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A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By FRANCOIS COPPEE

With a Preface by JOSE DE HEREDIA, of the French Academy

FRANCOIS COPPEE

FRANCOIS EDOUARD JOACHIM COPPEE was born in Paris, January 12, 1842. His father was a minor 'employe' in the French War Office; and, as the family consisted of six the parents, three daughters, and a son (the subject of this essay)—the early years of the poet were not spent in great luxury. After the father's death, the young man himself entered the governmental office with its monotonous work. In the evening he studied hard at St. Genevieve Library. He made rhymes, had them even printed (*Le Reliquaire*, 1866); but the public remained indifferent until 1869, when his comedy in verse, '*Le Passant*', appeared. From this period dates the reputation of Coppee—he woke up one morning a

"celebrated man."

Like many of his countrymen, he is a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, and a writer of fiction. He was elected to the French Academy in 1884. Smooth shaven, of placid figure, with pensive eyes, the hair brushed back regularly, the head of an artist, Coppee can be seen any day looking over the display of the Parisian secondhand booksellers on the Quai Malaquais; at home on the writing-desk, a page of carefully prepared manuscript, yet sometimes covered by cigarette-ashes; upon the wall, sketches by Jules Lefebvre and Jules Breton; a little in the distance, the gaunt form of his attentive sister and companion, Annette, occupied with household cares, ever fearful of disturbing him. Within this tranquil domicile can be heard the noise of the Parisian faubourg with its thousand different dins; the bustle of the street; the clatter of a factory; the voice of the workshop; the cries of the pedlers intermingled with the chimes of the bells of a near-by convent—a confusing buzzing noise, which the author, however, seems to enjoy; for Coppee is Parisian by birth, Parisian by education, a Parisian of the Parisians.

If as a poet we contemplate him, Coppee belongs to the group commonly called "Parnassiens"—not the Romantic School, the sentimental lyric effusion of Lamartine, Hugo, or De Musset! When the poetical lute was laid aside by the triad of 1830, it was taken up by men of quite different stamp, of even opposed tendencies. Observation of exterior matters was now greatly adhered to in poetry; it became especially descriptive and scientific; the aim of every poet was now to render most exactly, even minutely, the impressions received, or faithfully to translate into artistic language a thesis of philosophy, a discovery of science. With such a poetical doctrine, you will easily understand the importance which the "naturalistic form" henceforth assumed.

Coppee, however, is not only a maker of verses, he is an artist and a poet. Every poem seems to have sprung from a genuine inspiration. When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about, and the result is that his poetry is nearly always interesting. Moreover, he respects the limits of his art; for while his friend and contemporary, M. Sully-Prudhomme, goes astray habitually into philosophical speculation, and his immortal senior, Victor Hugo, often declaims, if one may venture to say so, in a manner which is tedious, Coppee sticks rigorously to what may be called the proper regions of poetry.

Francois Coppee is not one of those superb high priests disdainful of the throng: he is the poet of the "humble," and in his work, 'Les Humbles', he paints with a sincere emotion his profound sympathy for the sorrows, the miseries, and the sacrifices of the meek. Again, in his 'Grave des Forgerons, Le Naufrage, and L'Epave', all poems of great extension and universal reputation, he treats of simple existences, of unknown unfortunates, and of sacrifices which the daily papers do not record. The coloring and designing are precise, even if the tone be somewhat sombre, and nobody will deny that Coppee most fully possesses the technique of French poetry.

But Francois Coppee is known to fame as a prosewriter, too. His 'Contes en prose' and his 'Vingt Contes Nouveaux' are gracefully and artistically told; scarcely one of the 'contes' fails to have a moral motive. The stories are short and naturally slight; some, indeed, incline rather to the essay than to the story, but each has that enthralling interest which justifies its existence. Coppee possesses preeminently the gift of presenting concrete fact rather than abstraction. A sketch, for instance, is the first tale written by him, 'Une Idylle pendant le Seige' (1875). In a novel we require strong characterization, great grasp of character, and the novelist should show us the human heart and intellect in full play and activity. In 1875 appeared also 'Olivier', followed by 'L'Exilee' (1876); 'Recits et Elegies' (1878); 'Vingt Contes Nouveaux' (1883); and 'Toute une Jeunesse', mainly an autobiography, crowned by acclaim by the Academy. 'Le Coupable' was published in 1897. Finally, in 1898, appeared 'La Bonne Souffrance'. In the last-mentioned work it would seem that the poet, just recovering from a severe malady, has returned to the dogmas of the Catholic Church, wherefrom he, like so many of his contemporaries, had become estranged when a youth. The poems of 1902, 'Dans la Priere et dans la Lutte', tend to confirm the correctness of this view.

Thanks to the juvenile Sarah Bernhardt, Coppee became, as before mentioned, like Byron, celebrated in one night. This happened through the performance of 'Le Passant'.

As interludes to the plays there are "occasional" theatrical pieces, written for the fiftieth anniversary of the performance of 'Hernani' or the two-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the "Comedie Francaise." This is a wide field, indeed, which M. Coppee has cultivated to various purposes.

Take Coppee's works in their sum and totality, and the world-decree is that he is an artist, and an admirable one. He plays upon his instrument with all power and grace. But he is no mere virtuoso. There is something in him beyond the executant. Of Malibran, Alfred de Musset says, most beautifully, that she had that "voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart." Here, also, behind the skilful player on language, the deft manipulator of rhyme and rhythm, the graceful and earnest writer, one feels the beating of a human heart. One feels that he is giving us personal impressions of life and its joys and sorrows; that his imagination is powerful because it is genuinely his own; that the flowers

of his fancy spring spontaneously from the soil. Nor can I regard it as aught but an added grace that the strings of his instrument should vibrate so readily to what is beautiful and unselfish and delicate in human feeling. JOSE DE HEREDIA de l'Academie Francaise.

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

ON THE BALCONY

As far back as Amedee Violette can remember, he sees himself in an infant's cap upon a fifth-floor balcony covered with convolvulus; the child was very small, and the balcony seemed very large to him. Amedee had received for a birthday present a box of water-colors, with which he was sprawled out upon an old rug, earnestly intent upon his work of coloring the woodcuts in an odd volume of the 'Magasin Pittoresque', and wetting his brush from time to time in his mouth. The neighbors in the next apartment had a right to one-half of the balcony. Some one in there was playing upon the piano Marcaillou's Indiana Waltz, which was all the rage at that time. Any man, born about the year 1845, who does not feel the tears of homesickness rise to his eyes as he turns over the pages of an old number of the 'Magasin Pittoresque', or who hears some one play upon an old piano Marcaillou's Indiana Waltz, is not endowed with much sensibility.

When the child was tired of putting the "flesh color" upon the faces of all the persons in the engravings, he got up and went to peep through the railings of the balustrade. He saw extending before him, from right to left, with a graceful curve, the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, one of the quietest streets in the Luxembourg quarter, then only half built up. The branches of the trees spread over the wooden fences, which enclosed gardens so silent and tranquil that passers by could hear the birds singing in their cages.

It was a September afternoon, with a broad expanse of pure sky across which large clouds, like mountains of silver, moved in majestic slowness.

Suddenly a soft voice called him:

"Amedee, your father will return from the office soon. We must wash your hands before we sit down to the table, my darling."

His mother came out upon the balcony for him. His mother; his dear mother, whom he knew for so short a time! It needs an effort for him to call her to mind now, his memories are so indistinct. She was so modest and pretty, so pale, and with such charming blue eyes, always carrying her head on one side, as if the weight of her lovely chestnut hair was too heavy for her to bear, and smiling the sweet, tired smile of those who have not long to live! She made his toilette, kissed him upon his forehead, after brushing his hair. Then she laid their modest table, which was always decorated with a pretty vase of flowers. Soon the father entered. He was one of those mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them.

He tried to be gay when he entered his own house. He raised his little boy aloft with one arm, before kissing him, exclaiming, "Houp la!" A moment later he kissed his young wife and held her close to him, tenderly, as he asked, with an anxious look:

"Have you coughed much to-day?"

She always replied, hanging her head like a child who tells an untruth, "No, not very much."

The father would then put on an old coat—the one he took off was not very new. Amedee was then seated in a high chair before his mug, and the young mother, going into the kitchen, would bring in the

supper. After opening his napkin, the father would brush back behind his ear with his hand a long lock on the right side, that always fell into his eyes.

"Is there too much of a breeze this evening? you afraid to go out upon the balcony, Lucie? Put a shawl on, then," said M. Violette, while his wife was pouring the water remaining in the carafe upon a box where some nasturtiums were growing.

"No, Paul, I am sure—take Amedee down from his chair, and let us go out upon the balcony."

It was cool upon this high balcony. The sun had set, and now the great clouds resembled mountains of gold, and a fresh odor came up from the surrounding gardens.

"Good-evening, Monsieur Violette," suddenly said a cordial voice. "What a fine evening!"

It was their neighbor, M. Gerard, an engraver, who had also come to take breath upon his end of the balcony, having spent the entire day bent over his work. He was large and bald-headed, with a good-natured face, a red beard sprinkled with white hairs, and he wore a short, loose coat. As he spoke he lighted his clay pipe, the bowl of which represented Abd-el- Kader's face, very much colored, save the eyes and turban, which were of white enamel.

The engraver's wife, a dumpy little woman with merry eyes, soon joined her husband, pushing before her two little girls; one, the smaller of the two, was two years younger than Amedee; the other was ten years old, and already had a wise little air. She was the pianist who practised one hour a day Marcaillou's Indiana Waltz.

The children chattered through the trellis that divided the balcony in two parts. Louise, the elder of the girls, knew how to read, and told the two little ones very beautiful stories: Joseph sold by his brethren; Robinson Crusoe discovering the footprints of human beings.

Amedee, who now has gray hair upon his temples, can still remember the chills that ran down his back at the moment when the wolf, hidden under coverings and the grandmother's cap, said, with a gnashing of teeth, to little Red Riding Hood: "All the better to eat you with, my child."

It was almost dark then upon the terrace. It was all delightfully terrible!

During this time the two families, in their respective parts of the balcony, were talking familiarly together. The Violettes were quiet people, and preferred rather to listen to their neighbors than to talk themselves, making brief replies for politeness' sake—"Ah!" "Is it possible?" "You are right."

The Gerards liked to talk. Madame Gerard, who was a good housekeeper, discussed questions of domestic economy; telling, for example, how she had been out that day, and had seen, upon the Rue du Bac, some merino: "A very good bargain, I assure you, Madame, and very wide!" Or perhaps the engraver, who was a simple politician, after the fashion of 1848, would declare that we must accept the Republic, "Oh, not the red-hot, you know, but the true, the real one!" Or he would wish that Cavaignac had been elected President at the September balloting; although he himself was then engraving—one must live, after all—a portrait of Prince Louis Napoleon, destined for the electoral platform. M. and Madame Violette let them talk; perhaps even they did not always pay attention to the conversation. When it was dark they held each other's hands and gazed at the stars.

These lovely, cool, autumnal evenings, upon the balcony, under the starry heavens, are the most distant of all Amedee's memories. Then there was a break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out, after which he recalls many sad days.

Winter had come, and they no longer spent their evenings upon the balcony. One could see nothing now through the windows but a dull, gray sky. Amedee's mother was ill and always remained in her bed. When he was installed near the bed, before a little table, cutting out with scissors the hussars from a sheet of Epinal, his poor mamma almost frightened him, as she leaned her elbow upon the pillow and gazed at him so long and so sadly, while her thin white hands restlessly pushed back her beautiful, disordered hair, and two red hectic spots burned under her cheekbones.

It was not she who now came to take him from his bed in the morning, but an old woman in a short jacket, who did not kiss him, and who smelled horribly of snuff.

His father, too, did not pay much attention to him now. When he returned in the evening from the office he always brought bottles and little packages from the apothecary. Sometimes he was accompanied by the physician, a large man, very much dressed and perfumed, who panted for breath after climbing the five flights of stairs. Once Amedee saw this stranger put his arms around his mother as she sat in her bed, and lay his head for a long time against her back. The child asked, "What for,

mamma?"

M. Violette, more nervous than ever, and continually throwing back the rebellious lock behind his ear, would accompany the doctor to the door and stop there to talk with him. Then Amedee's mother would call to him, and he would climb upon the bed, where she would gaze at him with her bright eyes and press him to her breast, saying, in a sad tone, as if she pitied him: "My poor little Medee! My poor little Medee!" Why was it? What did it all mean?

His father would return with a forced smile which was pitiful to see.

"Well, what did the doctor say?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! You are much better. Only, my poor Lucie, we must put on another blister to-night."

Oh, how monotonous and slow these days were to the little Amedee, near the drowsy invalid, in the close room smelling of drugs, where only the old snuff-taker entered once an hour to bring a cup of tea or put charcoal upon the fire!

Sometimes their neighbor, Madame Gerard, would come to inquire after the sick lady.

"Still very feeble, my good Madame Gerard," his mother would respond.
"Ah, I am beginning to get discouraged."

But Madame Gerard would not let her be despondent.

"You see, Madame Violette, it is this horrible, endless winter. It is almost March now; they are already selling boxes of primroses in little carts on the sidewalks. You will surely be better as soon as the sun shines. If you like, I will take little Amedee back with me to play with my little girls. It will amuse the child."

So it happened that the good neighbor kept the child every afternoon, and he became very fond of the little Gerard children.

Four little rooms, that is all; but with a quantity of old, picturesque furniture; engravings, casts, and pictures painted by comrades were on the walls; the doors were always open, and the children could always play where they liked, chase each other through the apartments or pillage them. In the drawing-room, which had been transformed into a work-room, the artist sat upon a high stool, point in hand; the light from a curtainless window, sifting through the transparent paper, made the worthy man's skull shine as he leaned over his copper plate. He worked hard all day; with an expensive house and two girls to bring up, it was necessary. In spite of his advanced opinions, he continued to engrave his Prince Louis—"A rogue who is trying to juggle us out of a Republic." At the very most, he stopped only two or three times a day to smoke his Abu-el-Kader. Nothing distracted him from his work; not even the little ones, who, tired of playing their piece for four hands upon the piano, would organize, with Amedee, a game of hide-and-seek close by their father, behind the old Empire sofa ornamented with bronze lions' heads. But Madame Gerard, in her kitchen, where she was always cooking something good for dinner, sometimes thought they made too great an uproar. Then Maria, a real hoyden, in trying to catch her sister, would push an old armchair against a Renaissance chest and make all the Rouen crockery tremble.

"Now then, now then, children!" exclaimed Madame Gerard, from the depths of her lair, from which escaped a delicious odor of bacon. "Let your father have a little quiet, and go and play in the dining-room."

They obeyed; for there they could move chairs as they liked, build houses of them, and play at making calls. Did ever anybody have such wild ideas at five years of age as this Maria? She took the arm of Amedee, whom she called her little husband, and went to call upon her sister and show her her little child, a pasteboard doll with a large head, wrapped up in a napkin.

"As you see, Madame, it is a boy."

"What do you intend to make of him when he grows up?" asked Louise, who lent herself complacently to the play, for she was ten years old and quite a young lady, if you please.

"Why, Madame," replied Maria, gravely, "he will be a soldier."

At that moment the engraver, who had left his bench to stretch his legs a little and to light his Abd-el-Kader for the third time, came and stood at the threshold of his room. Madame Gerard, reassured as to the state of her stew, which was slowly cooking—and oh, how good it smelled in the kitchen!—entered

the dining-room. Both looked at the children, so comical and so graceful, as they made their little grimaces! Then the husband glanced at his wife, and the wife at the husband, and both burst out into hearty laughter.

There never was any laughter in the apartment of the Violettes. It was cough! cough! cough! almost to suffocation, almost to death! This gentle young woman with the heavy hair was about to die! When the beautiful starry evenings should come again, she would no longer linger on the balcony, or press her husband's hand as they gazed at the stars. Little Amedee did not understand it; but he felt a vague terror of something dreadful happening in the house. Everything alarmed him now. He was afraid of the old woman who smelled of snuff, and who, when she dressed him in the morning, looked at him with a pitying air; he was afraid of the doctor, who climbed the five flights of stairs twice a day now, and left a whiff of perfume behind him; afraid of his father, who did not go to his office any more, whose beard was often three days old, and who feverishly paced the little parlor, tossing back with a distracted gesture the lock of hair behind his ear. He was afraid of his mother, alas! of his mother, whom he had seen that evening, by the light from the night-lamp, buried in the pillows, her delicate nose and chin thrown up, and who did not seem to recognize him, in spite of her wide-open eyes, when his father took her child in his arms and leaned over her with him that he might kiss her cold forehead covered with sweat!

At last the terrible day arrived, a day that Amedee never will forget, although he was then a very small child.

What awakened him that morning was his father's embrace as he came and took him from his bed. His father's eyes were wild and bloodshot from so much crying. Why was their neighbor, M. Gerard, there so early in the morning, and with great tears rolling down his cheeks too? He kept beside M. Violette, as if watching him, and patted him upon the back affectionately, saying:

"Now then, my poor friend! Have courage, courage!"

But the poor friend had no more. He let M. Gerard take the child from him, and then his head fell like a dead person's upon the good engraver's shoulder, and he began to weep with heavy sobs that shook his whole body.

"Mamma! See mamma!" cried the little Amedee, full of terror.

Alas! he never will see her again! At the Gerards, where they carried him and the kind neighbor dressed him, they told him that his mother had gone for a long time, a very long time; that he must love his papa very much and think only of him; and other things that he could not understand and dared not ask the meaning of, but which filled him with consternation.

It was strange! The engraver and his wife busied themselves entirely with him, watching him every moment. The little ones, too, treated him in a singular, almost respectful manner. What had caused such a change? Louise did not open her piano, and when little Maria wished to take her "menagerie" from the lower part of the buffet, Madame Gerard said sharply, as she wiped the tears from her eyes: "You must not play to-day."

After breakfast Madame Gerard put on her hat and shawl and went out, taking Amedee with her. They got into a carriage that took them through streets that the child did not know, across a bridge in the middle of which stood a large brass horseman, with his head crowned with laurel, and stopped before a large house and entered with the crowd, where a very agile and rapid young man put some black clothes on Amedee.

On their return the child found his father seated at the dining-room table with M. Gerard, and both of them were writing addresses upon large sheets of paper bordered with black. M. Violette was not crying, but his face showed deep lines of grief, and he let his lock of hair fall over his right eye.

At the sight of little Amedee, in his black clothes, he uttered a groan, and arose, staggering like a drunken man, bursting into tears again.

Oh, no! he never will forget that day, nor the horrible next day, when Madame Gerard came and dressed him in the morning in his black clothes, while he listened to the noise of heavy feet and blows from a hammer in the next room. He suddenly remembered that he had not seen his mother since two days before.

"Mamma! I want to see mamma!"

It was necessary then to try to make him understand the truth. Madame Gerard repeated to him that he ought to be very wise and good, and try to console his father, who had much to grieve him; for his

mother had gone away forever; that she was in heaven.

In heaven! heaven is very high up and far off. If his mother was in heaven, what was it that those porters dressed in black carried away in the heavy box that they knocked at every turn of the staircase? What did that solemn carriage, which he followed through all the rain, quickening his childish steps, with his little hand tightly clasped in his father's, carry away? What did they bury in that hole, from which an odor of freshly dug earth was emitted—in that hole surrounded by men in black, and from which his father turned away his head in horror? What was it that they hid in this ditch, in this garden full of crosses and stone urns, where the newly budded trees shone in the March sun after the shower, large drops of water still falling from their branches like tears?

His mother was in heaven! On the evening of that dreadful day Amedee dared not ask to "see mamma" when he was seated before his father at the table, where, for a long time, the old woman in a short jacket had placed only two plates. The poor widower, who had just wiped his eyes with his napkin, had put upon one of the plates a little meat cut up in bits for Amedee. He was very pale, and as Amedee sat in his high chair, he asked himself whether he should recognize his mother's sweet, caressing look, some day, in one of those stars that she loved to watch, seated upon the balcony on cool September nights, pressing her husband's hand in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

SAD CHANGES

Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck. A genuinely unfortunate tree was the poor sycamore which grew in the playground of an institution for boys on the Rue de la Grande-Chaumiere, directed by M. Batifol.

Chance might just as well have made it grow upon the banks of a river, upon some pretty bluff, where it might have seen the boats pass; or, better still, upon the mall in some garrison village, where it could have had the pleasure of listening twice a week to military music. But, no! it was written in the book of fate that this unlucky sycamore should lose its bark every summer, as a serpent changes its skin, and should scatter the ground with its dead leaves at the first frost, in the playground of the Batifol institution, which was a place without any distractions.

This solitary tree, which was like any other sycamore, middle-aged and without any singularities, ought to have had the painful feeling that it served in a measure to deceive the public. In fact, upon the advertisement of the Batifol institution (Cours du lycee Henri IV. Preparation au baccalaureat et aux ecoles de l'Etat), one read these fallacious words, "There is a garden;" when in reality it was only a vulgar court graveled with stones from the river, with a paved gutter in which one could gather half a dozen of lost marbles, a broken top, and a certain number of shoe-nails, and after recreation hours still more. This solitary sycamore was supposed to justify the illusion and fiction of the garden promised in the advertisement; but as trees certainly have common sense, this one should have been conscious that it was not a garden of itself.

It was a very unjust fate for an inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody; only expanding, at one side of the gymnasium portico, in a perfect rectangle formed by a prison wall, bristling with the glass of broken bottles, and by three buildings of distressing similarity, showing, above the numerous doors on the ground floor, inscriptions which merely to read induced a yawn: Hall 1, Hall 2, Hall 3, Hall 4, Stairway A, Stairway B, Entrance to the Dormitories, Dining-room, Laboratory.

The poor sycamore was dying of ennui in this dismal place. Its only happy seasons—the recreation hours, when the court echoed with the shouts and the laughter of the boys—were spoiled for it by the sight of two or three pupils who were punished by being made to stand at the foot of its trunk. Parisian birds, who are not fastidious, rarely lighted upon the tree, and never built their nests there. It might even be imagined that this disenchanting tree, when the wind agitated its foliage, would charitably say, "Believe me! the place is good for nothing. Go and make love elsewhere!"

In the shade of this sycamore, planted under an unlucky star, the greater part of Amedee's infancy was passed.

M. Violette was an employe of the Ministry, and was obliged to work seven hours a day, one or two hours of which were devoted to going wearily through a bundle of probably superfluous papers and

documents. The rest of the time was given to other occupations as varied as they were intellectual; such as yawning, filing his nails, talking about his chiefs, groaning over the slowness of promotion, cooking a potato or a sausage in the stove for his luncheon, reading the newspaper down to the editor's signature, and advertisements in which some country cure expresses his artless gratitude at being cured at last of an obstinate disease. In recompense for this daily captivity, M. Violette received, at the end of the month, a sum exactly sufficient to secure his household soup and beef, with a few vegetables.

In order that his son might attain such a distinguished position, M. Violette's father, a watch-maker in Chartres, had sacrificed everything, and died penniless. The Silvio Pellico official, during these exasperating and tiresome hours, sometimes regretted not having simply succeeded his father. He could see himself, in imagination, in the light little shop near the cathedral, with a magnifying-glass fixed in his eye, ready to inspect some farmer's old "turnip," and suspended over his bench thirty silver and gold watches left by farmers the week before, who would profit by the next market-day to come and get them, all going together with a merry tick. It may be questioned whether a trade as low as this would have been fitting for a young man of education, a Bachelor of Arts, crammed with Greek roots and quotations, able to prove the existence of God, and to recite without hesitation the dates of the reigns of Nabonassar and of Nabopolassar. This watch-maker, this simple artisan, understood modern genius better. This modest shopkeeper acted according to the democratic law and followed the instinct of a noble and wise ambition. He made of his son—a sensible and intelligent boy—a machine to copy documents, and spend his days guessing the conundrums in the illustrated newspapers, which he read as easily as M. Ledrain would decipher the cuneiform inscriptions on an Assyrian brick. Also—an admirable result, which should rejoice the old watch-maker's shade—his son had become a gentleman, a functionary, so splendidly remunerated by the State that he was obliged to wear patches of cloth, as near like the trousers as possible, on their seat; and his poor young wife, during her life, had always been obliged, as rent-day drew near, to carry the soup-ladle and six silver covers to the pawn-shop.

At all events, M. Violette was a widower now, and being busy all day was very much embarrassed with the care of his little son. His neighbors, the Gerards, were very kind to Amedee, and continued to keep him with them all the afternoon. This state of affairs could not always continue, and M. Violette hesitated to abuse his worthy friends' kindness in that way.

However, Amedee gave them little trouble, and Mamma Gerard loved him as if he were her own. The orphan was now inseparable from little Maria, a perfect little witch, who became prettier every day. The engraver, having found in a cupboard the old bearskin cap which he had worn as a grenadier in the National Guard, a headdress that had been suppressed since '98, gave it to the children. What a magnificent plaything it was, and how well calculated to excite their imagination! It was immediately transformed in their minds into a frightfully large and ferocious bear, which they chased through the apartment, lying in wait for it behind armchairs, striking at it with sticks, and puffing out their little cheeks with all their might to say "Boum!" imitating the report of a gun. This hunting diversion completed the destruction of the old furniture. Tranquil in the midst of the joyous uproar and disorder, the engraver was busily at work finishing off the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and the large bullion epaulettes of the Prince President, whom, as a suspicious republican and foreseeing the 'coup d'etat', he detested with all his heart.

"Truly, Monsieur Violette," said Mother Gerard to the employe, when he came for his little son upon his return from the office, and excused himself for the trouble that the child must give his neighbors, "truly, I assure you, he does not disturb us in the least. Wait a little before you send him to school. He is very quiet, and if Maria did not excite him so—upon my word, she is more of a boy than he—your Amedee would always be looking at the pictures. My Louise hears him read every day two pages in the Moral Tales, and yesterday he amused Gerard by telling him the story of the grateful elephant. He can go to school later—wait a little."

But M. Violette had decided to send Amedee to M. Batifol's. "Oh, yes, as a day scholar, of course! It is so convenient; not two steps' distance. This will not prevent little Amedee from seeing his friends often. He is nearly seven years old, and very backward; he hardly knows how to make his letters. One can not begin with children too soon," and much more to the same effect.

This was the reason why, one fine spring day, M. Violette was ushered into M. Batifol's office, who, the servant said, would be there directly.

M. Batifol's office was hideous. In the three bookcases which the master of the house—a snob and a greedy schoolmaster—never opened, were some of those books that one can buy upon the quays by the running yard; for example, Laharpe's Cours de Litterature, and an endless edition of Rollin, whose tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings. The cylindrical office-table, one of those masterpieces of veneered mahogany which the Faubourg St. Antoine still keeps the secret of making,

was surmounted by a globe of the world.

Suddenly, through the open window, little Amedee saw the sycamore in the yard. A young blackbird, who did not know the place, came and perched for an instant only upon one of its branches.

We may fancy the tree saying to it:

"What are you doing here? The Luxembourg is only a short distance from here, and is charming. Children are there, making mud-pies, nurses upon the seats chattering with the military, lovers promenading, holding hands. Go there, you simpleton!"

The blackbird flew away, and the university tree, once more solitary and alone, drooped its dispirited leaves. Amedee, in his confused childish desire for information, was just ready to ask why this sycamore looked so morose, when the door opened and M. Batifol appeared. The master of the school had a severe aspect, in spite of his almost indecorous name. He resembled a hippopotamus clothed in an ample black coat. He entered slowly and bowed in a dignified way to M. Violette, then seated himself in a leather armchair before his papers, and, taking off his velvet skull-cap, revealed such a voluminous round, yellow baldness that little Amedee compared it with terror to the globe on the top of his desk.

It was just the same thing! These two round balls were twins! There was even upon M. Batifol's cranium an eruption of little red pimples, grouped almost exactly like an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean.

"Whom have I the honor—?" asked the schoolmaster, in an unctuous voice, an excellent voice for proclaiming names at the distribution of prizes.

M. Violette was not a brave man. It was very foolish, but when the senior clerk called him into his office to do some work, he was always seized with a sort of stammering and shaking of the limbs. A person so imposing as M. Batifol was not calculated to give him assurance. Amedee was timid, too, like his father, and while the child, frightened by the resemblance of the sphere to M. Batifol's bald head, was already trembling, M. Violette, much agitated, was trying to think of something to say, consequently, he said nothing of any account. However, he ended by repeating almost the same things he had said to Mamma Gerard: "My son is nearly seven years old, and very backward, etc."

The teacher appeared to listen to M. Violette with benevolent interest, inclining his geographical cranium every few seconds. In reality, he was observing and judging his visitors. The father's scanty overcoat, the rather pale face of the little boy, all betokened poverty. It simply meant a day scholar at thirty francs a month, nothing more. So M. Batifol shortened the "speech" that under like circumstances he addressed to his new pupils.

He would take charge of his "young friend" (thirty francs a month, that is understood, and the child will bring his own luncheon in a little basket) who would first be placed in an elementary class. Certain fathers prefer, and they have reason to do so, that their sons should be half-boarders, with a healthful and abundant repast at noon. But M. Batifol did not insist upon it. His young friend would then be placed in the infant class, at first; but he would be prepared there at once, 'ab ovo', one day to receive lessons in this University of France, 'alma parens' (instruction in foreign languages not included in the ordinary price, naturally), which by daily study, competition between scholars (accomplishments, such as dancing, music, and fencing, to be paid for separately; that goes without saying) prepare children for social life, and make men and citizens of them.

M. Violette contented himself with the day school at thirty francs, and for a good reason. The affair was settled. Early the next morning Amedee would enter the "ninth preparatory."

"Give me your hand, my young friend," said the master, as father and son arose to take their leave.

Amedee reached out his hand, and M. Batifol took it in his, which was so heavy, large, and cold that the child shivered at the contact, and fancied he was touching a leg of mutton of six or seven pounds' weight, freshly killed, and sent from the butcher's.

Finally they left. Early the next morning, Amedee, provided with a little basket, in which the old snuff-taker had put a little bottle of red wine, and some sliced veal, and jam tarts, presented himself at the boarding-school, to be prepared without delay for the teaching of the 'alma parens'.

The hippopotamus clothed in black did not take off his skullcap this time, to the child's great regret, for he wished to assure himself if the degrees of latitude and longitude were checked off in squares on M. Batifol's cranium as they were on the terrestrial globe. He conducted his pupil to his class at once and presented him to the master.

"Here is a new day scholar, Monsieur Tavernier. You will find out how far advanced he is in reading and writing, if you please." M. Tavernier was a tall young man with a sallow complexion, a bachelor who, had he been living like his late father, a sergeant of the gendarmes, in a pretty house surrounded by apple trees and green grass, would not, perhaps, have had that 'papier-mache' appearance, and would not have been dressed at eight o'clock in the morning in a black coat of the kind we see hanging in the Morgue. M. Tavernier received the newcomer with a sickly smile, which disappeared as soon as M. Batifol left the room.

"Go and take your place in that empty seat there, in the third row," said M. Tavernier, in an indifferent tone.

He deigned, however, to conduct Amedee to the seat which he was to occupy. Amedee's neighbor, one of the future citizens preparing for social life—several with patches upon their trousers—had been naughty enough to bring into class a handful of cockchafers. He was punished by a quarter of an hour's standing up, which he did soon after, sulking at the foot of the sycamore-tree in the large court.

"You will soon see what a cur he is," whispered the pupil in disgrace; as soon as the teacher had returned to his seat.

M. Tavernier struck his ruler on the edge of his chair, and, having reestablished silence, invited pupil Godard to recite his lesson.

Pupil Godard, who was a chubby-faced fellow with sleepy eyes, rose automatically and in one single stream, like a running tap, recited, without stopping to take breath, "The Wolf and the Lamb," rolling off La Fontaine's fable like the thread from a bobbin run by steam.

"The-strongest-reason-is-always-the-best-and-we-will-prove-it-at-once-a-lamb-was-quenching-his-thirst-in-a-stream-of-pure-running-water—"

Suddenly Godard was confused, he hesitated. The machine had been badly oiled. Something obstructed the bobbin.

"In-a-stream-of-pure-running-water-in-a stream—"

Then he stopped short, the tap was closed. Godard did not know his lesson, and he, too, was condemned to remain on guard under the sycamore during recess.

After pupil Godard came pupil Grosdidier; then Blanc, then Moreau (Gaston), then Moreau (Ernest), then Malepert; then another, and another, who babbled with the same intelligence and volubility, with the same piping voice, this cruel and wonderful fable. It was as irritating and monotonous as a fine rain. All the pupils in the "ninth preparatory" were disgusted for fifteen years, at least, with this most exquisite of French poems.

Little Amedee wanted to cry; he listened with stupefaction blended with fright as the scholars by turns unwound their bobbins. To think that to-morrow he must do the same! He never would be able. M. Tavernier frightened him very much, too. The yellow-complexioned usher, seated nonchalantly in his armchair, was not without pretension; in spite of his black coat with the "take-me-out-of-pawn" air, polished his nails, and only opened his mouth at times to utter a reprimand or pronounce sentence of punishment.

This was school, then! Amedee recalled the pleasant reading-lessons that the eldest of the Gerards had given him—that good Louise, so wise and serious and only ten years old, pointing out his letters to him in a picture alphabet with a knitting-needle, always so patient and kind. The child was overcome at the very first with a disgust for school, and gazed through the window which lighted the room at the noiselessly moving, large, indented leaves of the melancholy sycamore.

CHAPTER III

PAPA AND MAMMA GERARD

One, two, three years rolled by without anything very remarkable happening to the inhabitants of the fifth story.

The quarter had not changed, and it still had the appearance of a suburban faubourg. They had just erected, within gunshot of the house where the Violettes and Gerards lived, a large five-story building, upon whose roof still trembled in the wind the masons' withered bouquets. But that was all. In front of them, on the lot "For Sale," enclosed by rotten boards, where one could always see tufts of nettles and a goat tied to a stake, and upon the high wall above which by the end of April the lilacs hung in their perfumed clusters, the rains had not effaced this brutal declaration of love, scraped with a knife in the plaster: "When Melie wishes she can have me," and signed "Eugene."

Three years had passed, and little Amedee had grown a trifle. At that time a child born in the centre of Paris—for example, in the labyrinth of infected streets about the Halles—would have grown up without having any idea of the change of seasons other than by the state of the temperature and the narrow strip of sky which he could see by raising his head. Even today certain poor children—the poor never budge from their hiding-places—learn of the arrival of winter only by the odor of roasted chestnuts; of spring, by the boxes of gilly-flowers in the fruiterer's stall; of summer, by the water-carts passing, and of autumn, by the heaps of oyster-shells at the doors of wine-shops. The broad sky, with its confused shapes of cloud architecture, the burning gold of the setting sun behind the masses of trees, the enchanting stillness of moonlight upon the river, all these grand and magnificent spectacles are for the delight of those who live in suburban quarters, or play there sometimes. The sons of people who work in buttons and jet spend their infancy playing on staircases that smell of lead, or in courts that resemble wells, and do not suspect that nature exists. At the outside they suspect that nature may exist when they see the horses on Palm Sunday decorated with bits of boxwood behind each ear. What matters it, after all, if the child has imagination? A star reflected in a gutter will reveal to him an immense nocturnal poem; and he will breathe all the intoxication of summer in the full-blown rose which the grisette from the next house lets fall from her hair.

Amedee had had the good fortune of being born in that delicious and melancholy suburb of Paris which had not yet become "Hausmannized," and was full of wild and charming nooks.

His father, the widower, could not be consoled, and tried to wear out his grief in long promenades, going out on clear evenings, holding his little boy by the hand, toward the more solitary places. They followed those fine boulevards, formerly in the suburbs, where there were giant elms, planted in the time of Louis XIV, ditches full of grass, ruined palisades, showing through their opening market-gardens where melons glistened in the rays of the setting sun. Both were silent; the father lost in reveries, Amedee absorbed in the confused dreams of a child. They went long distances, passing the Barriere d'Enfer, reaching unknown parts, which produced the same effect upon an inhabitant of Rue Montmartre as the places upon an old map of the world, marked with the mysterious words 'Mare ignotum', would upon a savant of the Middle Ages. There were many houses in this ancient suburb; curious old buildings, nearly all of one story.

Sometimes they would pass a public-house painted in a sinister wine-color; or else a garden hedged in by acacias, at the fork of two roads, with arbors and a sign consisting of a very small windmill at the end of a pole, turning in the fresh evening breeze. It was almost country; the grass grew upon the sidewalks, springing up in the road between the broken pavements. A poppy flashed here and there upon the tops of the low walls. They met very few people; now and then some poor person, a woman in a cap dragging along a crying child, a workman burdened with his tools, a belated invalid, and sometimes in the middle of the sidewalk, in a cloud of dust, a flock of exhausted sheep, bleating desperately, and nipped in the legs by dogs hurrying them toward the abattoir. The father and son would walk straight ahead until it was dark under the trees; then they would retrace their steps, the sharp air stinging their faces. Those ancient hanging street-lamps, the tragic lanterns of the time of the Terror, were suspended at long intervals in the avenue, mingling their dismal twinkle with the pale gleams of the green twilight sky.

These sorrowful promenades with his melancholy companion would commonly end a tiresome day at Batifol's school. Amedee was now in the "seventh," and knew already that the phrase, "the will of God," could not be turned into Latin by 'bonitas divina', and that the word 'cornu' was not declinable. These long, silent hours spent at his school-desk, or beside a person absorbed in grief, might have become fatal to the child's disposition, had it not been for his good friends, the Gerards. He went to see them as often as he was able, a spare hour now and then, and most of the day on Thursdays. The engraver's house was always full of good-nature and gayety, and Amedee felt comfortable and really happy there.

The good Gerards, besides their Louise and Maria, to say nothing of Amedee, whom they looked upon as one of the family, had now taken charge of a fourth child, a little girl, named Rosine, who was precisely the same age as their youngest.

This was the way it happened. Above the Gerards, in one of the mansards upon the sixth floor, lived a printer named Combarieu, with his wife or mistress—the concierge did not know which, nor did it

matter much. The woman had just deserted him, leaving a child of eight years. One could expect nothing better of a creature who, according to the concierge, fed her husband upon pork-butcher's meat, to spare herself the trouble of getting dinner, and passed the entire day with uncombed hair, in a dressing-sacque, reading novels, and telling her fortune with cards. The grocer's daughter declared she had met her one evening, at a dancing-hall, seated with a fireman before a salad-bowl full of wine, prepared in the French fashion.

During the day Combarieu, although a red-hot Republican, sent his little girl to the Sisters; but he went out every evening with a mysterious air and left the child alone. The concierge even uttered in a low voice, with the romantic admiration which that class of people have for conspirators, the terrible word "secret society," and asserted that the printer had a musket concealed under his straw bed.

These revelations were of a nature to excite M. Gerard's sympathy in favor of his neighbor, for the coup d'etat and the proclamation of the Empire had irritated him very much. Had it not been his melancholy duty to engrave, the day after the second of December—he must feed his family first of all—a Bonapartist allegory entitled, "The Uncle and the Nephew," where one saw France extending its hand to Napoleon I and Prince Louis, while soaring above the group was an eagle with spreading wings, holding in one of his claws the cross of the Legion of Honor?

One day the engraver asked his wife, as he lighted his pipe—he had given up Abd-el-Kader and smoked now a Barbes—if they ought not to interest themselves a little in the abandoned child. It needed nothing more to arouse the good woman, who had already said more than once: "What a pity!" as she saw little Rosine waiting for her father in the lodge of the concierge, asleep in a chair before the stove. She coaxed the child to play with her children. Rosine was very pretty, with bright eyes, a droll little Parisian nose, and a mass of straw-colored curly hair escaping from her cap. The little rogue let fly quite often some gutter expression, such as "Hang it!" or "Tol-derol-dol!" at which Madame Gerard would exclaim, "What do I hear, Mademoiselle?" but she was intelligent and soon corrected herself.

One Sunday morning, Combarieu, having learned of their kindness to his child, made a visit to thank them.

Very dark, with a livid complexion, all hair and beard, and trying to look like the head of Jesus Christ, in his long black blouse he embodied the type of a club conspirator, a representative of the workingmen. A Freemason, probably; a solemn drunkard, who became intoxicated oftener on big words than on native wine, and spoke in a loud, pretentious voice, gazing before him with large, stupid eyes swimming in a sort of ecstasy; his whole person made one think of a boozy preacher. He immediately inspired the engraver with respect, and dazzled him by the fascination which the audacious exert over the timid. M. Gerard thought he discerned in Combarieu one of those superior men whom a cruel fate had caused to be born among the lower class and in whom poverty had stifled genius.

Enlightened as to the artist's political preferences by the bowl of his pipe, Combarieu complacently eulogized himself. Upon his own admission he had at first been foolish enough to dream of a universal brotherhood, a holy alliance of the people. He had even written poems which he had published himself, notably an "Ode to Poland," and an "Epistle to Beranger," which latter had evoked an autograph letter from the illustrious song-writer. But he was no longer such a simpleton.

"When one has seen what we have seen during June, and on the second of December, there is no longer any question of sentiment." Here the engraver, as a hospitable host, brought a bottle of wine and two glasses. "No, Monsieur Gerard, I thank you, I take nothing between my meals. The workingmen have been deceived too often, and at the next election we shall not let the bourgeoisie strangle the Republic." (M. Gerard had now uncorked the bottle.) "Only a finger! Enough! Enough! simply so as not to refuse you. While waiting, let us prepare ourselves. Just now the Eastern question muddles us, and behold 'Badinguet,'—[A nickname given to Napoleon III.]—with a big affair upon his hands. You have some wine here that is worth drinking. If he loses one battle he is done for. One glass more? Ah! you make me depart from my usual custom—absolutely done for. But this time we shall keep our eyes open. No half measures! We will return to the great methods of 'ninety-three—the Committee of Public Safety, the Law of Suspects, the Revolutionary Tribunal, every damned one of them! and, if it is necessary, a permanent guillotine! To your good health!"

So much energy frightened Father Gerard a little; for in spite of his Barbes pipe-bowl he was not a genuine red-hot Republican. He dared not protest, however, and blushed a little as he thought that the night before an editor had proposed to him to engrave a portrait of the new Empress, very décolleté, and showing her famous shoulders, and that he had not said No; for his daughters needed new shoes, and his wife had declared the day before that she had not a gown to put on.

So for several months he had four children—Amedee, Louise, Maria, and little Rose Combarieu—to make a racket in his apartment. Certainly they were no longer babies; they did not play at making calls

nor chase the old fur hat around the room; they were more sensible, and the old furniture had a little rest. And it was time, for all the chairs were lame, two of the larger ones had lost an arm each, and the Empire sofa had lost the greater part of its hair through the rents in its dark-green velvet covering. The unfortunate square piano had had no pity shown it; more out of tune and asthmatic than ever, it was now always open, and one could read above the yellow and worn-out keyboard a once famous name—"Sebastian Erard, Manufacturer of Pianos and Harps for S.A.R. Madame la Duchesse de Berri." Not only Louise, the eldest of the Gerards—a large girl now, having been to her first communion, dressing her hair in bands, and wearing white waists—not only Louise, who had become a good musician, had made the piano submit to long tortures, but her sister Maria, and Amedee also, already played the 'Bouquet de Bal' or 'Papa, les p'tits bateaux'. Rosine, too, in her character of street urchin, knew all the popular songs, and spent entire hours in picking out the airs with one finger upon the old instrument.

Ah! the songs of those days, the last of romanticism, the make-believe 'Orientales'; 'Odes' and 'Ballads', by the dozen; 'Comes d'Espagne et d'Italie', with their pages, turrets, chatelaines; bull-fighters, Spanish ladies; vivandieres, beguiled away from their homes under the pale of the church, "near a stream of running water, by a gay and handsome chevalier," and many other such silly things—Amedee will remember them always! They bring back to him, clearly and strongly, certain happy hours in his childhood! They make him smell again at times even the odor that pervaded the Gerards' house. A mule-driver's song will bring up before his vision the engraver working at his plate before the curtainless window on a winter's day. It snows in the streets, and large white flakes are slowly falling behind the glass; but the room, ornamented with pictures and busts, is lighted and heated by a bright coke fire. Amedee can see himself seated in a corner by the fire, learning by heart a page of the "Epitome" which he must recite the next morning at M. Batifol's. Maria and Rosine are crouched at his feet, with a box of glass beads, which they are stringing into a necklace. It was comfortable; the whole apartment smelled of the engraver's pipe, and in the dining-room, whose door is half opened, Louise is at the piano, singing, in a fresh voice, some lines where "Castilla" rhymes with "mantilla," and "Andalousie" with "jealousy," while her agile fingers played on the old instrument an accompaniment supposed to imitate bells and castanets.

Or perhaps it is a radiant morning in June, and they are in the dining-room; the balcony door is open wide, and a large hornet buzzes loudly in the vine. Louise is still at the piano; she is singing this time, and trying to reach the low tones of a dramatic romance where a Corsican child is urged on to vengeance by his father:

Tiens, prends ma carabiue!
Sur toi veillera Dieu—

This is a great day, the day when Mamma Gerard makes her gooseberry preserves. There is a large basin already full of it on the table. What a delicious odor! A perfume of roses mingled with that of warm sugar. Maria and Rosine have just slipped into the kitchen, the gourmands! But Louise is a serious person, and will not interrupt her singing for such a trifle. She continues to sing in a low voice: and at the moment when Amedee stands speechless with admiration before her, as she is scolding in a terrible tone and playing dreadful chords, to and behold! here come the children, both with pink moustaches, and licking their lips voluptuously.

Ah! these were happy hours to Amedee. They consoled him for the interminable days at M. Batifol's.

Having passed the ninth preparatory grade, under the direction of the indolent M. Tavernier, always busy polishing his nails, like a Chinese mandarin, the child had for a professor in the eighth grade Pere Montandeuil, a poor fellow stupefied by thirty years of teaching, who secretly employed all his spare hours in composing five-act tragedies, and who, by dint of carrying to and going for his manuscripts at the Odeon, ended by marrying the stagedoor-keeper's daughter. In the seventh grade Amedee groaned under the tyranny of M. Prudhommod, a man from the country, with a smattering of Latin and a terribly violent temper, throwing at the pupils the insults of a plowboy. Now he had entered the sixth grade, under M. Bance, an unfortunate fellow about twenty years old, ugly, lame, and foolishly timid, whom M. Batifol reproached severely with not having made himself respected, and whose eyes filled with tears every morning when, upon entering the schoolroom, he was obliged to efface with a cloth a caricature of himself made by some of his pupils.

Everything in M. Batifol's school—the grotesque and miserable teachers, the ferocious and cynical pupils, the dingy, dusty, and ink-stained rooms—saddened and displeased Amedee. Although very intelligent, he was disgusted with the sort of instruction there, which was served out in portions, like soldier's rations, and would have lost courage but for his little friend, Louise Gerard, who out of sheer kindness constituted herself his school-mistress, guiding and inspiring him, and working hard at the rudiments of L'homond's Grammar and Alexandre's Dictionary, to help the child struggle with his 'De Viris'. Unfortunate indeed is he who has not had, during his infancy, a petticoat near him—the sweet

influence of a woman. He will always have something coarse in his mind and hard in his heart. Without this excellent and kind Louise, Amedee would have been exposed to this danger. His mother was dead, and M. Violette, alas! was always overwhelmed with his grief, and, it must be admitted, somewhat neglected his little son.

The widower could not be consoled. Since his wife's death he had grown ten years older, and his refractory lock of hair had become perfectly white. His Lucie had been the sole joy in his commonplace and obscure life. She was so pretty, so sweet! such a good manager, dressing upon nothing, and making things seem luxurious with only one flower! M. Violette existed only on this dear and cruel souvenir, living his humble idyll over again in his mind.

He had had six years of this happiness. One of his comrades took him to pass an evening with an old friend who was captain in the Invalides. The worthy man had lost an arm at Waterloo; he was a relative of Lucie, a good-natured old fellow, amiable and lively, delighting in arranging his apartments into a sort of Bonapartist chapel and giving little entertainments with cake and punch, while Lucie's mother, a cousin of the captain, did the honors. M. Violette immediately observed the young girl, seated under a "Bataille des Pyramides" with two swords crossed above it, a carnation in her hair. It was in midsummer, and through the open window one could see the magnificent moonlight, which shone upon the esplanade and made the huge cannon shine. They were playing charades, and when it came Lucie's turn to be questioned among all the guests, M. Violette, to relieve her of her embarrassment, replied so awkwardly that they all exclaimed, "Now, then, that is cheating!" With what naive grace and bashful coquetry she served the tea, going from one table to another, cup in hand, followed by the one-armed captain with silver epaulets, carrying the plum-cake! In order to see her again, M. Violette paid the captain visit after visit. But the greater part of the time he saw only the old soldier, who told him of his victories and conquests, of the attack of the redoubt at Borodino, and the frightful swearing of the dashing Murat, King of Naples, as he urged the squadrons on to the rescue. At last, one beautiful Sunday in autumn, he found himself alone with the young girl in the private garden of the veteran of the Old Guard. He seated himself beside Lucie on a stone bench: he told her his love, with the profound gaze of the Little Corporal, in bronzed plaster, resting upon them; and, full of delicious confusion, she replied, "Speak to mamma," dropping her bewildered eyes and gazing at the bed of china-asters, whose boxwood border traced the form of a cross of the Legion of Honor.

And all this was effaced, lost forever! The captain was dead; Lucie's mother was dead, and Lucie herself, his beloved Lucie, was dead, after giving him six years of cloudless happiness.

Certainly, he would never marry again. Oh, never!

No woman had ever existed or ever would exist for him but his poor darling, sleeping in the Montparnasse Cemetery, whose grave he visited every Sunday with a little watering-pot concealed under his coat.

He recalled, with a shiver of disgust, how, a few months after Lucie's death, one stifling evening in July, he was seated upon a bench in the Luxembourg, listening to the drums beating a retreat under the trees, when a woman came and took a seat beside him and looked at him steadily. Surprised by her significant look, he replied, to the question that she addressed to him, timidly and at the same time boldly: "So this is the way that you take the air?" And when she ended by asking him, "Come to my house," he had followed her. But he had hardly entered when the past all came back to him, and he felt a stifled feeling of distress. Falling into a chair, he sobbed, burying his face in his hands. His grief was so violent that, by a feminine instinct of pity, the wretched creature took his head in her arms, saying, in a consoling tone, "There, cry, cry, it will do you good!" and rocked him like an infant. At last he disengaged himself from this caress, which made him ashamed of himself, and throwing what little money he had about him upon the top of the bureau, he went away and returned to his home, where he went hastily to bed and wept to his heart's content, as he gnawed his pillow. Oh, horrible memories!

No! never a wife, no mistress, nothing! Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him.

The widower's morning awakening was frightful above all things else-his awakening in the large bed that now had but one pillow. It was there that he had once had the exquisite pleasure of watching his dear Lucie every morning when asleep; for she did not like to get up early, and sometimes he had jokingly scolded her for it. What serenity upon this delicate, sweet face, with its closed eyes, nestling among her beautiful, disordered hair! How chaste this lovely young wife was in her unconstraint! She had thrown one of her arms outside of the covering, and the neck of her nightgown, having slipped down, showed such a pure white shoulder and delicate neck. He leaned over the half-opened mouth, which exhaled a warm and living odor, something like the perfume of a flower, to inhale it, and a tender pride swept over him when he thought that she was his, his wife, this delicious creature who was almost a child yet, and that her heart was given to him forever. He could not resist it; he touched his young wife's lips with his own. She trembled under the kiss and opened her eyes, when the

astonishment of the awakening was at once transformed into a happy smile as she met her husband's glance. Oh, blissful moment! But in spite of all, one must be sensible. He recalled that the milk-maid had left at daybreak her pot of milk at the door of their apartment; that the fire was not lighted, and that he must be at the office early, as the time for promotions was drawing near. Giving another kiss to the half-asleep Lucie, he said to her, in a coaxing tone, "Now then, Lucie, my child, it is half-past eight. Up, up with you, lazy little one!"

How could he console himself for such lost happiness? He had his son, yes—and he loved him very much—but the sight of Amedee increased M. Violette's grief; for the child grew to look more like his mother every day.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMON ABSINTHE

Three or four times a year M. Violette, accompanied by his son, paid a visit to an uncle of his deceased wife, whose heir Amedee might some day become.

M. Isidore Gaufre had founded and made successful a large house for Catholic books and pictures, to which he had added an important agency for the sale of all kinds of religious objects. This vast establishment was called, by a stroke of genius of its proprietor, "Bon Marche des Paroisses," and was famous among all the French clergy. At last it occupied the principal part of the house and all the out-buildings of an old hotel on the Rue Servandoni, constructed in the pompous and magnificent style of the latter part of the seventeenth century. He did a great business there.

All day long, priests and clerical-looking gentlemen mounted the long flight of steps that led to a spacious first floor, lighted by large, high windows surmounted by grotesque heads. There the long-bearded missionaries came to purchase their cargoes of glass beads or imitation coral rosaries, before embarking for the East, or the Gaboon, to convert the negroes and the Chinese.

The member of the third estate, draped in a long chocolate-colored, straight frock-coat, holding a gigantic umbrella under his arm, procured, dirt cheap and by the thousand, pamphlets of religious tenets. The country curate, visiting Paris, arranged for the immediate delivery of a remonstrance, in electrotype, Byzantine style, signing a series of long-dated bills, contracting, by zeal supplemented by some ready cash, to fulfil his liabilities, through the generosity of the faithful ones.

There, likewise, a young director of consciences came to look for some devotional work—for example, the 12mo entitled "Widows' Tears Wiped Away," by St. Francois de Sales—for some penitent. The representative from some deputation from a devoutly Catholic district would solicit a reduction upon a purchase of the "Twelve Stations of the Cross," hideously daubed, which he proposed to present to the parishes which his adversaries had accused of being Voltairians. A brother of the Christian Doctrine, or a sister of St. Vincent de Paul, would bargain for catechisms for their schools. From time to time, even a prince of the church, a bishop with aristocratic mien, enveloped in an ample gown, with his hat surrounded with a green cord and golden tassels, would mysteriously shut himself up in M. Isidore Gaufre's office for an hour; and then would be reconducted to the top of the steps by the cringing proprietor, profuse with his "Monseigneur," and obsequiously bowing under the haughty benediction of two fingers in a violet glove.

It was certainly not from sympathy that M. Violette had kept up his relations with his wife's uncle; for M. Gaufre, who was servilely polite to all those in whom he had an interest, was usually disdainful, sometimes even insolent, to those who were of no use to him. During his niece's life he had troubled himself very little about her, and had given her for a wedding present only an ivory crucifix with a shell for holy water, such as he sold by the gross to be used in convents. A self-made man, having already amassed—so they said—a considerable fortune, M. Gaufre held in very low estimation this poor devil of a commonplace employe whose slow advancement was doubtless due to the fact that he was lazy and incapable. From the greeting that he received, M. Violette suspected the poor opinion that M. Gaufre had of him. If he went there in spite of his natural pride it was only on his son's account. For M. Gaufre was rich, and he was not young. Perhaps—who could tell?—he might not forget Amedee, his nephew, in his will? It was necessary for him to see the child occasionally, and M. Violette, in pursuance of his paternal duty, condemned himself, three or four times a year, to the infliction of a visit at the "Bon Marche des Paroisses."

The hopes that M. Violette had formed as to his son's inheriting from M. Gaufre were very problematical; for the father, whom M. Gaufre had not been able to avoid receiving at his table occasionally, had been struck, even shocked, by the familiar and despotic tone of the old merchant's servant, a superb Normandy woman of about twenty-five years, answering to the royal name of Berenice. The impertinent ways of this robust woman betrayed her position in her master's house, as much as the diamonds that glittered in her ears. This creature would surely watch the will of her patron, a sexagenarian with an apoplectic neck, which became the color of dregs of wine after a glass of brandy.

M. Gaufre, although very practical and a churchwarden at St. Sulpice, had always had a taste for liaisons. His wife, during her life—he had been a widower for a dozen years—had been one of those unfortunate beings of whom people said, "That poor lady is to be pitied; she never can keep a servant." She had in vain taken girls from the provinces, without beauty and certified to be virtuous. One by one—a Flemish girl, an Alsatian, three Nivernaise, two from Picardy; even a young girl from Beauce, hired on account of her certificate as "the best-behaved girl in the village"—they were unsparingly devoured by the minotaur of the Rue Servandoni. All were turned out of doors, with a conscientious blow in the face, by the justly irritated spouse. When he became a widower he gave himself up to his liaisons in perfect security, but without scandal, of course, as to his passion for servants. New country-girls, wearing strange headdresses, responded favorably, in various patois, to his propositions. An Alsatian bow reigned six months; a Breton cap more than a year; but at last what must inevitably take place happened. The beautiful Berenice definitely bound with fetters of iron the old libertine. She was now all-powerful in the house, where she reigned supreme through her beauty and her talent for cooking; and as she saw her master's face grow more congested at each repast, she made her preparations for the future. Who could say but that M. Gaufre, a real devotee after all, would develop conscientious scruples some day, and end in a marriage, in extremis?

M. Violette knew all this; nevertheless it was important that Amedee should not be forgotten by his old relative, and sometimes, though rarely, he would leave his office a little earlier than usual, call for his son as he left the Batifol boarding-school, and take him to the Rue Servandoni.

The large drawing-rooms, transformed into a shop, where one could still see, upon forgotten panels, rococo shepherds offering doves to their shepherdesses, were always a new subject of surprise to little Amedee. After passing through the book-shop, where thousands of little volumes with figured gray and yellow covers crowded the shelves, and boys in ecru linen blouses were rapidly tying up bundles, one entered the jewellery department. There, under beautiful glass cases, sparkled all the glittering display and showy luxury of the Church, golden tabernacles where the Paschal Lamb reposed in a flaming triangle, censers with quadruple chains, stoles and chasubles, heavy with embroidery, enormous candelabra, ostensories and drinking-cups incrustated with enamel and false precious stones—before all these splendors the child, who had read the Arabian Nights, believed that he had entered Aladdin's cave, or Aboul-Cassem's pit. From this glittering array one passed, without transition, into the sombre depot of ecclesiastical vestments. Here all was black. One saw only piles of cassocks and pyramids of black hats. Two manikins, one clothed in a cardinal's purple robe, the other in episcopalian violet, threw a little color over the gloomy show.

But the large hall with painted statues amazed Amedee. They were all there, statues of all the saints in little chapels placed promiscuously upon the shelves in rows.

No more hierarchy. The Evangelist had, for a neighbor a little Jesuit saint—an upstart of yesterday. The unfortunate Fourier had at his side the Virgin Mary. The Saviour of men elbowed St. Labre. They were of plaster run into moulds, or roughly carved in wood, and were colored with paint as glaring as the red and blue of a barber's pole, and covered with vulgar gildings. Chins in the air, ecstatic eyes shining with varnish, horribly ugly and all new, they were drawn up in line like recruits at the roll-call, the mitred bishop, the martyr carrying his palm, St. Agnes embracing her lamb, St. Roch with his dog and shells, St. John the Baptist in his sheepskin, and, most ridiculous of all, poor Vincent de Paul carrying three naked children in his arms, like a midwife's advertisement.

This frightful exhibition, which was of the nature of the Tussaud Museum or a masquerade, positively frightened Amedee. He had recently been to his first communion, and was still burning with the mystical fever, but so much ugliness offended his already fastidious taste and threw him into his first doubt.

One day, about five o'clock, M. Violette and his son arrived at the "Bon Marche des Paroisses," and found Uncle Isidore in the room where the painted statues were kept, superintending—the packing of a St. Michel. The last customer of the day was just leaving, the Bishop 'in partibus' of Trebizonde, blessing M. Gaufre. The little apoplectic man, the giver of holy water, left alone with his clerks, felt under restraint no longer.

"Pay attention, you confounded idiot!" he cried to the young man just ready to lay the archangel in the shavings. "You almost broke the dragon's tail."

Then, noticing Amedee and M. Violette who had just entered:

"Ah! It is you, Violate! Good-day! Good-day, Amedee! You come at an unlucky time. It is shipping-day with us. I am in a great hurry—Eh! Monsieur Combier, by your leave, Monsieur Combier! Do not forget the three dozen of the Apparition de la Salette in stucco for Grenoble, with twenty-five per cent. reduction upon the bill. Are you working hard, Amedee? What do you say? He was first and assisted at the feast of St. Charlemagne! So much the better!—Jules, did you send the six chandeliers and the plated pyx and the Stations of the Cross, Number Two, to the Dames du Sacre-Coeur d'Alencons? What, not yet? But the order came three days ago! You must hurry, I tell you!—You can see, Violette, I am overflowing with work—but come in here a moment."

And once more ordering his bookkeeper, a captive in his glass case, to send the officers the notes that the cure of Sourdeval had allowed to go to protest, Uncle Isidore ushered M. Violette and his son into his office.

It was an ancient room, and M. Gaufre, who aimed at the austere, had made it gloomier still by a safe, and black haircloth furniture, which looked as if taken from a vestryroom. The pretty, high, and oval apartment, with its large window, opening upon a garden, its ceiling painted in light rosy clouds, its woodwork ornamented with wreaths and quivers, still preserved some of the charm and elegance of former days. Amedee would have been amused there, had not Uncle Isidore, who had seated himself before his desk, launched at once an unkind question at M. Violette.

"By the way, have you obtained the promotion that you counted so much upon last year?"

"Unfortunately, no, Monsieur Gaufre. You know what the Administration is."

"Yes, it is slow; but you are not overwhelmed with work, however. While in a business like this—what cares, what annoyances! I sometimes envy you. You can take an hour to cut your pens. Well, what is wanted of me now?"

The head of a clerk with a pencil behind his ear, appeared through the half-open door.

"Monsieur le Superieur of Foreign Missions wishes to speak with Monsieur."

"You can see! Not one minute to myself. Another time, my dear Violette. Adieu, my little man—it is astonishing how much he grows to look like Lucie! You must come and dine with me some Sunday, without ceremony. Berenice's 'souffle au fromage' is something delicious! Let Monsieur le Superieur come in."

M. Violette took his departure, displeased at his useless visit and irritated against Uncle Isidore, who had been hardly civil.

"That man is a perfect egotist," thought he, sadly; "and that girl has him in her clutches. My poor Amedee will have nothing from him."

Amedee himself was not interested in his uncle's fortune. He was just then a pupil in the fourth grade, which follows the same studies as at the Lycee Henri IV. Having suddenly grown tall, he was annoyed at wearing short trousers, and had already renounced all infantile games. The dangling crows which illustrated the pages of his Burnouf grammar were all dated the previous year, and he had entirely renounced feeding silkworms in his desk. Everything pointed to his not being a very practical man. Geometry disgusted him, and as for dates, he could not remember one. On holidays he liked to walk by himself through quiet streets; he read poems at the bookstalls, and lingered in the Luxembourg Gardens to see the sun set. Destined to be a dreamer and a sentimentalist—so much the worse for you, poor Amedee!

He went very often to the Gerards, but he no longer called his little friends "thou." Louise was now seventeen years old, thin, without color, and with a lank figure; decidedly far from pretty. People, in speaking of her, began to say, "She has beautiful eyes and is an excellent musician." Her sister Maria was twelve years old and a perfect little rosebud.

As to the neighbor's little girl, Rosine Combarieu, she had disappeared. One day the printer suddenly departed without saying a word to anybody, and took his child with him. The concierge said that he was concerned in some political plot, and was obliged to leave the house in the night. They believed him to

be concealed in some small town.

Accordingly, Father Gerard was not angry with him for fleeing without taking leave of him. The conspirator had kept all his prestige in the eyes of the engraver, who, by a special run of ill-luck, was always engaged by a publisher of Bonapartist works, and was busy at that moment upon a portrait of the Prince Imperial, in the uniform of a corporal of the Guards, with an immense bearskin cap upon his childish head.

Father Gerard was growing old. His beard, formerly of a reddish shade, and what little hair there was remaining upon his head, had become silvery white; that wonderful white which, like a tardy recompense to red-faced persons, becomes their full-blooded faces so well. The good man felt the weight of years, as did his wife, whose flesh increased in such a troublesome way that she was forced to pant heavily when she seated herself after climbing the five flights. Father Gerard grew old, like everything that surrounded him; like the house opposite, that he had seen built, and that no longer had the air of a new building; like his curious old furniture, his mended crockery, and his engravings, yellow with age, the frames of which had turned red; like the old Gerard piano, upon which Louise, an accomplished performer, now was playing a set of Beethoven's waltzes and Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words." This poor old servant now had only the shrill, trembling tones of a harmonica.

The poor artist grew old, and he was uneasy as to the future; for he had not known how to manage like his school-friend, the intriguing Damourette, who had formerly cheated him out of the 'prix de Rome' by a favor, and who now played the gentleman at the Institute, in his embroidered coat, and received all the good orders. He, the simpleton, had saddled himself with a family, and although he had drudged like a slave he had laid nothing aside. One day he might be stricken with apoplexy and leave his widow without resources, and his two daughters without a dowry. He sometimes thought of all this as he filled his pipe, and it was not pleasant.

If M. Gerard grew gloomy as he grew older, M. Violette became mournful. He was more than forty years old now. What a decline! Does grief make the years count double? The widower was a mere wreck. His rebellious lock of hair had become a dirty gray, and always hung over his right eye, and he no longer took the trouble to toss it behind his ear. His hands trembled and he felt his memory leaving him. He grew more taciturn and silent than ever, and seemed interested in nothing, not even in his son's studies. He returned home late, ate little at dinner, and then went out again with a tottering step to pace the dark, gloomy streets. At the office, where he still did his work mechanically, he was a doomed man; he never would be elected chief assistant. "What depravity!" said one of his fellow clerks, a young man with a bright future, protected by the head of the department, who went to the races and had not his equal in imitating the "Gnouf! gnouf!" of Grassot, the actor. "A man of his age does not decline so rapidly without good cause. It is not natural!" What is it, then, that has reduced M. Violette to such a degree of dejection and wretchedness?

Alas! we must admit it. The unhappy man lacked courage, and he sought consolation in his despair, and found it in a vice.

Every evening when he left his office he went into a filthy little cafe on the Rue du Four. He would seat himself upon a bench in the back of the room, in the darkest corner, as if ashamed; and would ask in a low tone for his first glass of absinthe. His first! Yes, for he drank two, three even. He drank them in little sips, feeling slowly rise within him the cerebral rapture of the powerful liquor. Let those who are happy blame him if they will! It was there, leaning upon the marble table, looking at, without seeing her, through the pyramids of lump sugar and bowls of punch, the lady cashier with her well oiled hair reflected in the glass behind her—it was there that the inconsolable widower found forgetfulness of his trouble. It was there that for one hour he lived over again his former happiness.

For, by a phenomenon well known to drinkers of absinthe, he regulated and governed his intoxication, and it gave him the dream that he desired.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

And once more he became the young husband, who adores his dear Lucie and is adored by her.

It is winter, he is seated in the corner by the fire, and before him, sitting in the light reflected by a green lampshade upon which dark silhouettes of jockey-riders are running at full speed, his wife is busying herself with some embroidery. Every few moments they look at each other and smile, he over his book and she over her work; the lover never tired of admiring Lucie's delicate fingers. She is too pretty! Suddenly he falls at her feet, slips his arm about her waist, and gives her a long kiss; then, overcome with languor, he puts his head upon his beloved's knees and hears her say to him, in a low voice: "That is right! Go to sleep!" and her soft hands lightly stroke his hair.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

They are in that beautiful field filled with flowers, near the woods in Verrieres, upon a fine June afternoon when the sun is low. She has made a magnificent bouquet of field flowers. She stops at intervals to add a cornflower, and he follows, carrying her mantle and umbrella. How beautiful is summer and how sweet it is to love! They are a little tired; for during the whole of this bright Sunday they have wandered through the meadows. It is the hour for dinner, and here is a little tavern under some lindens, where the whiteness of the napkins rivals the blossoming thickets. They choose a table and order their repast of a moustached youth. While waiting for their soup, Lucie, rosy from being out all day in the open air and silent from hunger, amuses herself in looking at the blue designs on the plates, which represented battles in Africa. What a joyous dinner! There were mushrooms in the omelet, mushrooms in the stewed kidneys, mushrooms in the filet. But so much the better! They are very fond of them. And the good wine! The dear child is almost intoxicated at dessert! She takes it into her head to squeeze a cherry-stone between her thumb and first finger and makes it pop-slap! into her husband's face! And the naughty creature laughs! But he will have his revenge—wait a little! He rises, and leaning over the table buries two fingers between her collar and her neck, and the mischievous creature draws her head down into her shoulders as far as she can, begging him, with a nervous laugh, "No, no, I beseech you!" for she is afraid of being tickled. But the best time of all is the return through the country at night, the exquisite odor of new-mown hay, the road lighted by a summer sky where the whole zodiac twinkles, and through which, like a silent stream, the Chemin de St. Jacques rolls its diamond smoke.

Tired and happy she hangs upon her husband's arm. How he loves her! It seems to him that his love for Lucie is as deep and profound as the night. "Nobody is coming let me kiss your dear mouth!" and their kisses are so pure, so sincere, and so sweet, that they ought to rejoice the stars!

"Another glass of absinthe, boy—one more!"

And the unhappy man would forget for a few moments longer that he ought to go back to his lonely lodging, where the servant had laid the table some time before, and his little son awaited him, yawning with hunger and reading a book placed beside his plate. He forgot the horrible moment of returning, when he would try to hide his intoxicated condition under a feint of bad humor, and when he would seat himself at table without even kissing Amedee, in order that the child should not smell his breath.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out
Inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody
It was all delightfully terrible!
Mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them
Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him
Tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings
Tired smile of those who have not long to live
Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck
Voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart
When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A ROMANCE OF YOUTH — VOLUME 1 ***

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