

THE STRONGEST

They thought him queer. "The war struck home to him," said his friends. And since he was ruined, in any case, and had retired to what was left of his estate, they decided that he had gone under, and . . . good-night!

Henri de Puymafray's father—one-time gentleman in waiting to Charles X, a lover of white wine and pretty country girls—was killed in a hunting accident before he knew that he was to have an heir. His mother, née Pannetier, a stupid, ugly creature, daughter of an army contractor, died three days after the birth of the child. She had perpetuated the race—had gilded again, for a day, the escutcheon sorely soiled by time. And, having accomplished the full duty of a plebeian millionaire, she took her place hierarchically in the tombs of the Puymafrays, who forgave the misalliance. A seedy old uncle, of the noble side, was named guardian and then tutor for the little marquis. He sulked at the coming of the child, who ruined all his own senile hopes, but he established himself at the château with an abbé from the bishopric of Nantes, and with the two Nanettes, his childhood nurse and her little daughter.

Fourteen uneventful years. The child grew up, loved by his nurse, whipped by the abbé, consoled by his little foster sister, and lectured by his tutor.

In spite of his appearance—the crooked nose, the rolling, yellow eyes, and the gold-headed cane he