

utes he never failed to find a partner for a game of piquet. At the neighbouring tables the other members of the club played cards likewise. The play was not high, but was nevertheless carried on with the greatest ardour. Conversation went on in low tones, such was the custom. Any stranger whom chance or curiosity led into the club-room, soon felt awkward and intrusive amid this company of old men, all busy shuffling cards, marking points, or exchanging the whispered remarks which the course of the game called forth. The members of the "Cercle de l'Esplanade" were accounted first-rate players in all Lunel. At half-past ten the games had generally come to an end, and by eleven o'clock the great room was empty. Casimir Vincent would then go home.

When the weather was fine, he took two or three turns on the Esplanade, and by half-past eleven was in his sitting-room. A large lamp with a shade burned on the table; the evening papers and the letters of the last delivery were laid out beside it. Vincent read for about half an hour, and then passed into his bedroom. In summer, before undressing, it was his custom to stand for a while at the window, from whence he could see a park which lay behind the house. The rustling murmur of the trees seemed to have a peculiar charm for him. He would stay listening to it attentively for a long time, though his countenance betrayed no emotion, and remained calm and serious as ever. But he would often heave a deep sigh as he turned away from the window. In the winter time, he would spend that last half-hour in front of the fire, his eyes fixed on the dying embers, while his features preserved that same look of thoughtful contemplation with which he listened in summer to the last hushed sounds of nature. Advancing years had made Casimir Vincent a singularly thoughtful, serious, and taciturn man.

When the war with Germany broke out, M. Vincent shared the fever of patriotism which took possession of all France. From morning to night he read the papers; drew up plans for the campaign, and discussed the conditions which should be imposed upon the vanquished enemy. He had recovered the enthusiasm of his youth, and took the liveliest interest in all the burning questions of the day.

The first defeats produced a sort of stupefaction, though they did not shake his confidence.

"We will take our revenge," he said; "and we to the northern invaders who have dared to pollute the sacred soil of France!"

But after the disasters of Forbach and Reichschoffen, after the bloody battles of Mars-la-Tour and Gravelotte, came the fearful news of the catastrophe of Sedan; and then, one following another, resounded the terrible blows under which France was crushed by the fortune of war; Strasbourg, Metz, Paris, fell into the power of the enemy. Whole armies were annihilated or led into captivity; new armies were raised, and were overtaken by the same fate; the northern and eastern provinces of France were like a vast cemetery, drenched with the noblest blood of the country. In the south, in the neighbourhood of Lunel, there was fury or despair, and in some cases a still more harrowing feeling or resignation. Casimir Vincent went about his business with the air of a ghost, and his dumb, pent-up sorrow was pitiful to witness. Still just as before the war, he never failed to go every morning to the *Mas*, and to show himself twice a-day at the club.

After peace had been concluded, everything resumed its accustomed aspect, in the little town which was far removed from the seat of military events. Vincent, who had sustained no loss of fortune or of position, appeared almost to have forgotten the misfortune which had befallen his country. He scarcely ever spoke of the war, and never joined in the general clamour for revenge which arose on all sides. But he grew daily more gloomy, more sad, more taciturn, till his best friends at last admitted that "old Vincent had become quite impracticable."

Vincent, however, continued to follow the political questions of the day: he subscribed to some of the leading Paris newspapers, and spent the better part of the day reading them.

In October, 1873, when the news spread that the Comte de Chambord was going to ascend the throne of his ancestors, the old Legitimist had a last burst of enthusiasm.

"I would die happy," he said, "if it were given to me to see Henry V. at the head of the country."

The letter by which the Comte de Chambord annihilated the hopes of the so-called "fusionists" caused the banker a great shock.

"The king is right," he said; "he is always right; but what can be said of a country where the foremost citizens dare to propose to their legitimate sovereign to attain, by devious and crooked paths, the throne which God himself gave him? Poor France!"

René Sabatier, who had always been a favourite with the banker, and who in his turn, felt a real affection for him, became anxious at last, seeing him so completely dispirited. One night he accompanied him home, and took advantage of the opportunity to question his old friend on his sadness.

"You are not well. You seem tired. What is the matter? Why do you not consult the doctor?"

"The doctor can do nothing for me," replied Vincent. "I am bored, that's all."

"Travel; try a change."

"I am as well at Lunel as I should be anywhere else. Here, at least, I am surrounded by well-known faces, and I have my regular occupations, which make the days seem less insupportably long."

"Go to Paris. It is my dream to go there. Ah! if I were rich and free like you I would start this very night."

"Paris! Thanks for the advice! No! anywhere rather than there! Paris is the ruin of France! Paris is the birthplace of the evils of which we are all dying! The Revolution, the Empire, the war, the Commune, all came from Paris! Paris has killed France! Curse it!"

"Softly, softly, *Papa Vincent*," replied Sabatier; "do not fly into such a passion. Whatever you may say, Paris is the finest town in the world. Paris has its vices, I admit; but its brilliant qualities make it the capital of civilisation."

"Pray, spare me your Victor Hugo phrases! Yes, Paris is verily the most civilised town in the world, if by civilisation you mean the reverse of all that is natural and true. Shall I tell you what you, a provincial stranger, will find in Paris? The first tailors and the first shoemakers in the world; the best hair-dressers and fencing-masters; the greatest coquettes and the most profligate women; the most cheating hotel-keepers, the most selfish politicians, and the most wonderful actors. That is all you, as a stranger, will see; as to the Paris of work and self-denial, it will be hidden from you. The honest folks of Paris—and, thank Heaven! there are some left—do not frequent the places where you go to seek excitement and see sights. Busy with such work, and ashamed of the enervating pleasures that strangers rush to so greedily, they know how to respect their mourning country. Their houses would be closed to you, nor would they be thrown open to me. No, no, I will not go to Paris. Lunel is a dull town, I confess; I am weary of the life I lead here; it weighs me down, and I long to have done with it; still, I prefer it to life in Paris."

He paused for a minute and bent his head as if he were absorbed in painful reflections, then he resumed slowly in a low voice, as though, he were speaking to himself, "Ay, indeed, life in Lunel is dull and colourless... Life in Paris is repugnant to me... Life is unbearable everywhere in France... Formerly it was not so, and life then had an object; men lived, men died at least for something. But what can I do now? Fold my arms, and impotently witness the ruin of my country... All is going, perishing, falling to pieces... and I am but a weak old man."

A long silence followed, which Sabatier dared not break till the two friends reached the banker's door.

"Monsieur Vincent," Sabatier then said, in a respectful tone, "I wish you good night; try and sleep well."

"Good night, my dear René," said the old man. He was holding the door still ajar, when he suddenly turned round and said abruptly to the young man—

"How old are you?"

"I am four-and-twenty."

"Well, follow the advice of an old bachelor: marry. A life full of cares is better than a life which is utterly void. Woe to the man who is alone in the world!... Take a wife... Solitude begets unwholesome thoughts... Good-night Sabatier!"

The next day Vincent appeared at the usual hour at the *café* of the Esplanade, and in a few minutes he was seated opposite Sabatier, apparently absorbed in the intricacies of a game of piquet.

"You have just thrown away ninety," remarked Sabatier.

"Have I?" said Vincent. He took up the cards he had discarded, looked at them, and said quietly, "You are right; here is my knave of clubs."

There was another deal.

"Why what is the matter with you to-day?" cried Sabatier. "You have not reckoned your quint."

"You are right again, young man," said the banker; "I had forgotten it. I do not know what I am thinking of." So saying, he pushed away the cards.

"Go and play with Coule," he added; "it amuses me no longer."

He got up and placed himself near another table where two other men were playing. Old Vidal came up and proposed a game of bezique. Vincent assented willingly, and they seated themselves at a vacant table. Vincent won the game.

"Bezique is child's play," he said; "I prefer piquet." He got up and apologised for not going on. "I will give you your revenge to-morrow," he said. He remained half an hour longer in the club-room, going from one group to another, and exchanging a few brief sentences with his friends; but he went home somewhat earlier than usual. No sooner had he left the room than every one began to talk about him.

"Old Vincent looks very ill. What is the matter with him?"

"He did not know his cards, and threw out his best. I never saw him like that."

"How are his affairs? Are they all right?"

"That they are. He bought largely into the funds only last week."

"Then, what ails him?"

"Nothing—he is bored."

"Has he ever been anything else for the last thirty years?"

"No. But apparently he has found out at last that it is not amusing to be bored."

While remarks were being exchanged at the club, Vincent was walking slowly homewards. More than once he stopped on his way, and stood plunged in deep thought, stroking his chin while as was his wont. Once he took off his hat, brushed his hair back with a slow and regular movement, and then pressed his hand on his temple as though he had felt a sharp and sudden pain. His cravat seemed to choke him; once or twice he passed his finger between his throat and his shirt-collar, and breathed hard like a man who has been making some violent effort.

On entering his apartment he found everything in its accustomed place; there was the lamp, and beside it the papers and a few letters. He glanced at these; and recognizing the writing on the addresses, laid them aside without opening them. Even the papers had not the power to interest him; he opened one, and after looking through the leading article he crumpled it up in his hand and threw it on the ground.

"Always the same twaddle!" he exclaimed. The clock of a neighbouring church struck eleven. Vincent took up a candlestick and went into his bedroom. As he stood before the chimney his eyes fell on the large mirror. He remained motionless and gazed long at his own image: it was that of an old man, bent under the weight of years, with a yellow, shrivelled-up face, dim eyes, and a despondent countenance.

"I never would have believed," he said, speaking very slowly, "that a life as long as mine could have been so joyless. To eat, to drink, to sleep, to read letters and newspapers, to shuffle and deal out cards, to be of no use for anything or to anybody, ... to care for nothing, to care for nobody, ... and to be bored."

He walked up to the open window and looked out into the spring. Above were the cloudless, starry heavens—below, the old plane-trees seemed to slumber: a solemn silence reigned all around.

"What fearful silence!" he said; "a death-like silence... without and within myself." He shuddered and closed the window.

The next morning he went as usual to the *Mas de Vincent*. The *pair* came out to meet him at the gate.

"A fine morning, Monsieur Vincent. I hope I see you well. We could not wish for better. If Providence only sends us a little rain, and we have no frost or hail, this year's crop will be splendid."

"We have no reason to complain," replied Vincent; the *Mas* has always made a capital return."

"Ah, you are a fortunate man, sir. All you touch seems to turn to gold. The *Mas* is worth double what it was in your father's time. One may indeed call you a fortunate man."

When, half an hour later, Vincent was driving back in his *cabriolet*, he more than once repeated to himself, "Yes, yes, I am a fortunate man." But his countenance was not that of a fortunate man.

He scarcely tasted his breakfast: at dinner, he ate little or nothing. His old servant, Martha, became anxious, and inquired if her master was ill.

"No, I am not ill, but I have no appetite. To-morrow I will be better."

At the club he refused to play. As on the preceding evening, he wandered from one table to the other, looking on and stroking his chin without saying a word.

"Why don't you play?" inquired Sabatier.

"I have played piquet thirty years long. Is it very surprising that I should be weary of the game?"

"Play bezique."

"Bezique is child's play."

"Whist, then?"

"I don't know whist."

"You will learn."

"I am too old."

"Oh, *Papa Vincent*, you are hard to please to-night."

"Very hard to please, verily. It is of course unconscionable to expect from life something more than the pleasure of playing cards for half-penny points."

Sabatier did not reply, and at the end of an hour Vincent left the club without having exchanged another word.

When he reached his own door, he stood irresolute, and looked right and left as though he expected somebody. He whistled softly, and, as on the previous day, took off his hat to press his hand upon his forehead. At that moment a poor beggar-woman, with a child in her arms, went by.

"For God's sake, my good gentleman," she said, in a supplicating tone, "give me something for this poor child!"

Vincent drew out his purse, and looked into it for an instant, as though he were searching for small coin. Finding none, he took a five-franc piece and gave it to the woman.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed, almost in a tone of fear. "How can I thank you, sir? May God preserve you and yours, and return to you in blessings what you have done for me!"

She moved on, and Vincent's eyes followed her. "Halloa! here, woman!" he called out, abruptly.

The beggar-woman looked round and hesitated. She feared to turn back lest the banker should have made a mistake and wish to take back his alms.

"Come back, I say," repeated Vincent. "No

one wants to harm you; on the contrary. But make haste; I have no time to lose."

The poor woman came up.

"Here," said Vincent, "take all," and poured the contents of his purse into her hand. The woman was struck dumb with surprise for a few seconds. When she recovered her speech, and began to stammer forth her thanks, Vincent had disappeared.

Guerre, the coachman, had been waiting more than an hour. At last he grew impatient.

"Martha!" he cried, "is not Monsieur up? It is nearly eight."

The servant went to the kitchen door and glanced up at the bed-room windows. The curtains were still drawn.

"This is very strange," she said, "for Monsieur always gets up at six. I'll go up and see what has happened."

In a few minutes she came down again, seared, pale, and trembling.

"Guerre," she said, in a hoarse whisper, "come quick. Our master—" She could say no more, but the old coachman understood that some misfortune had happened. He came into the house and ran up-stairs as fast as his old legs would carry him. Martha followed. The two servants stopped at the entrance of the sitting-room, and Martha pointed silently to the bedroom door. Guerre went in with faltering steps.

The bright sunshine lighted up the room in spite of the curtains and the blinds. On the table stood two candlesticks, in which the lights had burned down to the sockets. Between them, placed so as to catch the eye at once, Guerre saw a paper, on which a few lines were written: and in front of the hearth, lying in a pool of blood, the corpse of Casimir Vincent. Guerre picked up an open razor, smeared with blood, and placed it, with a shudder, on the table. He then took up the paper, which he had noticed on entering the room, and read as follows:

"Weary of life, I have sought death. My affairs are in good order. My will is in the hands of M. Vidal, the notary."

"CASIMIR VINCENT."

The funeral took place quietly the next day. All the members of the "Cercle de l'Esplanade" attended.

A portion of the banker's wealth went to distant relatives. René Sabatier, however, had a large legacy, and a still more considerable sum was bequeathed to the town of Lunel for the foundation of a charitable institution. The clergy offered no opposition to the burial of the suicide in consecrated ground; and René Sabatier, remembering the last remarks of his unhappy friend, caused a stone to be placed on his grave, with the following inscription:—

"A MAN, WEARY OF LIFE,
HAS SOUGHT REPOSE HERE:
PRAY FOR HIM!"

THE GLEANER.

EX-EMPRESS EUGENIE will spend part of the summer in England, which place she will reach at the end of this month, after her visit to Madrid.

PRINCE ARTHUR, of England, who wears the title of the Duke of Cornwall, is betrothed in marriage to Lady Rosamond Jane Frances, second daughter of the Duke of Marlborough.

COUNT BEST, the Austrian Ambassador, speaking at the annual banquet of the German Hospital in London, remarked that the English army was the only European army which during the present century never suffered a defeat. What about New Orleans?

HUMOROUS.

MUCH of the charity that begins at home is too feeble to get out of doors.

It is cruel to wink your eyes with satisfaction when you give a blind beggar the wrong direction to a savings' bank.

WHEN two newspaper men dine together they always look at each other in hope of finding out which has got the money.

DOX'T neglect your penmanship. A man in New York got \$64,000 from a banker for being a good writer. It is not yet known how many years he will get.

EXPERIENCE teaches us how to do many things, but when a man sits down on a bent pin experience has to take a back seat, while instinct comes to the front.

WOMEN make good lawyers. When a man goes home without a smile and as he tackles cold corn beef and cabbage on the night of washday he is always cross-questioned.

MR. GLADSTONE'S physician has forbidden him to work so hard and continually as he has done of late years, and actually urged him to restrict himself to the labor of six ordinary Englishmen.

It is interesting to sit in a flour store now as the proprietor receives a dispatch, and yells, "They're a throwin' shells acrossgrasseacornalibzcheffinvarina, an' some one is goin' to get hurt. Turn out all hands and mark every danged bar'f up half a dollar."

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