

The most difficult form of courage, perhaps, is that which Lucien needed at this moment to get rid of Blondet as he had just got rid of Madame d'Espard and Châtelet. In him, unfortunately, the joys of vanity hindered the exercise of pride—the basis, beyond doubt, of many great things. His vanity had triumphed in the previous encounter; he had shown himself as a rich man, happy and scornful, to two persons who had scorned him when he was poor and wretched. But how could a poet, like an old diplomat, run the gauntlet with two self-styled friends, who had welcomed him in misery, under whose roof he had slept in the worst of his troubles? Finot, Blondet, and he had groveled together; they had wallowed in such orgies as consume something more than money. Like soldiers who find no market for their courage, Lucien had just done what many men do in Paris: he had still further compromised his character by shaking Finot's hand, and not rejecting Blondet's affection.

Every man who has dabbled, or still dabbles, in journalism is under the painful necessity of bowing to men he despises, of smiling at his dearest foe, of compounding the foulest meanness, of soiling his fingers to pay his aggressors in their own coin. He becomes used to seeing evil done, and passing it over; he begins by condoning it, and ends by committing it. In the long run the soul, constantly stained by shameful and perpetual compromise, sinks lower, the spring of noble thoughts grows rusty, the hinges of familiarity wear easy, and turn of their own accord. Alceste becomes Philinte, natures lose their firmness, talents are perverted, faith in great deeds evaporates. The man who yearned to be proud of his work wastes himself in rubbishy articles which his conscience regards, sooner or later, as so many evil actions. He started, like Lousteau or Vernou, to be a great writer; he finds himself a feeble scrivener. Hence it is impossible to honor too highly men whose character stands as high as their talent—men like d'Arthez, who know how to walk sure-footed across the reefs of literary life.

Lucien could make no reply to Blondet's flattery; his wit