

MME. D'ERMEL, (*excited*).—This priest, sir, would have lost twenty games of checkers, and more too, rather than speak ill of one absent, grieve an old friend, and sin against the goodness of God.

JACOBUS, (*sneeringly*).—Humph! humph! the goodness of God!

MME. D'ERMEL, (*earnestly*).—Yes, the goodness of God! Are not you going to find fault with God too, now?

JACOBUS, (*rising, and walking up and down the room with his arms crossed*).—The goodness of God! it is very droll, people will persist in thus calling God, good!

MME. D'ERMEL.—Jacobus, take care now!

JACOBUS.—Well, Madam, since it seems determined that a twenty years' long friendship is to make room for a fanatic lately escaped from the Seminary. . . .

MME. D'ERMEL.—Dear me!

JACOBUS.—The last word the old friend shall utter in your house shall at least be a protest against the stupid idols that drive him from it. A good God! and why not? did not the ancients call their infernal Furies good also? . . . A good God! I can understand how in the first bloom of youth, when pleasant dreams still hover over the threshold of life, when the future looks bright with hopes of love and success in life, when all that makes existence desirable, seems attainable, I can understand how the heart may indulge in dreams of a kind and protecting divinity, and pour out the incense of its youth on his altars! but—

MME. D'ERMEL, (*to herself*).—How well he can talk!

JACOBUS.—But at our age, Madam, and with such looks as ours—

MME. D'ERMEL.—You are very polite, indeed!

JACOBUS.—I speak for myself, Madam. Come, of what special providential kindness is the old man you have now before your eyes, a living proof? Look in my face, and answer.

MME. D'ERMEL.—Look at it yourself. . . There is a mirror.

JACOBUS, (*very much excited*).—Well, I look at myself; what do I see? I see an image whose every feature proclaims a victim and a tormentor! . . . I see old age, old age hideous to itself and to others, a painful caricature, a ridiculous and sinister intruder amid the festivities of life, a trembling spectre, tired of living and afraid to die! But that which your mirror fails to show is the sombre cortège of griefs and miseries hid within the wrinkles, like a troop of ill-omened birds within a ruin; the helpless, hopeless infirmities, the only companions of the old man in his gloomy solitude. Speak, Madam, for which of these accompaniments of old age can this poor pariah find a cause to bless Providence? He is alone; the earth he walks is filled with the spoils of all that was once dear to him; he drags his burden along graves, seeking his own, and shuddering before it! Nature presents to him nothing but faded beauties; a sun no longer warm, springs that bring death. What is there in all this, I ask again, to thank God for? Is it for his having, at least, spared us the trouble of children? Be it so; our dying looks will thus, thanks to that great kindness, not fall upon the greedy eyes of heirs watching eagerly for the last breath—beloved sons impatient to be masters—that last crown usually reserved to the prolonged martyrdom—the usual death-blow that terminates the terrible chastisement for the unknown crime—human life!

MME. D'ERMEL.—This is not all, is it? You are not going to leave so generous a speech incomplete? Why don't you go on, and demonstrate to your old friend, who has painfully trodden these same paths, supporting herself on these utopias, faith and love, that her laborious journey is all vain and fruitless, that fifty years of struggles, griefs and hopes go all for nothing; a fitting end and worthy of the beginning. No, no, Jacobus, you shall not go on, you shall do