

provinces, but learned, to my no small surprise, that he was from beyond Kusan.

There are no places where acquaintance is more quickly made than at the card-table and on the road. I soon got intimate with my priest, who was genial and communicative, and told me many things which, out of discretion, I should not have dared to inquire. At first we were conversing on general subjects, and when the expression *vertrakt** escaped me,—without interrupting me he looked me steadfastly in the face, and seemed engrossed with something quite different from what I was talking about. When I ceased speaking, "*Pasluschi*," (my dear,) he said, abruptly quitting the subject of the previous conversation, "pray repeat that word *vertrakt*!"

I repeated it, and asked what there was in it that struck him?

"I do not know the meaning of that word," he replied, "and only conjecture it from the connection of what you say; but I have heard the word once before in my life, and then, if I do not mistake, from *your* mouth. The tone of your voice struck me at once; I have heard you speak before to-day."

As I could not remember to have before met him, I named those places I was most accustomed to frequent.

"No, no!" he said, "not there!"

He again looked hard at me, and slowly repeated the word *vertrakt*.

"*Pasluschi*!" he suddenly exclaimed, "tell me, do you know the bookseller Curth or Leibrock?"

"Yes," replied I, "in the Nowsky."

Thereupon he told me the day on which he had seen me there, heard me speak, and had his attention attracted by the word *vertrakt*. This opened the way to a fresh subject of conversation; from Leibrock, the bookseller, to literature, the transition was not very wide; but, the Rubicon once passed, how was it to be recrossed? and on the fields beyond it I did not feel altogether at my ease, for it is tolerably long since I made acquaintance with the Fathers of the Church, and it was no easy matter for me to recall them to my memory. But my embarrassment was of no long duration; my priest soon released me from it. With the acute perception of a connoisseur he quickly detected that I was not at home on this field, and led me to one more familiar to me; for to him no subject was untrodden ground. He spoke of politics, belles-lettres, journalism; and my surprise rose into astonishment when he introduced Tieck, Borne, and Heine into the conversation. Yes, still more than that; he was acquainted with George Sand's writings, and knew that she is Madame Dudevant. I did not conceal my astonishment.

"It surprises you," he said, "to meet with a Greek-Catholic priest to whom such worldly matters are not unfamiliar. *Pasluschi*! the surest road to heaven leads across the earth, and if at times one soils one's shoe-soles, then it is that one feels the most ardent desire for the wings that should bear him heavenwards. Man's best and highest study is that of man himself, and believe me that one often acquires a better knowledge of

one's contemporaries from a bad romance than from all the police-registers in the country."

"A bad romance," I replied, "signifies nothing; that which is but little read can afford no standard by which to form a judgment."

"Think you so?" said he, "I must disagree with you; the bad ones are those which are *most* read; as to the good ones, a great many people say they have read them who have never looked at them. But the bad ones are devoured, and it is not by the author, but by his readers, that I estimate the taste, the cultivation, and the morality of the people. Unhappily the readers of the present day exact neither depth nor truth; GLITTER is what they will have—glitter and that which dazzles, *that* is offered to them; *that* is what authors provide and readers greedily devour, and therefore are neither worth anything. Look at Eugene Sue's last work, as yet but half published; I have seen it only in the feuillet of the *Debats*, but I would wager that, when the thing is complete, the publisher will sell a hundred thousand copies."

"The *thing*! Do you then think the work so bad?"

"Bad? No; that is not the word; it is a sort of stuff for which I have no name ready; lend me your '*vertrakt*;' judging from the manner in which I heard you apply it, that is, perhaps, the word that best expresses my view. Such a work, which glitters, but with false stones; which shines, but only from rottenness, like decayed wood; which is pleasing to the palate, but mortally poisonous; such a *vertraktes* (diabolical) work, which, under the mask of morality, corrupts all morals, plainly shows that the reading world is pretty well corrupted already, for otherwise no author would dare to write it."

"You will at any rate admit that the romance of the *Mysteres de Paris* is based upon deeply moral views, and that it is the author's aim to lead us through vice to virtue."

"Oh yes, so long as we do not remain sticking in vice by the way. He first poisons us, and then hands us the chemical analysis of the poison; of which, however, we have then no need, since the pain in our vitals tells us, without the aid of science, the nature of the drug. Every work is *immoral* which irritates the senses by luxurious pictures, and *repulsive* when it then essays to cool them again by a flood of terror and disgust. Hypocrisy is at the bottom of the whole, or, at least, silly pretension and braggadocio. What business have these plans for the improvement of the world in the pages of romance? Romances have only to do with the state of the mind—with the *inward* man, in short; the description of his external circumstances should be subservient to the end of developing and explaining the motives and condition of his mind. But here just the contrary is done; a phantasmagoria is shown us which is intended as a representation of certain conditions of the human mind, when, in fact, it is nothing but a series of silly plans for social reform, based upon theories still more absurd. What business has all this nonsense about cellular prisons, coalitions of workmen, and other socialist stuff, in a romance, from whose volumes assuredly no statesman will think of gaining wisdom? If the author puts forward these views seriously, if they are

* Signifying *odd, strange*. It has other meanings, and is somewhat of a cant term.