

"My dear Daneau," said the banker, much affected, "you shall neither of you, I trust, feel the want of it long. I have reason to hope that, having thus far stood this shock without loss of credit, I shall be able to use your deposits with advantage to us all; and believe me, gentlemen, you have, both of you, purchased a claim upon my gratitude that must make my future prosperity synonymous with your own."

The Marquis and the builder withdrew together, and at the door of the house might have been seen this worthy mechanic and this noble lord, far distant in station, but near neighbours in virtuous sentiments, the one bearing the badge of the late revolution, and the other an ex-peer of Charles X., grasping each other's hands, as equals in integrity and honour.

In the meantime, the banker, restored to cheerfulness by this double act of generosity, now saw a fair prospect not only of saving the credit of his house, but even of turning all his losses to good account; since nothing could more firmly establish the popular opinion of his stability, than the fact of his having stood without flinching the test of such a catastrophe, which had ruined so many other great capitalists. So nearly, however, had he been prostrated, and to such a state of helplessness had he been reduced, that he lay even now at the mercy of his only remaining creditor, M. de Lozeraie, whose recent return from England filled him with dire apprehensions.—Could the Count be induced to defer his claim for but a few months, the banker saw that he would be able, by gradually calling in his not yet available funds, to meet him without hesitation, and being thus once relieved from his last incumbrance, he could wait patiently for the ultimate recovery of immense sums, from debtors who had failed during the panic, but who would undoubtedly pay a good percentage upon their various liabilities. That any hopes of the banker, based upon the forbearance of the Count de Lozeraie, were not to be depended upon, will be readily surmised by all who have followed me through the preceding chapters; and a letter that was now put into the hands of M. Durand, desiring him to hold himself in readiness for the immediate reimbursement of M. de Lozeraie's funds, confirmed his worst fears, and again clouded his brow with care. This demand was of sufficient importance, under present circumstances, to throw the whole of the banker's affairs again into confusion, and completely to nullify the efforts of M. M. de Berizy and Daneau's kindness.

To satisfy it, it would be necessary to dispose of a part of these notes at an enormous discount, (for this was an epoch at which no loan could be effected, but upon the most extravagant terms,) added to which, the circumstance of his being obliged to raise supplies by such means, would have all the effect upon his credit of an actual failure.

It was a cruel stroke, when he had thus far striven successfully to meet every demand without shewing to the world the extremity to which he was reduced, to be compelled at last by one transaction, to throw up all the advantages he had so perseveringly struggled for; yet such was the case.

M. Durand reflected long upon this new position—he regarded it in its most alarming shape—he considered that he was about to stake, on a single throw, the whole of his financial and political existence; he thought of his daughter's lot—he pictured to himself the exultation of his old enemies, and it is not to be wondered at, if he felt something like regret that he had behaved so tyrannically to M. de Lozeraie, when fortune put him in his power. He concluded, however, that nothing could save him but prompt action, and he betook himself immediately to the Count's residence.

As may be supposed, that nobleman, on hearing the banker announced, felt at first a great desire to retaliate upon him the long delay that had been practised at his reception by the latter; but as, after what he had heard, he really felt great anxiety about the safety of his funds in M. Durand's hands, the interests of his fortune prevailed over those of his vanity, and he gave orders for his instant admission.

M. Durand's character had this advantage over that of M. de Lozeraie, that it always bore that aspect of firm decision and proud superiority which, even under circumstances of deep humiliation like the present, rendered it impossible to trample upon him, or to exult in any outward expression of the pain that lay within; while the vanity of the Count displayed all the indecision of a mind that seeks, by a thousand subterfuges, to escape from the act of submission circumstances compel it to make. Thus, when M. Durand found himself in the presence of the Count, he evinced no awkwardness or embarrassment, but advancing towards him with that cool and firm assurance that shewed he had decided on the part he should act, he said—

"I am come, sir, to deliver myself up to you."

"What am I to understand by that, sir?"