

them. You wonder what they can be thinking about, so listless do they appear; and yet, at that very moment are the wishes, the purse, the intentions, the fancies—of a woman—better searched, than the Custom-house officers can search a suspicious carriage at the frontiers. These intelligent fellows see a thing at a glance, the slightest detail in dress, an almost invisible stain on the boot, a faded hat, an ill-sorted ribbon, the old or new style of the dress, the freshness of the gloves, the jewellery in vogue, all, in short, that can betray in a woman her quality, her fortune, her character. Then, with telegraphic rapidity is the opinion transmitted from one to the other, by a look, a sign, a smile, a motion of the lips, and every one is under arms to secure a bargain. If it be an English lady, the sombre, mysterious, Byronic personage is in attendance; if a plain sort of a woman, the oldest of the clerks. In less than a quarter of an hour, he shows her a hundred shawls—intoxicates her with colours and designs; unfolds as many shawls as the kite describes circles around the hare he is going to seize, and the good woman, all in a maze, not knowing what to choose, and flattered in all her notions, gives herself up to the clerk, who gains his point with the customary phrase, the question lying between two shawls: "This one, madam, has everything to recommend it; it is apple green, the fashionable colour, but the fashion changes, whilst this one (a black or white one, the sale of which is urgent,) will last for ever, and will suit all dresses."

"You have no idea," said lately one of these masters in the art of selling, to a friend of ours, "what eloquent ingenuity is required in this shawl business. You are a discreet fellow, and I will let you into a little secret which, as a study of the morality of our times, cannot fail to interest you, and will give you an idea of the inventive genius of our master. He invented what we call the Selim-shawl—a shawl the sale of which is considered an impossibility, and which we always sell. We keep in a cedar box of very plain exterior, but richly lined with satin, a shawl worth from five to six hundred francs, and which we pass off as having been sent by Selim to the Emperor Napoleon. This shawl is our Imperial Guard, we bring it forward at all critical moments: it is sold, and never dies. Our last one was palmed off on an English lady—the greatest triumph we have yet achieved, for the English women are our battle of Waterloo—escape us always. We meet with women that slip out of our hands like eels, but we catch them again on the staircase; others that fancy they can get the better of us with a joke; we laugh with them and hold them fast; questionable foreigners, to whom we bring our second rate shawls, and whom we inveigle with flatteries; but the English women are unconquerable, you might as well attack the bronze statue of Louis XIV: they seem to take a particular pleasure in fooling us. This makes our last victory so

notable; but you shall judge yourself what it cost us in ingenuity and patience when I tell you the story—the manœuvre occupied the whole establishment. As soon as we saw her come we knew what sort of conflict was before us. One of us met her: "Does madame wish an Indian shawl or a French shawl, a highly priced or——?"

"I will see."

"How high a price is madame willing to give?"

"I will see."

Several shawls were hung in the best light to exhibit their designs and colours.

"These are our best shawls," continued my colleague, calling her attention to them; "our best qualities in blue, red and orange; all ten thousand francs. Here are others at five thousand, and some at three thousand."

She looked all round with the most complete indifference before deigning to notice the articles in question, and when at last she gave some attention to the shawls, she asked, without giving any sign of approbation or disapprobation: "Have you any others?"

"Yes, madame; but perhaps madame has not quite made up her mind to buy a shawl?"

"Oh yes, I have."

Inferior shawls were brought forth, but spread out with the importance necessary to fix the attention, and with the customary phrase: "These are much dearer; they are entirely new, and have not been worn yet; they have come by mail recently, and have been brought from the manufacturers of Lahore themselves."

"Oh, I understand," she replied; "I like them pretty well." Still no marked sign of preference. We are all very patient, and know how to wait. My colleague waited, but we could see his irritation in the few glances he cast towards us.

"What's the price of this one?" she said at last, after an unusually long pause, and pointing to a shawl, sky blue, and covered with birds nestling in pagodas.

"Seven thousand francs."

She took the shawl, wrapped herself in it, looked in the glass, and returned it to its place.

"No, I don't like it."

Another long quarter of an hour passed in fruitless attempts.

"We have nothing else, madame," said my colleague, looking at our master.

"Madame is hard to please, like all persons of taste," said the latter, and advanced to the attack in his turn.

But our English customer took up her eyeglass, and looked at the head of the establishment with a curious "*who are you*" air, which he would never have tolerated from any one except a foreigner. She evidently did not know that he was qualified to be elected deputy at any time, and that he dined sometimes at the Tuileries.