

# THE AMARANTH.

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FOR THE AMARANTH.

## THE BANKER AND THE COUNT.

A TALE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

*Translated from the French.*

It was early in the spring of 1830, a year ever memorable in the annals of France, that a man of about fifty-five years of age was sitting in a small apartment, on the first floor of a spacious mansion in the Rue de Provence at Paris, and attentively perusing the journals of the day that his valet had just placed before him. This man was Mathieu Durand, the French banker. The deep wrinkles that crossed his open and expansive forehead evidenced the constant efforts of an active and laborious life; and yet when he was unoccupied, which was seldom the case, his countenance beamed with benevolence and good will, while the tone of his voice, at once cheerful and encouraging, seemed just calculated to transfer to others the happiness he so evidently experienced himself. It might be remarked, however, that he seemed to pride himself on this happiness rather than actually to enjoy it, and that he loved to display it, and to obtrude it on the notice of those about him, as though he felt it only by the effect it produced upon others. Not that he desired to humiliate those who approached him, but rather to let them see in his person, the condition to which a man may attain by diligent industry and honourable conduct.

In other respects, the prevailing character of M. Durand's physiognomy was that of a powerful and vigorous intellect. Embracing at a glance, the most minute detail of the propositions made to him by those who came to him on business, it was his custom, when he refused, to recapitulate briefly, but with remarkable clearness and precision, all that had been said to him; after which he made his own observations, either complying with or refusing the request, or at least modifying the terms of it.

In M. Durand's character there was also one peculiar trait that deserves notice here, and which will be very perceptible in the course of this narrative, viz., a cold and inflexible obstinacy, that, however calmly and politely maintained, never could by any reasoning or persuasion be induced to change its purpose.— And yet nobody was ever more apt than he, of his own accord, and without any visible reason, to alter his resolutions. For instance: after having condemned a speculation, and with great clearness exposed the fallacy of its calculations, he would be seen all at once lending it both the sanction of his name and the assistance of his capital. At another time he would open an extensive credit with a merchant, at the very time when other bankers began to doubt his solvency, and when no one was more aware than himself of the sorry state of his affairs. Every one was at a loss to account for these decisions, so contrary to his interest. Some attributed them to caprice, and others to generosity; but to the former idea was opposed the tact and prudence that he displayed in the general management of his affairs; to the latter and more received opinion, the inflexible refusals he gave to certain reasonable demands for aid. One man alone attributed them to calculation, and that was M. Tremont, the managing clerk of the house of Mathieu Durand; but even he did not explain what was the object of this calculation. He merely replied, in answer to a question as to what system of arithmetic it was, that could justify the loan of one hundred thousand francs to an insolvent debtor, that it was a species of "indirect arithmetic." What indirect arithmetic was the old man did not think it necessary to explain, but took refuge in an obstinate silence, to which a slight winking of the eye and an almost imperceptible smile gave an air of profound finesse. Be it as it may, the established reputation of M. Du-