

you know. Bless you other folks can quote besides you." He surveyed me as he said this with an air, I thought, of quite superfluous significance.

"Twaddle, imbecility, tiresome lectures trite moralizing, common-places, balderdash, jargon, tom-foolery, slipslop, palaver, drivel; that's the diet you've been recommending me. Has it done me good? How do I look? Sick? Ill?"

"Sick and ill," I said.

"Can you wonder? How would you have liked it yourself! After all, you know I'm only human, a man and a brother—that kind of thing. Do I look dyspeptic?"

"You do," I answered, frankly.

"Is it surprising? Think what you and such as you have made me undergo."

"But what would you have me do in the future?"

"Spare me. Have some mercy, some little consideration. You've overdone it, indeed you have. The General Reader has his limits. His back will only bear a certain burden, and I declare just now, if you put another volume on it, though but a thin duodecimo, it will give way as shure as fate. Don't then. He isn't learned, you know. He doesn't set up for being of much account; but as a rule, the General Reader's willing, and can be fairly amused at a cheap rate. But don't overload him, don't over-drive him, and above all, don't over-cudgel him. If you do, he'll only drop."

"I am willing," I said, "indeed, I am most anxious to serve you, and please you, if you'll only show me how."

"It's very simple. When your going to write of this or that, that it's 'certain to entertain the General Reader,' just think if it really is so certain; ask yourself whether it entertained *you*, and then consider whether, in truth, it will entertain *him*. Think, also, how many other people may, at the same moment, be writing and recommending other things certain to entertain the General Reader. And the same with what's erudite, and valuable, and interesting. I've got to dread all those terms. They make me shiver and turn goose-flesh all over. Generally speaking, indeed, draw it mild,

or I won't answer for the consequences. Spare the General Reader; he hasn't deserved the treatment he has received at the hands of you and your lot. Think of the life you've led me. Surely I deserve a little consideration."

He paused, and for a moment I felt myself unable to make him any reply. I mused over what he had been saying. It did occur to me that possibly there was some reason in his complaint, and that of late years there had been rather what he called "a dead set" made at the General Reader!"

"But you skip a good deal, I suppose?" I said, presently.

"Skip? I should think I did. There had been an end of me long ago if I had not skipped. But even skipping's trying when you have to do much of it. I've skipped sometimes until I'd hardly a breath left in my body, or strength in my fingers to turn a leaf. I owe much to skipping, I admit; but one can't be always skipping. I don't think I need trouble you any more just now," he added, after a minute's silence.

"You're very good," I said. "It is late."

"Only bear in mind, and urge upon others to deal forbearingly with me in the future. Please use all your influence to achieve that result. Publish what I have told you if you like."

"Do you think it would entertain the General Reader?" I enquired.

He groaned. "You are hard upon me still," he said. "Upon my word you are. But—risk it. It may do some good. At the worst, it will be but one more drop in the cup. Yes, risk it!"

I passed my hands across my tired eyes, thinking how I could give literary shape to his conversation. When I looked up he had gone. He had not even said good-night. His departure had been as noiseless as his entry.

However, I have followed his counsel. I have risked it.

The younger Dumas (the elder, too, since his father's death), and several other literary Parisians, talk of living in Italy until their country's troubles are settled.