

Unconscious Comedians

by

Honoré de Balzac

Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley

A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication

Unconscious Comedians by Honoré de Balzac, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University. This Portable Document file is furnished free and without any charge of any kind. Any person using this document file, for any purpose, and in any way does so at his or her own risk. Neither the Pennsylvania State University nor Jim Manis, Faculty Editor, nor anyone associated with the Pennsylvania State University assumes any responsibility for the material contained within the document or for the file as an electronic transmission, in any way.

Unconscious Comedians by Honoré de Balzac, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley, the Pennsylvania State University, *Electronic Classics Series*, Jim Manis, Faculty Editor, Hazleton, PA 18202-1291 is a Portable Document File produced as part of an ongoing student publication project to bring classical works of literature, in English, to free and easy access of those wishing to make use of them.

Cover Design: Jim Manis

Copyright © 2002 The Pennsylvania State University

Unconscious Comedians

by

Honoré de Balzac

Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley

Dedication

To Monsieur le Comte Jules de Castellane.

LEON DE LORA, our celebrated landscape painter, belongs to one of the noblest families of the Roussillon (Spanish originally) which, although distinguished for the antiquity of its race, has been doomed for a century to the proverbial pov-

erty of hidalgos. Coming, light-footed, to Paris from the department of the Eastern Pyrenees, with the sum of eleven francs in his pocket for all viaticum, he had in some degree forgotten the miseries and privations of his childhood and his family amid the other privations and miseries which are never lacking to “rapins,” whose whole fortune consists of intrepid vocation. Later, the cares of fame and those of success were other causes of forgetfulness.

If you have followed the capricious and meandering course of these studies, perhaps you will remember Mistigris, Schinner’s pupil, one of the heroes of “A Start in Life” (Scenes from Private Life), and his brief apparitions in other Scenes. In 1845, this landscape painter, emulator of the Hobbemas, Ruysdaels, and Lorraines, resembles no more the shabby, frisky rapin whom we then knew. Now an illustrious man, he owns a charming house in the rue de Berlin, not far from the hotel de Brambourg, where his friend Brideau lives, and quite close to the house of Schinner, his early master. He is a member of the Institute and an officer of the Legion of honor; he is thirty-six years old, has an income of twenty thousand francs from the Funds, his pictures sell for their weight in

Unconscious Comedians

gold, and (what seems to him more extraordinary than the invitations he receives occasionally to court balls) his name and fame, mentioned so often for the last sixteen years by the press of Europe, has at last penetrated to the valley of the Eastern Pyrenees, where vegetate three veritable Loras: his father, his eldest brother, and an old paternal aunt, Mademoiselle Urraca y Lora.

In the maternal line the painter has no relation left except a cousin, the nephew of his mother, residing in a small manufacturing town in the department. This cousin was the first to bethink himself of Leon. But it was not until 1840 that Leon de Lora received a letter from Monsieur Sylvestre Palafox-Castal-Gazonal (called simply Gazonal) to which he replied that he was assuredly himself,—that is to say, the son of the late Leonie Gazonal, wife of Comte Fernand Didas y Lora.

During the summer of 1841 cousin Sylvestre Gazonal went to inform the illustrious unknown family of Lora that their little Leon had not gone to the Rio de la Plata, as they supposed, but was now one of the greatest geniuses of the French school of painting; a fact the family did not believe. The eldest son, Don Juan de Lora assured his cousin Gazonal

that he was certainly the dupe of some Parisian wag.

Now the said Gazonal was intending to go to Paris to prosecute a lawsuit which the prefect of the Eastern Pyrenees had arbitrarily removed from the usual jurisdiction, transferring it to that of the Council of State. The worthy provincial determined to investigate this act, and to ask his Parisian cousin the reason of such high-handed measures. It thus happened that Monsieur Gazonal came to Paris, took shabby lodgings in the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, and was amazed to see the palace of his cousin in the rue de Berlin. Being told that the painter was then travelling in Italy, he renounced, for the time being, the intention of asking his advice, and doubted if he should ever find his maternal relationship acknowledged by so great a man.

During the years 1843 and 1844 Gazonal attended to his lawsuit. This suit concerned a question as to the current and level of a stream of water and the necessity of removing a dam, in which dispute the administration, instigated by the abutters on the river banks, had meddled. The removal of the dam threatened the existence of Gazonal's manufactory. In 1845, Gazonal considered his cause as wholly lost; the

secretary of the Master of Petitions, charged with the duty of drawing up the report, had confided to him that the said report would assuredly be against him, and his own lawyer confirmed the statement. Gazonal, though commander of the National Guard in his own town and one of the most capable manufacturers of the department, found himself of so little account in Paris, and he was, moreover, so frightened by the costs of living and the dearness of even the most trifling things, that he kept himself, all this time, secluded in his shabby lodgings. The Southerner, deprived of his sun, execrated Paris, which he called a manufactory of rheumatism. As he added up the costs of his suit and his living, he vowed within himself to poison the prefect on his return, or to minotaurize him. In his moments of deepest sadness he killed the prefect outright; in gayer mood he contented himself with minotaurizing him.

One morning as he ate his breakfast and cursed his fate, he picked up a newspaper savagely. The following lines, ending an article, struck Gazonal as if the mysterious voice which speaks to gamblers before they win had sounded in his ear: "Our celebrated landscape painter, Leon de Lora, lately re-

turned from Italy, will exhibit several pictures at the Salon; thus the exhibition promises, as we see, to be most brilliant." With the suddenness of action that distinguishes the sons of the sunny South, Gazonal sprang from his lodgings to the street, from the street to a street-cab, and drove to the rue de Berlin to find his cousin.

Leon de Lora sent word by a servant to his cousin Gazonal that he invited him to breakfast the next day at the Cafe de Paris, but he was now engaged in a matter which did not allow him to receive his cousin at the present moment. Gazonal, like a true Southerner, recounted all his troubles to the valet.

The next day at ten o'clock, Gazonal, much too well-dressed for the occasion (he had put on his bottle-blue coat with brass buttons, a frilled shirt, a white waistcoat and yellow gloves), awaited his amphitryon a full hour, stamping his feet on the boulevard, after hearing from the master of the cafe that "these gentlemen" breakfasted habitually between eleven and twelve o'clock.

"Between eleven and half-past," he said when he related his adventures to his cronies in the provinces, "two Parisians

Unconscious Comedians

dressed in simple frock-coats, looking like *nothing at all*, called out when they saw me on the boulevard, ‘There’s our Gazonal!’”

The speaker was Bixiou, with whom Leon de Lora had armed himself to “bring out” his provincial cousin, in other words, to make him pose.

“Don’t be vexed, cousin, I’m at your service!’ cried out that little Leon, taking me in his arms,” related Gazonal on his return home. “The breakfast was splendid. I thought I was going blind when I saw the number of bits of gold it took to pay that bill. Those fellows must earn their weight in gold, for I saw my cousin give the waiter *thirty sous*—the price of a whole day’s work!”

During this monstrous breakfast—advisedly so called in view of six dozen Osten oysters, six cutlets a la Soubise, a chicken a la Marengo, lobster mayonnaise, green peas, a mushroom patty, washed down with three bottles of Bordeaux, three bottles of Champagne, plus coffee and liqueurs, to say nothing of relishes—Gazonal was magnificent in his diatribes against Paris. The worthy manufacturer complained of the length of the four-pound bread-loaves, the height of

the houses, the indifference of the passengers in the streets to one another, the cold, the rain, the cost of hackney-coaches, all of which and much else he bemoaned in so witty a manner that the two artists took a mighty fancy to cousin Gazonal, and made him relate his lawsuit from beginning to end.

“My lawsuit,” he said in his Southern accent and rolling his r’s, “is a very simple thing; they want my manufactory. I’ve employed here in Paris a dolt of a lawyer, to whom I give twenty francs every time he opens an eye, and he is always asleep. He’s a slug, who drives in his coach, while I go afoot and he splashes me. I see now I ought to have had a carriage! On the other hand, that Council of State are a pack of do-nothings, who leave their duties to little scamps every one of whom is bought up by our prefect. That’s my lawsuit! They want my manufactory! Well, they’ll get it! and they must manage the best they can with my workmen, a hundred of ‘em, who’ll make them sing another tune before they’ve done with them.”

“Two years. Ha! that meddling prefect! he shall pay dear for this; I’ll have his life if I have to give mine on the scaffold—”

“Which state councillor presides over your section?”

“A former newspaper man,—doesn’t pay ten sous in taxes,—his name is Massol.”

The two Parisians exchanged glances.

“Who is the commissioner who is making the report?”

“Ha! that’s still more queer; he’s Master of Petitions, professor of something or other at the Sorbonne,—a fellow who writes things in reviews, and for whom I have the profoundest contempt.”

“Claude Vignon,” said Bixiou.

“Yes, that’s his name,” replied Gazonal. “Massol and Vignon—there you have Social Reason, in which there’s no reason at all.”

“There must be some way out of it,” said Leon de Lora. “You see, cousin, all things are possible in Paris for good as well as for evil, for the just as well as the unjust. There’s nothing that can’t be done, undone, and redone.”

“The devil take me if I stay ten days more in this hole of a place, the dullest in all France!”

The two cousins and Bixiou were at this moment walking from one end to the other of that sheet of asphalt on which,

between the hours of one and three, it is difficult to avoid seeing some of the personages in honor of whom Fame puts one or the other of her trumpets to her lips. Formerly that locality was the Place Royale; next it was the Pont Neuf; in these days this privilege had been acquired by the Boulevard des Italiens.

“Paris,” said the painter to his cousin, “is an instrument on which we must know how to play; if we stand here ten minutes I’ll give you your first lesson. There, look!” he said, raising his cane and pointing to a couple who were just then coming out from the Passage de l’Opera.

“Goodness! who’s that?” asked Gazonal.

That was an old woman, in a bonnet which had spent six months in a show-case, a very pretentious gown and a faded tartan shawl, whose face had been buried twenty years of her life in a damp lodge, and whose swollen hand-bag betokened no better social position than that of an ex-portress. With her was a slim little girl, whose eyes, fringed with black lashes, had lost their innocence and showed great weariness; her face, of a pretty shape, was fresh and her hair abundant, her forehead charming but audacious, her bust thin,—in other

Unconscious Comedians

words, an unripe fruit.

“That,” replied Bixiou, “is a rat tied to its mother.”

“A rat!—what’s that?”

“That particular rat,” said Leon, with a friendly nod to Mademoiselle Ninette, “may perhaps win your suit for you.”

Gazonal bounded; but Bixiou had held him by the arm ever since they left the cafe, thinking perhaps that the flush on his face was rather vivid.

“That rat, who is just leaving a rehearsal at the Opera-house, is going home to eat a miserable dinner, and will return about three o’clock to dress, if she dances in the ballet this evening—as she will, to-day being Monday. This rat is already an old rat for she is thirteen years of age. Two years from now that creature may be worth sixty thousand francs; she will be all or nothing, a great danseuse or a marcheuse, a celebrated person or a vulgar courtesan. She has worked hard since she was eight years old. Such as you see her, she is worn out with fatigue; she exhausted her body this morning in the dancing-class, she is just leaving a rehearsal where the evolutions are as complicated as a Chinese puzzle; and she’ll go through them again to-night. The rat is one of the primary

elements of the Opera; she is to the leading danseuse what a junior clerk is to a notary. The rat is—hope.”

“Who produces the rat?” asked Gazonal.

“Porters, paupers, actors, dancers,” replied Bixiou. “Only the lowest depths of poverty could force a child to subject her feet and joints to positive torture, to keep herself virtuous out of mere speculation until she is eighteen years of age, and to live with some horrible old crone like a beautiful plant in a dressing of manure. You shall see now a procession defiling before you, one after the other, of men of talent, little and great, artists in seed or flower, who are raising to the glory of France that every-day monument called the Opera, an assemblage of forces, wills, and forms of genius, nowhere collected as in Paris.

“I have already seen the Opera,” said Gazonal, with a self-sufficient air.

“Yes, from a three-francs-sixty-sous seat among the gods,” replied the landscape painter; “just as you have seen Paris in the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, without knowing anything about it. What did they give at the Opera when you were there?”

“Guillaume Tell.”

“Well,” said Leon, “Matilde’s grand *duo* must have delighted you. What do you suppose that charming singer did when she left the stage?”

“She—well, what?”

“She ate two bloody mutton-chops which her servant had ready for her.”

“Pooh! nonsense!”

“Malibran kept up on brandy—but it killed her in the end. Another thing! You have seen the ballet, and you’ll now see it defiling past you in its every-day clothes, without knowing that the face of your lawsuit depends on a pair of those legs.”

“My lawsuit!”

“See, cousin, here comes what is called a *marcheuse*.”

Leon pointed to one of those handsome creatures who at twenty-five years of age have lived sixty, and whose beauty is so real and so sure of being cultivated that they make no display of it. She was tall, and walked well, with the arrogant look of a dandy; her toilet was remarkable for its ruinous simplicity.

“That is Carabine,” said Bixiou, who gave her, as did Leon, a slight nod to which she responded by a smile.

“There’s another who may possibly get your prefect turned out.”

“A *marcheuse*!—but what is that?”

“A *marcheuse* is a rat of great beauty whom her mother, real or fictitious, has sold as soon as it was clear she would become neither first, second, nor third *danseuse*, but who prefers the occupation of *coryphee* to any other, for the main reason that having spent her youth in that employment she is unfitted for any other. She has been rejected at the minor theatres where they want *danseuses*; she has not succeeded in the three towns where ballets are given; she has not had the money, or perhaps the desire to go to foreign countries—for perhaps you don’t know that the great school of dancing in Paris supplies the whole world with male and female dancers. Thus a rat who becomes a *marcheuse*,—that is to say, an ordinary *figurante* in a ballet,—must have some solid attachment which keeps her in Paris: either a rich man she does not love or a poor man she loves too well. The one you have just seen pass will probably dress and redress three times this evening,—as a princess, a peasant-girl, a Tyrolese; by which she will earn about two hundred francs a month.”

Unconscious Comedians

“She is better dressed than my prefect’s wife.”

“If you should go to her house,” said Bixiou, “you would find there a chamber-maid, a cook, and a man-servant. She occupies a fine apartment in the rue Saint-Georges; in short, she is, in proportion to French fortunes of the present day compared with those of former times, a relic of the eighteenth century ‘opera-girl.’ Carabine is a power; at this moment she governs du Tillet, a banker who is very influential in the Chamber of Deputies.”

“And above these two rounds in the ballet ladder what comes next?” asked Gazonal.

“Look!” said his cousin, pointing to an elegant caleche which was turning at that moment from the boulevard into the rue Grange-Bateliere, “there’s one of the leading danseuses whose name on the posters attracts all Paris. That woman earns sixty thousand francs a year and lives like a princess; the price of your manufactory all told wouldn’t suffice to buy you the privilege of bidding her good-morning a dozen times.”

“Do you see,” said Bixiou, “that young man who is sitting on the front seat of her carriage? Well, he’s a viscount who bears a fine old name; he’s her first gentleman of the bed-

chamber; does all her business with the newspapers; carries messages of peace or war in the morning to the director of the Opera; and takes charge of the applause which salutes her as she enters or leaves the stage.”

“Well, well, my good friends, that’s the finishing touch! I see now that I knew nothing of the ways of Paris.”

“At any rate, you are learning what you can see in ten minutes in the Passage de l’Opera,” said Bixiou. “Look there.”

Two persons, a man and a woman, came out of the Passage at that moment. The woman was neither plain nor pretty; but her dress had that distinction of style and cut and color which reveals an artist; the man had the air of a singer.

“There,” said Bixiou, “is a baritone and a second danseuse. The baritone is a man of immense talent, but a baritone voice being only an accessory to the other parts he scarcely earns what the second danseuse earns. The danseuse, who was celebrated before Taglioni and Ellsler appeared, has preserved to our day some of the old traditions of the character dance and pantomime. If the two others had not revealed in the art of dancing a poetry hitherto unperceived, she would have been the leading talent; as it is, she is reduced to the second line.

But for all that, she fingers her thirty thousand francs a year, and her faithful friend is a peer of France, very influential in the Chamber. And see! there's a danseuse of the third order, who, as a dancer, exists only through the omnipotence of a newspaper. If her engagement were not renewed the ministry would have one more journalistic enemy on its back. The corps de ballet is a great power; consequently it is considered better form in the upper ranks of dandyism and politics to have relations with dance than with song. In the stalls, where the habits of the Opera congregate, the saying 'Monsieur is all for singing' is a form of ridicule."

A short man with a common face, quite simply dressed, passed them at this moment.

"There's the other half of the Opera receipts—that man who just went by; the tenor. There is no longer any play, poem, music, or representation of any kind possible unless some celebrated tenor can reach a certain note. The tenor is love, he is the Voice that touches the heart, that vibrates in the soul, and his value is reckoned at a much higher salary than that of a minister. One hundred thousand francs for a throat, one hundred thousand francs for a couple of ankle-

bones,—those are the two financial scourges of the Opera."

"I am amazed," said Gazonal, "at the hundreds of thousands of francs walking about here."

"We'll amaze you a good deal more, my dear cousin," said Leon de Lora. "We'll take Paris as an artist takes his violoncello, and show you how it is played,—in short, how people amuse themselves in Paris."

"It is a kaleidoscope with a circumference of twenty miles," cried Gazonal.

"Before piloting monsieur about, I have to see Gaillard," said Bixiou.

"But we can use Gaillard for the cousin," replied Leon.

"What sort of machine is that?" asked Gazonal.

"He isn't a machine, he is a machinist. Gaillard is a friend of ours who has ended a miscellaneous career by becoming the editor of a newspaper, and whose character and finances are governed by movements comparable to those of the tides. Gaillard can contribute to make you win your lawsuit—"

"It is lost."

"That's the very moment to win it," replied Bixiou.

When they reached Theodore Gaillard's abode, which was

Unconscious Comedians

now in the rue de Menars, the valet ushered the three friends into a boudoir and asked them to wait, as monsieur was in secret conference.

“With whom?” asked Bixiou.

“With a man who is selling him the incarceration of an *unseizable* debtor,” replied a handsome woman who now appeared in a charming morning toilet.

“In that case, my dear Suzanne,” said Bixiou, “I am certain we may go in.”

“Oh! what a beautiful creature!” said Gazonal.

“That is Madame Gaillard,” replied Leon de Lora, speaking low into his cousin’s ear. “She is the most humble-minded woman in Paris, for she had the public and has contented herself with a husband.”

“What is your will, messeigneurs?” said the facetious editor, seeing his two friends and imitating Frederic Lemaitre.

Theodore Gaillard, formerly a wit, had ended by becoming a stupid man in consequence of remaining constantly in one centre,—a moral phenomenon frequently to be observed in Paris. His principal method of conversation consisted in sowing his speeches with sayings taken from plays then in

vogue and pronounced in imitation of well-known actors.

“We have come to blague,” said Leon.

“Again, young men” (Odry in the *Saltimbanques*).

“Well, this time, we’ve got him, sure,” said Gaillard’s other visitor, apparently by way of conclusion.

“*Are you sure of it, pere Fromenteau?*” asked Gaillard. “This is the eleventh time you’ve caught him at night and missed him in the morning.”

“How could I help it? I never saw such a debtor! he’s a locomotive; goes to sleep in Paris and wakes up in the Seine-et-Oise. A safety lock I call him.” Seeing a smile on Gaillard’s face he added: “That’s a saying in our business. Pinch a man, means arrest him, lock him up. The criminal police have another term. Vidoeq said to his man, ‘You are served’; that’s funnier, for it means the guillotine.”

A nudge from Bixiou made Gazonal all eyes and ears.

“Does monsieur grease my paws?” asked Fromenteau of Gaillard, in a threatening but cool tone.

“A question that of fifty centimes” (*Les Saltimbanques*), replied the editor, taking out five francs and offering them to Fromenteau.

“And the rascallions?” said the man.

“What rascallions?” asked Gaillard.

“Those I employ,” replied Fromenteau calmly.

“Is there a lower depth still?” asked Bixiou.

“Yes, monsieur,” said the spy. “Some people give us information without knowing they do so, and without getting paid for it. I put fools and ninnies below rascallions.”

“They are often original, and witty, your rascallions!” said Leon.

“Do you belong to the police?” asked Gazonal, eyeing with uneasy curiosity the hard, impassible little man, who was dressed like the third clerk in a sheriff’s office.

“Which police do you mean?” asked Fromenteau.

“There are several?”

“As many as five,” replied the man. “Criminal, the head of which was Vidoeq; secret police, which keeps an eye on the other police, the head of it being always unknown; political police,—that’s Fouche’s. Then there’s the police of Foreign Affairs, and finally, the palace police (of the Emperor, Louis XVIII., etc.), always squabbling with that of the quai Malaquais. It came to an end under Monsieur Decazes. I

belonged to the police of Louis XVIII.; I’d been in it since 1793, with that poor Contenson.”

The four gentlemen looked at each other with one thought: “How many heads he must have brought to the scaffold!”

“Now-a-days, they are trying to get on without us. Folly!” continued the little man, who began to seem terrible. “Since 1830 they want honest men at the prefecture! I resigned, and I’ve made myself a small vocation by arresting for debt.”

“He is the right arm of the commercial police,” said Gaillard in Bixiou’s ear, “but you can never find out who pays him most, the debtor or the creditor.”

“The more rascally a business is, the more honor it needs. I’m for him who pays me best,” continued Fromenteau addressing Gaillard. “You want to recover fifty thousand francs and you talk farthings to your means of action. Give me five hundred francs and your man is pinched to-night, for we spotted him yesterday!”

“Five hundred francs for you alone!” cried Theodore Gaillard.

“Lizette wants a shawl,” said the spy, not a muscle of his face moving. “I call her Lizette because of Beranger.”

Unconscious Comedians

“You have a Lizette, and you stay in such a business!” cried the virtuous Gazonal.

“It is amusing! People may cry up the pleasures of hunting and fishing as much as they like but to stalk a man in Paris is far better fun.”

“Certainly,” said Gazonal, reflectively, speaking to himself, “they must have great talent.”

“If I were to enumerate the qualities which make a man remarkable in our vocation,” said Fromenteau, whose rapid glance had enabled him to fathom Gazonal completely, “you’d think I was talking of a man of genius. First, we must have the eyes of a lynx; next, audacity (to tear into houses like bombs, accost the servants as if we knew them, and propose treachery—always agreed to); next, memory, sagacity, invention (to make schemes, conceived rapidly, never the same—for spying must be guided by the characters and habits of the persons spied upon; it is a gift of heaven); and, finally, agility, vigor. All these facilities and qualities, monsieur, are depicted on the door of the Gymnase-Amoros as Virtue. Well, we must have them all, under pain of losing the salaries given us by the State, the rue de Jerusalem, or the minister of Commerce.”

“You certainly seem to me a remarkable man,” said Gazonal. Fromenteau looked at the provincial without replying, without betraying the smallest sign of feeling, and departed, bowing to no one,—a trait of real genius.

“Well, cousin, you have now seen the police incarnate,” said Leon to Gazonal.

“It has something the effect of a dinner-pill,” said the worthy provincial, while Gaillard and Bixiou were talking together in a low voice.

“I’ll give you an answer to-night at Carabine’s,” said Gaillard aloud, re-seating himself at his desk without seeing or bowing to Gazonal.

“He is a rude fellow!” cried the Southerner as they left the room.

“His paper has twenty-two thousand subscribers,” said Leon de Lora. “He is one of the five great powers of the day, and he hasn’t, in the morning, the time to be polite. Now,” continued Leon, speaking to Bixiou, “if we are going to the Chamber to help him with his lawsuit let us take the longest way round.”

“Words said by great men are like silver-gilt spoons with

the guilt washed off; by dint of repetition they lose their brilliancy," said Bixiou. "Where shall we go?"

"Here, close by, to our hatter?" replied Leon.

"Bravo!" cried Bixiou. "If we keep on in this way, we shall have an amusing day of it."

"Gazonal," said Leon, "I shall make the man pose for you; but mind that you keep a serious face, like the king on a five-franc piece, for you are going to see a choice original, a man whose importance has turned his head. In these days, my dear fellow, under our new political dispensation, every human being tries to cover himself with glory, and most of them cover themselves with ridicule; hence a lot of living caricatures quite new to the world."

"If everybody gets glory, who can be famous?" said Gazonal.

"Fame! none but fools want that," replied Bixiou. "Your cousin wears the cross, but I'm the better dressed of the two, and it is I whom people are looking at."

After this remark, which may explain why orators and other great statesmen no longer put the ribbon in their button-holes when in Paris, Leon showed Gazonal a sign, bearing, in golden letters, the illustrious name of "Vital, successor to

Finot, manufacturer of hats" (no longer "hatter" as formerly), whose advertisements brought in more money to the newspapers than those of any half-dozen vendors of pills or sugarplums,—the author, moreover, of an essay on hats.

"My dear fellow," said Bixiou to Gazonal, pointing to the splendors of the show-window, "Vital has forty thousand francs a year from invested property."

"And he stays a hatter!" cried the Southerner, with a bound that almost broke the arm which Bixiou had linked in his.

"You shall see the man," said Leon. "You need a hat and you shall have one gratis."

"Is Monsieur Vital absent?" asked Bixiou, seeing no one behind the desk.

"Monsieur is correcting proof in his study," replied the head clerk.

"Hein! what style!" said Leon to his cousin; then he added, addressing the clerk: "Could we speak to him without injury to his inspiration?"

"Let those gentlemen enter," said a voice.

It was a bourgeois voice, the voice of one eligible to the Chamber, a powerful voice, a wealthy voice.

Unconscious Comedians

Vital deigned to show himself, dressed entirely in black cloth, with a splendid frilled shirt adorned with one diamond. The three friends observed a young and pretty woman sitting near the desk, working at some embroidery.

Vital is a man between thirty and forty years of age, with a natural joviality now repressed by ambitious ideas. He is blessed with that medium height which is the privilege of sound organizations. He is rather plump, and takes great pains with his person. His forehead is getting bald, but he uses that circumstance to give himself the air of a man consumed by thought. It is easy to see by the way his wife looks at him and listens to him that she believes in the genius and glory of her husband. Vital loves artists, not that he has any taste for art, but from fellowship; for he feels himself an artist, and makes this felt by disclaiming that title of nobility, and placing himself with constant premeditation at so great a distance from the arts that persons may be forced to say to him: "You have raised the construction of hats to the height of a science."

"Have you at last discovered a hat to suit me?" asked Leon de Lora.

"Why, monsieur! in fifteen days?" replied Vital, "and for you! Two months would hardly suffice to invent a shape in keeping with your countenance. See, here is your lithographic portrait: I have studied it most carefully. I would not give myself that trouble for a prince; but you are more; you are an artist, and you understand me."

"This is one of our greatest inventors," said Bixiou presenting Gazonal. "He might be as great as Jacquart if he would only let himself die. Our friend, a manufacturer of cloth, has discovered a method of replacing the indigo in old blue coats, and he wants to see you as another great phenomenon, because he has heard of your saying, 'The hat is the man.' That speech of yours enraptured him. Ah! Vital, you have faith; you believe in something; you have enthusiasm for your work."

Vital scarcely listened; he grew pale with pleasure.

"Rise, my wife! Monsieur is a man of science."

Madame Vital rose at her husband's gesture. Gazonal bowed to her.

"Shall I have the honor to cover your head?" said Vital, with joyful obsequiousness.

"At the same price as mine," interposed Bixiou.

“Of course, of course; I ask no other fee than to be quoted by you, messieurs— Monsieur needs a picturesque hat, something in the style of Monsieur Lousteau’s,” he continued, looking at Gazonal with the eye of a master. “I will consider it.”

“You give yourself a great deal of trouble,” said Gazonal.

“Oh! for a few persons only; for those who know how to appreciate the value of the pains I bestow upon them. Now, take the aristocracy—there is but one man there who has truly comprehended the Hat; and that is the Prince de Bethune. How is it that men do not consider, as women do, that the hat is the first thing that strikes the eye? And why have they never thought of changing the present system, which is, let us say it frankly, ignoble? Yes, ignoble; and yet a Frenchman is, of all nationalities, the one most persistent in this folly! I know the difficulties of a change, messieurs. I don’t speak of my own writings on the matter, which, as I think, approach it philosophically, but simply as a hatter. I have myself studied means to accentuate the infamous head-covering to which France is now enslaved until I succeed in overthrowing it.

So saying he pointed to the hideous hat in vogue at the present day.

“Behold the enemy, messieurs,” he continued. “How is it that the wittiest and most satirical people on earth will consent to wear upon their heads a bit of stove-pipe?—as one of our great writers has called it. Here are some of the infections I have been able to give to those atrocious lines,” he added, pointing to a number of his creations. “But, although I am able to conform them to the character of each wearer—for, as you see, there are the hats of a doctor, a grocer, a dandy, an artist, a fat man, a thin man, and so forth—the style itself remains horrible. Seize, I beg of you, my whole thought—”

He took up a hat, low-crowned and wide-brimmed.

“This,” he continued, “is the old hat of Claude Vignon, a great critic, in the days when he was a free man and a free-liver. He has lately come round to the ministry; they’ve made him a professor, a librarian; he writes now for the Debats only; they’ve appointed him Master of Petitions with a salary of sixteen thousand francs; he earns four thousand more out of his paper, and he is decorated. Well, now see his new hat.”

And Vital showed them a hat of a form and design which was truly expressive of the juste-milieu.

Unconscious Comedians

“You ought to have made him a Punch and Judy hat!” cried Gazonal.

“You are a man of genius, Monsieur Vital,” said Leon.

Vital bowed.

“Would you kindly tell me why the shops of your trade in Paris remain open late at night,—later than the cafes and the wineshops? That fact puzzles me very much,” said Gazonal.

“In the first place, our shops are much finer when lighted up than they are in the daytime; next, where we sell ten hats in the daytime we sell fifty at night.”

“Everything is queer in Paris,” said Leon.

“Thanks to my efforts and my successes,” said Vital, returning to the course of his self-laudation, “we are coming to hats with round headpieces. It is to that I tend!”

“What obstacle is there?” asked Gazonal.

“Cheapness, monsieur. In the first place, very handsome silk hats can be built for fifteen francs, which kills our business; for in Paris no one ever has fifteen francs in his pocket to spend on a hat. If a beaver hat costs thirty, it is still the same thing— When I say beaver, I ought to state that there

are not ten pounds of beaver skins left in France. That article is worth three hundred and fifty francs a pound, and it takes an ounce for a hat. Besides, a beaver hat isn't really worth anything; the skin takes a wretched dye; gets rusty in ten minutes under the sun, and heat puts it out of shape as well. What we call 'beaver' in the trade is neither more nor less than hare's-skin. The best qualities are made from the back of the animal, the second from the sides, the third from the belly. I confide to you these trade secrets because you are men of honor. But whether a man has hare's-skin or silk on his head, fifteen or thirty francs in short, the problem is always insoluble. Hats must be paid for in cash, and that is why the hat remains what it is. The honor of vestural France will be saved on the day that gray hats with round crowns can be made to cost a hundred francs. We could then, like the tailors, give credit. To reach that result men must resolve to wear buckles, gold lace, plumes, and the brims lined with satin, as in the days of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV. Our business, which would then enter the domain of fancy, would increase tenfold. The markets of the world should belong to France; Paris will forever give the tone to women's fashions,

and yet the hats which all Frenchmen wear to-day are made in every country on earth! There are ten millions of foreign money to be gained annually for France in that question—

“A revolution!” cried Bixiou, pretending enthusiasm.

“Yes, and a radical one; for the form must be changed.”

“You are happy after the manner of Luther in dreaming of reform,” said Leon.

“Yes, monsieur. Ah! if a dozen or fifteen artists, capitalists, or dandies who set the tone would only have courage for twenty-four hours France would gain a splendid commercial battle! To succeed in this reform I would give my whole fortune! Yes, my sole ambition is to regenerate the hat and disappear.”

“The man is colossal,” said Gazonal, as they left the shop; “but I assure you that all your originals so far have a touch of the Southerner about them.”

“Let us go this way,” said Bixiou pointing to the rue Saint-Marc.

“Do you want to show me something else?”

“Yes; you shall see the usurers of rats, marchouses and great ladies, —a woman who possesses more terrible secrets than

there are gowns hanging in her window,” said Bixiou.

And he showed Gazonal one of those untidy shops which made an ugly stain in the midst of the dazzling show-windows of modern retail commerce. This shop had a front painted in 1820, which some bankrupt had doubtless left in a dilapidated condition. The color had disappeared beneath a double coating of dirt, the result of usage, and a thick layer of dust; the window-panes were filthy, the door-knob turned of itself, as door-knobs do in all places where people go out more quickly than they enter.

“What do you say of *that*? First cousin to Death, isn't she?” said Leon in Gazonal's ear, showing him, at the desk, a terrible individual. “Well, she calls herself Madame Nourrisson.”

“Madame, how much is this guipure?” asked the manufacturer, intending to compete in liveliness with the two artists.

“To you, monsieur, who come from the country, it will be only three hundred francs,” she replied. Then, remarking in his manner a sort of eagerness peculiar to Southerners, she added, in a grieved tone, “It formerly belonged to that poor Princess de Lamballe.”

Unconscious Comedians

“What! do you dare exhibit it so near the palace?” cried Bixiou.

“Monsieur, *they* don’t believe in it,” she replied.

“Madame, we have not come to make purchases,” said Bixiou, with a show of frankness.

“So I see, monsieur,” returned Madame Nourrisson.

“We have several things to sell,” said the illustrious caricaturist. “I live close by, rue de Richelieu, 112, sixth floor. If you will come round there for a moment, you may perhaps make some good bargains.”

Ten minutes later Madame Nourrisson did in fact present herself at Bixiou’s lodgings, where by that time he had taken Leon and Gazonal. Madame Nourrisson found them all three as serious as authors whose collaboration does not meet with the success it deserves.

“Madame,” said the intrepid hoaxer, showing her a pair of women’s slippers, “these belonged formerly to the Empress Josephine.”

He felt it incumbent on him to return change for the Prince de Lamballe.

“Those!” she exclaimed; “they were made this year; look at

the mark.”

“Don’t you perceive that the slippers are only by way of preface?” said Leon; “though, to be sure, they are usually the conclusion of a tale.”

“My friend here,” said Bixiou, motioning to Gazonal, “has an immense family interest in ascertaining whether a young lady of a good and wealthy house, whom he wishes to marry, has ever gone wrong.”

“How much will monsieur give for the information,” she asked, looking at Gazonal, who was no longer surprised by anything.

“One hundred francs,” he said.

“No, thank you!” she said with a grimace of refusal worthy of a macaw.

“Then say how much you want, my little Madame Nourrisson,” cried Bixiou catching her round the waist.

“In the first place, my dear gentlemen, I have never, since I’ve been in the business, found man or woman to haggle over happiness. Besides,” she said, letting a cold smile flicker on her lips, and enforcing it by an icy glance full of catlike distrust, “if it doesn’t concern your happiness, it concerns

your fortune; and at the height where I find you lodging no man haggles over a 'dot'— Come," she said, "out with it! What is it you want to know, my lambs?"

"About the Beunier family," replied Bixiou, very glad to find out something in this indirect manner about persons in whom he was interested.

"Oh! as for that," she said, "one louis is quite enough."

"Why?"

"Because I hold all the mother's jewels and she's on tenterhooks every three months, I can tell you! It is hard work for her to pay the interest on what I've lent her. Do you want to marry there, simpleton?" she added, addressing Gazonal; "then pay me forty francs and I'll talk four hundred worth."

Gazonal produced a forty-franc gold-piece, and Madame Nourrisson gave him startling details as to the secret penury of certain so-called fashionable women. This dealer in cast-off clothes, getting lively as she talked, pictured herself unconsciously while telling of others. Without betraying a single name or any secret, she made the three men shudder by proving to them how little so-called happiness existed in Paris that did not rest on the vacillating foundation of borrowed

money. She possessed, laid away in her drawers, the secrets of departed grandmothers, living children, deceased husbands, dead granddaughters,—memories set in gold and diamonds. She learned appalling stories by making her clients talk of one another; tearing their secrets from them in moments of passion, of quarrels, of anger, and during those cooler negotiations which need a loan to settle difficulties.

"Why were you ever induced to take up such a business?" asked Gazonal.

"For my son's sake," she said naively.

Such women almost invariably justify their trade by alleging noble motives. Madame Nourrisson posed as having lost several opportunities for marriage, also three daughters who had gone to the bad, and all her illusions. She showed the pawn-tickets of the Mont-de-Piete to prove the risks her business ran; declared that she did not know how to meet the "end of the month"; she was robbed, she said,—*robbed*.

The two artists looked at each other on hearing that expression, which seemed exaggerated.

"Look here, my sons, I'll show you how we are *done*. It is not about myself, but about my opposite neighbour, Ma-

Unconscious Comedians

dame Mahuchet, a ladies' shoemaker. I had loaned money to a countess, a woman who has too many passions for her means,—lives in a fine apartment filled with splendid furniture, and makes, as we say, a devil of a show with her high and mighty airs. She owed three hundred francs to her shoemaker, and was giving a dinner no later than yesterday. The shoemaker, who heard of the dinner from the cook, came to see me; we got excited, and she wanted to make a row; but I said: 'My dear Madame Mahuchet, what good will that do? you'll only get yourself hated. It is much better to obtain some security; and you save your bile.' She wouldn't listen, but go she would, and asked me to support her; so I went. 'Madame is not at home.'—'Up to that! we'll wait,' said Madame Mahuchet, 'if we have to stay all night,'—and down we camped in the antechamber. Presently the doors began to open and shut, and feet and voices came along. I felt badly. The guests were arriving for dinner. You can see the appearance it had. The countess sent her maid to coax Madame Mahuchet: 'Pay you to-morrow!' in short, all the snares! Nothing took. The countess, dressed to the nines, went to the dining-room. Mahuchet heard her and opened the door.

Gracious! when she saw that table sparkling with silver, the covers to the dishes and the chandeliers all glittering like a jewel-case, didn't she go off like soda-water and fire her shot: 'When people spend the money of others they should be sober and not give dinner-parties. Think of your being a countess and owing three hundred francs to a poor shoemaker with seven children!' You can guess how she railed, for the Mahuchet hasn't any education. When the countess tried to make an excuse ('no money') Mahuchet screamed out: 'Look at all your fine silver, madame; pawn it and pay me!'—'Take some yourself,' said the countess quickly, gathering up a quantity of forks and spoons and putting them into her hands. Downstairs we rattled!—heavens! like success itself. No, before we got to the street Mahuchet began to cry—she's a kind woman! She turned back and restored the silver; for she now understood that countess' poverty—it was plated ware!"

"And she forked it over," said Leon, in whom the former Mistigris occasionally reappeared.

"Ah! my dear monsieur," said Madame Nourrisson, enlightened by the slang, "you are an artist, you write plays,

you live in the rue du Helder and are friends with Madame Anatolia; you have habits that I know all about. Come, do you want some rarity in the grand style,—Carabine or Mousqueton, Malaga or Jenny Cadine?”

“Malaga, Carabine! nonsense!” cried Leon de Lora. “It was we who invented them.”

“I assure you, my good Madame Nourrisson,” said Bixiou, “that we only wanted the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and we should like very much to be informed as to how you ever came to slip into this business.”

“I was confidential maid in the family of a marshal of France, Prince d’Ysembourg,” she said, assuming the airs of a Dorine. “One morning, one of the most beplumed countesses of the Imperial court came to the house and wanted to speak to the marshal privately. I put myself in the way of hearing what she said. She burst into tears and confided to that booby of a marshal—yes, the Conde of the Republic is a booby!—that her husband, who served under him in Spain, had left her without means, and if she didn’t get a thousand francs, or two thousand, that day her children must go without food; she hadn’t any for the morrow. The marshal, who

was always ready to give in those days, took two notes of a thousand francs each out of his desk, and gave them to her. I saw that fine countess going down the staircase where she couldn’t see me. She was laughing with a satisfaction that certainly wasn’t motherly, so I slipped after her to the peristyle where I heard her say to the coachman, ‘To Leroy’s.’ I ran round quickly to Leroy’s, and there, sure enough, was the poor mother. I got there in time to see her order and pay for a fifteen-hundred-franc dress; you understand that in those days people were made to pay when they bought. The next day but one she appeared at an ambassador’s ball, dressed to please all the world and some one in particular. That day I said to myself: ‘I’ve got a career! When I’m no longer young I’ll lend money to great ladies on their finery; for passion never calculates, it pays blindly.’ If you want subjects for a vaudeville I can sell you plenty.”

She departed after delivering this tirade, in which all the phases of her past life were outlined, leaving Gazonal as much horrified by her revelations as by the five yellow teeth she showed when she tried to smile.

“What shall we do now?” he asked presently.

Unconscious Comedians

“Make notes,” replied Bixiou, whistling for his porter; “for I want some money, and I’ll show you the use of porters. You think they only pull the gate-cord; whereas they really pull poor devils like me and artists whom they take under their protection out of difficulties. Mine will get the Montyon prize one of these days.”

Gazonal opened his eyes to their utmost roundness.

A man between two ages, partly a graybeard, partly an office-boy, but more oily within and without, hair greasy, stomach puffy, skin dull and moist, like that of the prior of a convent, always wearing list shoes, a blue coat, and grayish trousers, made his appearance.

“What is it, monsieur?” he said with an air which combined that of a protector and a subordinate.

“Ravenouillet— His name is Ravenouillet,” said Bixiou turning to Gazonal. “Have you our notebook of bills due with you?”

Ravenouillet pulled out of his pocket the greasiest and stickiest book that Gazonal’s eyes had ever beheld.

“Write down at three months’ sight two notes of five hundred francs each, which you will proceed to sign.”

And Bixiou handed over two notes already drawn to his order by Ravenouillet, which Ravenouillet immediately signed and inscribed on the greasy book, in which his wife also kept account of the debts of the other lodgers.

“Thanks, Ravenouillet,” said Bixiou. “And here’s a box at the Vaudeville for you.”

“Oh! my daughter will enjoy that,” said Ravenouillet, departing.

“There are seventy-one tenants in this house,” said Bixiou, “and the average of what they owe Ravenouillet is six thousand francs a month, eighteen thousand quarterly for money advanced, postage, etc., not counting the rents due. He is Providence—at thirty per cent, which we all pay him, though he never asks for anything.”

“Oh, Paris! Paris!” cried Gazonal.

“I’m going to take you now, cousin Gazonal,” said Bixiou, after indorsing the notes, “to see another comedian, who will play you a charming scene gratis.”

“Who is it?” said Gazonal.

“A usurer. As we go along I’ll tell you the debut of friend Ravenouillet in Paris.”

Passing in front of the porter's lodge, Gazonal saw Made-moiselle Lucienne Ravenouillet holding in her hand a music score (she was a pupil of the Conservatoire), her father reading a newspaper, and Madame Ravenouillet with a package of letters to be carried up to the lodgers.

"Thanks, Monsieur Bixiou!" said the girl.

"She's not a rat," explained Leon to his cousin; "she is the larva of the grasshopper."

"Here's the history of Ravenouillet," continued Bixiou, when the three friends reached the boulevard. "In 1831 Massol, the councillor of state who is dealing with your case, was a lawyer-journalist who at that time never thought of being more than Keeper of the Seals, and deigned to have King Louis-Philippe on his throne. Forgive his ambition, he's from Carcassonne. One morning there entered to him a young rustic of his parts, who said: 'You know me very well, Mossoo Massol; I'm your neighbour the grocer's little boy; I've come from down there, for they tell me a fellow is certain to get a place if he comes to Paris.' Hearing these words, Massol shuddered, and said to himself that if he were weak enough to help this compatriot (to him utterly unknown)

he should have the whole department prone upon him, his bell-rope would break, his valet leave him, he should have difficulties with his landlord about the stairway, and the other lodgers would assuredly complain of the smell of garlic pervading the house. Consequently, he looked at his visitor as a butcher looks at a sheep whose throat he intends to cut. But whether the rustic comprehended the stab of that glance or not, he went on to say (so Massol told me), 'I've as much ambition as other men. I will never go back to my native place, if I ever do go back, unless I am a rich man. Paris is the antechamber of Paradise. They tell me that you who write the newspapers can make, as they say, "fine weather and foul"; that is, you have things all your own way, and it's enough to ask your help to get any place, no matter what, under government. Now, though I have faculties, like others, I know myself: I have no education; I don't know how to write, and that's a misfortune, for I have ideas. I am not seeking, therefore, to be your rival; I judge myself, and I know I couldn't succeed there. But, as you are so powerful, and as we are almost brothers, having played together in childhood, I count upon you to launch me in a career and to protect me— Oh,

Unconscious Comedians

you MUST; I want a place, a place suitable to my capacity, to such as I am, a place were I can make my fortune.’ Massol was just about to put his compatriot neck and crop out of the door with some brutal speech, when the rustic ended his appeal thus: ‘I don’t ask to enter the administration where people advance like tortoises—there’s your cousin, who has stuck in one post for twenty years. No, I only want to make my debut.’—‘On the stage?’ asked Massol only too happy at that conclusion.—‘No, though I have gesture enough, and figure, and memory. But there’s too much wear and tear; I prefer the career of *porter*.’ Massol kept his countenance, and replied: ‘I think there’s more wear and tear in that, but as your choice is made I’ll see what I can do’; and he got him, as Ravenouillet says, his first ‘cordon.’”

“I was the first master,” said Leon, “to consider the race of porter. You’ll find knaves of morality, mountebanks of vanity, modern sycophants, septembriseurs, disguised in philanthropy, inventors of palpitating questions, preaching the emancipation of the negroes, improvement of little thieves, benevolence to liberated convicts, and who, nevertheless, leave their porters in a condition worse than that of the Irish,

in holes more dreadful than a mud cabin, and pay them less money to live on than the State pays to support a convict. I have done but one good action in my life, and that was to build my porter a decent lodge.”

“Yes,” said Bixiou, “if a man, having built a great cage divided into thousands of compartments like the cells of a beehive or the dens of a menagerie, constructed to receive human beings of all trades and all kinds, if that animal, calling itself the proprietor, should go to a man of science and say: ‘I want an individual of the bimanous species, able to live in holes full of old boots, pestiferous with rags, and ten feet square; I want him such that he can live there all his life, sleep there, eat there, be happy, get children as pretty as little cupids, work, toil, cultivate flowers, sing there, stay there, and live in darkness but see and know everything,’ most assuredly the man of science could never have invented the porter to oblige the proprietor; Paris, and Paris only could create him, or, if you choose, the devil.”

“Parisian creative powers have gone farther than that,” said Gazonal; “look at the workmen! You don’t know all the products of industry, though you exhibit them. Our toilers fight

against the toilers of the continent by force of misery, as Napoleon fought Europe by force of regiments.”

“Here we are, at my friend the usurer’s,” said Bixiou. “His name is Vauvinet. One of the greatest mistakes made by writers who describe our manners and morals is to harp on old portraits. In these days all trades change. The grocer becomes a peer of France, artists capitalize their money, vaudevillists have incomes. A few rare beings may remain what they originally were, but professions in general have no longer either their special costume or their formerly fixed habits and ways. In the past we had Gobseck, Gigounet, Samonon,—the last of the Romans; to-day we rejoice in Vauvinet, the good-fellow usurer, the dandy who frequents the greenroom and the lorettes, and drives about in a little coupe with one horse. Take special note of my man, friend Gazonal, and you’ll see the comedy of money, the cold man who won’t give a penny, the hot man who snuffs a profit; listen to him attentively!”

All three went up to the second floor of a fine-looking house on the boulevard des Italiens, where they found themselves surrounded by the elegances then in fashion. A young man about twenty-eight years of age advanced to meet them

with a smiling face, for he saw Leon de Lora first. Vauvinet held out his hand with apparent friendliness to Bixiou, and bowed coldly to Gazonal as he motioned them to enter his office, where bourgeois taste was visible beneath the artistic appearance of the furniture, and in spite of the statuettes and the thousand other little trifles applied to our little apartments by modern art, which has made itself as small as its patrons.

Vauvinet was dressed, like other young men of our day who go into business, with extreme elegance, which many of them regard as a species of prospectus.

“I’ve come for some money,” said Bixiou, laughing, and presenting his notes.

Vauvinet assumed a serious air, which made Gazonal smile, such difference was there between the smiling visage that received them and the countenance of the money-lender recalled to business.

“My dear fellow,” said Vauvinet, looking at Bixiou, “I should certainly oblige you with the greatest pleasure, but I haven’t any money to loan at the present time.”

“Ah, bah!”

Unconscious Comedians

“No; I have given all I had to—you know who. That poor Lousteau went into partnership for the management of a theatre with an old vaudevillist who has great influence with the ministry, Ridal; and they came to me yesterday for thirty thousand francs. I’m cleaned out, and so completely that I was just in the act of sending to Cerizet for a hundred louis, when I lost at lansquenet this morning, at Jenny Cadine’s.”

“You must indeed me hard-up if you can’t oblige this poor Bixiou,” said Leon de Lora; “for he can be very sharp-tongued when he hasn’t a sou.”

“Well,” said Bixiou, “I could never say anything but good of Vauvinet; he’s full of goods.”

“My dear friend,” said Vauvinet, “if I had the money, I couldn’t possibly discount, even at fifty per cent, notes which are drawn by your porter. Ravenouillet’s paper isn’t in demand. He’s not a Rothschild. I warn you that his notes are worn thin; you had better invent another firm. Find an uncle. As for a friend who’ll sign notes for us there’s no such being to be found; the matter-of-factness of the present age is making awful progress.”

“I have a friend,” said Bixiou, motioning to Leon’s cousin.

“Monsieur here; one of the most distinguished manufacturers of cloth in the South, named Gazonal. His hair is not very well dressed,” added Bixiou, looking at the touzled and luxuriant crop on the provincial’s head, “but I am going to take him to Marius, who will make him look less like a poodle-dog, an appearance so injurious to his credit, and to ours.”

“I don’t believe in Southern securities, be it said without offence to monsieur,” replied Vauvinet, with whom Gazonal was so entertained that he did not resent his insolence.

Gazonal, that extremely penetrating intellect, thought that the painter and Bixiou intended, by way of teaching him to know Paris, to make him pay the thousand francs for his breakfast at the Cafe de Paris, for this son of the Pyrenees had never got out of that armor of distrust which incloses the provincial in Paris.

“How can you expect me to have outstanding business at seven hundred miles from Paris?” added Vauvinet.

“Then you refuse me positively?” asked Bixiou.

“I have twenty francs, and no more,” said the young usurer.

“I’m sorry for you,” said the joker. “I thought I was worth a thousand francs.”

“You are worth two hundred thousand francs,” replied Vauvinet, “and sometimes you are worth your weight in gold, or at least your tongue is; but I tell you I haven’t a penny.”

“Very good,” replied Bixiou; “then we won’t say anything more about it. I had arranged for this evening, at Carabine’s, the thing you most wanted—you know?”

Vauvinet winked an eye at Bixiou; the wink that two jockeys give each other when they want to say: “Don’t try trickery.”

“Don’t you remember catching me round the waist as if I were a pretty woman,” said Bixiou, “and coaxing me with look and speech, and saying, ‘I’ll do anything for you if you’ll only get me shares at par in that railroad du Tillet and Nucingen have made an offer for?’ Well, old fellow, du Tillet and Nucingen are coming to Carabine’s to-night, where they will meet a number of political characters. You’ve lost a fine opportunity. Good-bye to you, old carrot.”

Bixiou rose, leaving Vauvinet apparently indifferent, but inwardly annoyed by the sense that he had committed a folly.

“One moment, my dear fellow,” said the money-lender. “Though I haven’t the money, I have credit. If your notes are worth nothing, I can keep them and give you notes in ex-

change. If we can come to an agreement about that railway stock we could share the profits, of course in due proportion and I’ll allow you that on—”

“No, no,” said Bixiou, “I want money in hand, and I must get those notes of Ravenouillet’s cashed.”

“Ravenouillet is sound,” said Vauvinet. “He puts money into the savings-bank; he is good security.”

“Better than you,” interposed Leon, “for *he* doesn’t stipend lorettes; he hasn’t any rent to pay; and he never rushes into speculations which keep him dreading either a rise or fall.”

“You think you can laugh at me, great man,” returned Vauvinet, once more jovial and caressing; “you’ve turned La Fontaine’s fable of ‘Le Chene et le Roseau’ into an elixir—Come, Gubetta, my old accomplice,” he continued, seizing Bixiou round the waist, “you want money; well, I can borrow three thousand francs from my friend Cerizet instead of two; ‘Let us be friends, Cinna!’ hand over your colossal cabbages,—made to trick the public like a gardener’s catalogue. If I refused you it was because it is pretty hard on a man who can only do his poor little business by turning over his money, to have to keep your Ravenouillet notes in the drawer of his

desk. Hard, hard, very hard!”

“What discount do you want?” asked Bixiou.

“Next to nothing,” returned Vauvinet. “It will cost you a miserable fifty francs at the end of the quarter.”

“As Emile Blondet used to say, you shall be my benefactor,” replied Bixiou.

“Twenty per cent!” whispered Gazonal to Bixiou, who replied by a punch of his elbow in the provincial’s oesophagus.

“Bless me!” said Vauvinet opening a drawer in his desk as if to put away the Ravenouillet notes, “here’s an old bill of five hundred francs stuck in the drawer! I didn’t know I was so rich. And here’s a note payable at the end of the month for four hundred and fifty; Cerizet will take it without much diminution, and there’s your sum in hand. But no nonsense, Bixiou! Hein? to-night, at Carabine’s, will you swear to me—”

“Haven’t we *re*-friended?” said Bixiou, pocketing the five-hundred-franc bill and the note for four hundred and fifty. “I give you my word of honor that you shall see du Tillet, and many other men who want to make their way—their railway—to-night at Carabine’s.”

Vauvinet conducted the three friends to the landing of the staircase, cajoling Bixiou on the way. Bixiou kept a grave face till he reached the outer door, listening to Gazonal, who tried to enlighten him on his late operation, and to prove to him that if Vauvinet’s follower, Cerizet, took another twenty francs out of his four hundred and fifty, he was getting money at forty per cent.

When they reached the asphalt Bixiou frightened Gazonal by the laugh of a Parisian hoaxer,—that cold, mute laugh, a sort of labial north wind.

“The assignment of the contract for that railway is adjourned, positively, by the Chamber; I heard this yesterday from that marcheuse whom we smiled at just now. If I win five or six thousand francs at lansquenet to-night, why should I grudge sixty-five francs for the power to stake, hey?”

“Lansquenet is another of the thousand facets of Paris as it is,” said Leon. “And therefore, cousin, I intend to present you to-night in the salon of a duchess,—a duchess of the rue Saint-Georges, where you will see the aristocracy of the lorettes, and probably be able to win your lawsuit. But it is quite impossible to present you anywhere with that mop of

Pyrenean hair; you look like a porcupine; and therefore we'll take you close by, Place de la Bourse, to Marius, another of our comedians—”

“Who is he?”

“I'll tell you his tale,” said Bixiou. “In the year 1800 a Toulousian named Cabot, a young wig-maker devoured by ambition, came to Paris, and set up a shop (I use your slang). This man of genius,—he now has an income of twenty-four thousand francs a year, and lives, retired from business, at Libourne,—well, he saw that so vulgar and ignoble a name as Cabot could never attain celebrity. Monsieur de Parny, whose hair he cut, gave him the name of Marius, infinitely superior, you perceive, to the Christian names of Armand and Hippolyte, behind which patronymics attacked by the Cabot evil are wont to hide. All the successors of Cabot have called themselves Marius. The present Marius is Marius V.; his real name is Mongin. This occurs in various other trades; for ‘Botot water,’ and for ‘Little-Virtue’ ink. Names become commercial property in Paris, and have ended by constituting a sort of ensign of nobility. The present Marius, who takes pupils, has created, he says, the leading school of hair-

dressing in the world.

“I've seen, in coming through France,” said Gazonal, “a great many signs bearing the words: ‘Such a one, pupil of Marius.’”

“His pupils have to wash their hands after every head,” said Bixiou; “but Marius does not take them indifferently; they must have nice hands, and not be ill-looking. The most remarkable for manners, appearance, and elocution are sent out to dress heads; and they come back tired to death. Marius himself never turns out except for titled women; he drives his cabriolet and has a groom.”

“But, after all, he is nothing but a barber!” cried Gazonal, somewhat shocked.

“Barber!” exclaimed Bixiou; “please remember that he is captain in the National Guard, and is decorated for being the first to spring into a barricade in 1832.”

“And take care what you say to him: he is neither barber, hair-dresser, nor wig-maker; he is a director of salons for hair-dressing,” said Leon, as they went up a staircase with crystal balusters and mahogany rail, the steps of which were covered with a sumptuous carpet.

Unconscious Comedians

“Ah ca! mind you don’t compromise us,” said Bixiou. “In the antechamber you’ll see lacqueys who will take off your coat, and seize your hat, to brush them; and they’ll accompany you to the door of the salons to open and shut it. I mention this, friend Gazonal,” added Bixiou, slyly, “lest you might think they were after your property, and cry ‘Stop thief!’”

“These salons,” said Leon, “are three boudoirs where the director has collected all the inventions of modern luxury: lambrequins to the windows, jardinières everywhere, downy divans where each customer can wait his turn and read the newspapers. You might suppose, when you first go in, that five francs would be the least they’d get out of your waistcoat pocket; but nothing is ever extracted beyond ten sous for combing and frizzing your hair, or twenty sous for cutting and frizzing. Elegant dressing-tables stand about among the jardinières; water is laid on to the washstands; enormous mirrors reproduce the whole figure. Therefore don’t look astonished. When the client (that’s the elegant word substituted by Marius for the ignoble word customer), —when the client appears at the door, Marius gives him a glance

which appraises him: to Marius you are a *head*, more or less susceptible of occupying his mind. To him there’s no mankind; there are only heads.”

“We let you hear Marius on all the notes of his scale,” said Bixiou, “and you know how to follow our lead.”

As soon as Gazonal showed himself, the glance was given, and was evidently favourable, for Marius exclaimed: “Regulus! yours this head! Prepare it first with the little scissors.”

“Excuse me,” said Gazonal to the pupil, at a sign from Bixiou. “I prefer to have my head dressed by Monsieur Marius himself.”

Marius, much flattered by this demand, advanced, leaving the head on which he was engaged.

“I am with you in a moment; I am just finishing. Pray have no uneasiness, my pupil will prepare you; I alone will decide the cut.”

Marius, a slim little man, his hair frizzed like that of Rubini, and jet black, dressed also in black, with long white cuffs, and the frill of his shirt adorned with a diamond, now saw Bixiou, to whom he bowed as to a power the equal of his own.

“That is only an ordinary head,” he said to Leon, pointing to the person on whom he was operating,—“a grocer, or something of that kind. But if we devoted ourselves to art only, we should lie in Bicetre, mad!” and he turned back with an inimitable gesture to his client, after saying to Regulus, “Prepare monsieur, he is evidently an artist.”

“A journalist,” said Bixiou.

Hearing that word, Marius gave two or three strokes of the comb to the ordinary head and flung himself upon Gazonal, taking Regulus by the arm at the instant that the pupil was about to begin the operation of the little scissors.

“I will take charge of monsieur. Look, monsieur,” he said to the grocer, “reflect yourself in the great mirror—if the mirror permits. Ossian!”

A lacquy entered, and took hold of the client to dress him.

“You pay at the desk, monsieur,” said Marius to the stupefied grocer, who was pulling out his purse.

“Is there any use, my dear fellow,” said Bixiou, “in going through this operation of the little scissors?”

“No head ever comes to me unclesed,” replied the illus-

trious hair-dresser; “but for your sake, I will do that of monsieur myself, wholly. My pupils sketch out the scheme, or my strength would not hold out. Every one says as you do: ‘Dressed by Marius!’ Therefore, I can give only the finishing strokes. What journal is monsieur on?”

“If I were you, I should keep three or four Mariuses,” said Gazonal.

“Ah! monsieur, I see, is a feuilletonist,” said Marius. “Alas! in dressing heads which expose us to notice it is impossible. Excuse me!”

He left Gazonal to overlook Regulus, who was “preparing” a newly arrived head. Tapping his tongue against his palate, he made a disapproving noise, which may perhaps be written down as “titt, titt, titt.”

“There, there! good heavens! that cut is not square; your scissors are hacking it. Here! see there! Regulus, you are not clipping poodles; these are men—who have a character; if you continue to look at the ceiling instead of looking only between the glass and the head, you will dishonor my house.”

“You are stern, Monsieur Marius.”

“I owe them the secrets of my art.”

“Then it is an art?” said Gazonal.

Marius, affronted, looked at Gazonal in the glass, and stopped short, the scissors in one hand, the comb in the other.

“Monsieur, you speak like a—child! and yet, from your accent, I judge you are from the South, the birthplace of men of genius.”

“Yes, I know that hair-dressing requires some taste,” replied Gazonal.

“Hush, monsieur, hush! I expected better things of *you*. Let me tell you that a hair-dresser,—I don’t say a good hair-dresser, for a man is, or he is not, a hair-dresser,—a hair-dresser, I repeat, is more difficult to find than—what shall I say? than—I don’t know what—a minister?—(Sit still!) No, for you can’t judge by ministers, the streets are full of them. A Paganini? No, he’s not great enough. A hair-dresser, monsieur, a man who divines your soul and your habits, in order to dress your hair conformably with your being, that man has all that constitutes a philosopher—and such he is. See the women! Women appreciate us; they know our value; our value to them is the conquest they make when they have placed their heads in our hands to attain a triumph. I say to

you that a hair-dresser—the world does not know what he is. I who speak to you, I am very nearly all that there is of—without boasting I may say I am known—Still, I think more might be done—The execution, that is everything! Ah! if women would only give me *carte blanche*!—if I might only execute the ideas that come to me! I have, you see, a hell of imagination!—but the women don’t fall in with it; they have their own plans; they’ll stick their fingers or combs, as soon as my back is turned, through the most delicious edifices—which ought to be engraved and perpetuated; for our works, monsieur, last unfortunately but a few hours. A great hair-dresser, hey! he’s like Careme and Vestris in their careers. (Head a little this way, if you please, *so*; I attend particularly to front faces!) Our profession is ruined by bunglers who understand neither the epoch nor their art. There are dealers in wigs and essences who are enough to make one’s hair stand on end; they care only to sell you bottles. It is pitiable! But that’s business. Such poor wretches cut hair and dress it as they can. I, when I arrived in Paris from Toulouse, my ambition was to succeed the great Marius, to be a true Marius, to make that name illustrious. I alone, more than all the four

others, I said to myself, 'I will conquer, or die.' (There! now sit straight, I am going to finish you.) I was the first to introduce *elegance*; I made my salons the object of curiosity. I disdain advertisements; what advertisements would have cost, monsieur, I put into elegance, charm, comfort. Next year I shall have a quartette in one of the salons to discourse music, and of the best. Yes, we ought to charm away the ennui of those whose heads we dress. I do not conceal from myself the annoyances to a client. (Look at yourself!) To have one's hair dressed is fatiguing, perhaps as much so as posing for one's portrait. Monsieur knows perhaps that the famous Monsieur Humbolt (I did the best I could with the few hairs America left him—science has this in common with savages, that she scalps her men clean), that illustrious savant, said that next to the suffering of going to be hanged was that of going to be painted; but I place the trial of having your head dressed before that of being painted, and so do certain women. Well, monsieur, my object is to make those who come here to have their hair cut or frizzed enjoy themselves. (Hold still, you have a tuft which *must* be conquered.) A Jew proposed to supply me with Italian cantatrices who, during

the interludes, were to depilate the young men of forty; but they proved to be girls from the Conservatoire, and music-teachers from the Rue Montmartre. There you are, monsieur; your head is dressed as that of a man of talent ought to be. Ossian," he said to the lacquey in livery, "dress monsieur and show him out. Whose turn next?" he added proudly, gazing round upon the persons who awaited him.

"Don't laugh, Gazonal," said Leon as they reached the foot of the staircase, whence his eye could take in the whole of the Place de la Bourse. "I see over there one of our great men, and you shall compare his language with that of the barber, and tell me which of the two you think the most original."

"Don't laugh, Gazonal," said Bixiou, mimicking Leon's intonation. "What do you suppose is Marius's business?"

"Hair-dressing."

"He has obtained a monopoly of the sale of hair in bulk, as a certain dealer in comestibles who is going to sell us a pate for three francs has acquired a monopoly of the sale of truffles; he discounts the paper of that business; he loans money on pawn to clients when embarrassed; he gives annuities on lives; he gambles at the Bourse; he is a stockholder in all the fash-

ion papers; and he sells, under the name of a certain chemist, an infamous drug which, for his share alone, gives him an income of thirty thousand francs, and costs in advertisements a hundred thousand yearly.”

“Is it possible!” cried Gazonal.

“Remember this,” said Bixiou, gravely. “In Paris there is no such thing as a small business; all things swell to large proportions, down to the sale of rags and matches. The lemonade-seller who, with his napkin under his arm, meets you as you enter his shop, may be worth his fifty thousand francs a year; the waiter in a restaurant is eligible for the Chamber; the man you take for a beggar in the street carries a hundred thousand francs worth of unset diamonds in his waistcoat pocket, and didn’t steal them either.”

The three inseparables (for one day at any rate) now crossed the Place de la Bourse in a way to intercept a man about forty years of age, wearing the Legion of honor, who was coming from the boulevard by way of the rue Neuve-Vivienne.

“Hey!” said Leon, “what are you pondering over, my dear Dubourdieu? Some fine symbolic composition? My dear

cousin, I have the pleasure to present to you our illustrious painter Dubourdieu, not less celebrated for his humanitarian convictions than for his talents in art. Dubourdieu, my cousin Palafox.”

Dubourdieu, a small, pale man with melancholy blue eyes, bowed slightly to Gazonal, who bent low as before a man of genius.

“So you have elected Stidmann in place of—” he began.

“How could I help it? I wasn’t there,” replied Lora.

“You bring the Academy into disrepute,” continued the painter. “To choose such a man as that! I don’t wish to say ill of him, but he works at a trade. Where are you dragging the first of arts,—the art those works are the most lasting; bringing nations to light of which the world has long lost even the memory; an art which crowns and consecrates great men? Yes, sculpture is priesthood; it preserves the ideas of an epoch, and you give its chair to a maker of toys and mantelpieces, an ornamentationist, a seller of bric-a-brac! Ah! as Chamfort said, one has to swallow a viper every morning to endure the life of Paris. Well, at any rate, Art remains to a few of us; they can’t prevent us from cultivating it—”

“And besides, my dear fellow, you have a consolation which few artists possess; the future is yours,” said Bixiou. “When the world is converted to our doctrine, you will be at the head of your art; for you are putting into it ideas which people will understand—*when* they are generalized! In fifty years from now you’ll be to all the world what you are to a few of us at this moment,—a great man. The only question is how to get along till then.”

“I have just finished,” resumed the great artist, his face expanding like that of a man whose hobby is stroked, “an allegorical figure of Harmony; and if you will come and see it, you will understand why it should have taken me two years to paint it. Everything is in it! At the first glance one divines the destiny of the globe. A queen holds a shepherd’s crook in her hand,—symbolical of the advancement of the races useful to mankind; she wears on her head the cap of Liberty; her breasts are sixfold, as the Egyptians carved them—for the Egyptians foresaw Fourier; her feet are resting on two clasped hands which embrace a globe,—symbol of the brotherhood of all human races; she tramples cannon under foot to signify the abolition of war; and I have tried to

make her face express the serenity of triumphant agriculture. I have also placed beside her an enormous curled cabbage, which, according to our master, is an image of Harmony. Ah! it is not the least among Fourier’s titles to veneration that he has restored the gift of thought to plants; he has bound all creation in one by the signification of things to one another, and by their special language. A hundred years hence this earth will be much larger than it is now.”

“And how will that, monsieur, come to pass?” said Gazonal, stupefied at hearing a man outside of a lunatic asylum talk in this way.

“Through the extending of production. If men will apply The System, it will not be impossible to act upon the stars.”

“What would become of painting in that case?” asked Gazonal.

“It would be magnified.”

“Would our eyes be magnified too?” said Gazonal, looking at his two friends significantly.

“Man will return to what he was before he became degenerate; our six-feet men will then be dwarfs.”

“Is your picture finished?” asked Leon.

Unconscious Comedians

“Entirely finished,” replied Dubourdieu. “I have tried to see Hiclar, and get him to compose a symphony for it; I wish that while viewing my picture the public should hear music a la Beethoven to develop its ideas and bring them within range of the intellect by two arts. Ah! if the government would only lend me one of the galleries of the Louvre!”

“I’ll mention it, if you want me to do so; you should never neglect an opportunity to strike minds.”

“Ah! my friends are preparing articles; but I am afraid they’ll go too far.”

“Pooh!” said Bixiou, “they can’t go as far as the future.”

Dubourdieu looked askance at Bixiou, and continued his way.

“Why, he’s mad,” said Gazonal; “he is following the moon in her courses.”

“His skill is masterly,” said Leon, “and he knows his art, but Fourierism has killed him. You have just seen, cousin, one of the effects of ambition upon artists. Too often, in Paris, from a desire to reach more rapidly than by natural ways the celebrity which to them is fortune, artists borrow the wings of circumstance, they think they make themselves

of more importance as men of a specialty, the supporters of some ‘system’; and they fancy they can transform a clique into the public. One is a republican, another Saint-Simonian; this one aristocrat, that one Catholic, others juste-milieu, middle ages, or German, as they choose for their purpose. Now, though opinions do not give talent, they always spoil what talent there is; and the poor fellow whom you have just seen is a proof thereof. An artist’s opinion ought to be: Faith in his art, in his work; and his only way of success is toil when nature has given him the sacred fire.”

“Let us get away,” said Bixiou. “Leon is beginning to moralize.”

“But that man was sincere,” said Gazonal, still stupefied.

“Perfectly sincere,” replied Bixiou; “as sincere as the king of barbers just now.”

“He is mad!” repeated Gazonal.

“And he is not the first man driven man by Fourier’s ideas,” said Bixiou. “You don’t know anything about Paris. Ask it for a hundred thousand francs to realize an idea that will be useful to humanity,—the steam-engine for instance,—and you’ll die, like Salomon de Caux, at Bicetre; but if the money

is wanted for some paradoxical absurdity, Parisians will annihilate themselves and their fortune for it. It is the same with systems as it is with material things. Utterly impracticable newspapers have consumed millions within the last fifteen years. What makes your lawsuit so hard to win, is that you have right on your side, and on that of the prefect there are (so you suppose) secret motives.”

“Do you think that a man of intellect having once understood the nature of Paris could live elsewhere?” said Leon to his cousin.

“Suppose we take Gazonal to old Mere Fontaine?” said Bixiou, making a sign to the driver of a citadine to draw up; “it will be a step from the real to the fantastic. Driver, Vieille rue du Temple.”

And all three were presently rolling in the direction of the Marais.

“What are you taking me to see now?” asked Gazonal.

“The proof of what Bixiou told you,” replied Leon; “we shall show you a woman who makes twenty thousand francs a year by working a fantastic idea.”

“A fortune-teller,” said Bixiou, interpreting the look of the

Southerner as a question. “Madame Fontaine is thought, by those who seek to pry into the future, to be wiser in her wisdom than Mademoiselle Lenormand.”

“She must be very rich,” remarked Gazonal.

“She was the victim of her own idea, as long as lotteries existed,” said Bixiou; “for in Paris there are no great gains without corresponding outlays. The strongest heads are liable to crack there, as if to give vent to their steam. Those who make much money have vices or fancies,—no doubt to establish an equilibrium.”

“And now that the lottery is abolished?” asked Gazonal.

“Oh! now she has a nephew for whom she is hoarding.”

When they reached the Vieille rue du Temple the three friends entered one of the oldest houses in that street and passed up a shaking staircase, the steps of which, caked with mud, led them in semi-darkness, and through a stench peculiar to houses on an alley, to the third story, where they beheld a door which painting alone could render; literature would have to spend too many nights in suitably describing it.

An old woman, in keeping with that door, and who might have been that door in human guise, ushered the three friends

Unconscious Comedians

into a room which served as an ante-chamber, where, in spite of the warm atmosphere which fills the streets of Paris, they felt the icy chill of crypts about them. A damp air came from an inner courtyard which resembled a huge air-shaft; the light that entered was gray, and the sill of the window was filled with pots of sickly plants. In this room, which had a coating of some greasy, fuliginous substance, the furniture, the chairs, the table, were all most abject. The floor tiles oozed like a water-cooler. In short, every accessory was in keeping with the fearful old woman of the hooked nose, ghastly face, and decent rags who directed the “consulters” to sit down, informing them that only one at a time could be admitted to Madame.

Gazonal, who played the intrepid, entered bravely, and found himself in presence of one of those women forgotten by Death, who no doubt forgets them intentionally in order to leave some samples of Itself among the living. He saw before him a withered face in which shone fixed gray eyes of wearying immobility; a flattened nose, smeared with snuff; knuckle-bones well set up by muscles that, under pretence of being hands, played nonchalantly with a pack of cards, like some machine the movement of which is about to run

down. The body, a species of broom-handle decently covered with clothes, enjoyed the advantages of death and did not stir. Above the forehead rose a coif of black velvet. Madame Fontaine, for it was really a woman, had a black hen on her right hand and a huge toad, named Astaroth, on her left. Gazonal did not at first perceive them.

The toad, of surprising dimensions, was less alarming in himself than through the effect of two topaz eyes, large as a ten-sous piece, which cast forth vivid gleams. It was impossible to endure that look. The toad is a creature as yet unexplained. Perhaps the whole animal creation, including man, is comprised in it; for, as Lassailly said, the toad exists indefinitely; and, as we know, it is of all created animals the one whose marriage lasts the longest.

The black hen had a cage about two feet distant from the table, covered with a green cloth, to which she came along a plank which formed a sort of drawbridge between the cage and the table.

When the woman, the least real of the creatures in this Hoffmanesque den, said to Gazonal: “Cut!” the worthy provincial shuddered involuntarily. That which renders these

beings so formidable is the importance of what we want to know. People go to them, as they know very well, to buy hope.

The den of the sibyl was much darker than the antechamber; the color of the walls could scarcely be distinguished. The ceiling, blackened by smoke, far from reflecting the little light that came from a window obstructed by pale and sickly vegetations, absorbed the greater part of it; but the table where the sorceress sat received what there was of this half-light fully. The table, the chair of the woman, and that on which Gazonal was seated, formed the entire furniture of the little room, which was divided at one end by a sort of loft where Madame Fontaine probably slept. Gazonal heard through a half-opened door the bubbling murmur of a soup-pot. That kitchen sound, accompanied by a composite odor in which the effluvia of a sink predominated, mingled incongruous ideas of the necessities of actual life with those of supernatural power. Disgust entered into curiosity.

Gazonal observed one stair of pine wood, the lowest no doubt of the staircase which led to the loft. He took in these minor details at a glance, with a sense of nausea. It was all

quite otherwise alarming than the romantic tales and scenes of German drama lead one to expect; here was suffocating actuality. The air diffused a sort of dizzy heaviness, the dim light rasped the nerves. When the Southerner, impelled by a species of self-assertion, gazed firmly at the toad, he felt a sort of emetic heat at the pit of his stomach, and was conscious of a terror like that a criminal might feel in presence of a gendarme. He endeavoured to brace himself by looking at Madame Fontaine; but there he encountered two almost white eyes, the motionless and icy pupils of which were absolutely intolerable to him. The silence became terrifying.

“Which do you wish, monsieur, the five-franc fortune, the ten-franc fortune, or the grand game?”

“The five-franc fortune is dear enough,” replied the Southerner, making powerful efforts not to yield to the influence of the surroundings in which he found himself.

At the moment when Gazonal was thus endeavouring to collect himself, a voice—an infernal voice—made him bound in his chair; the black hen clucked.

“Go back, my daughter, go back; monsieur chooses to spend only five francs.”

Unconscious Comedians

The hen seemed to understand her mistress, for, after coming within a foot of the cards, she turned and resumed her former place.

“What flower to you like best?” asked the old woman, in a voice hoarsened by the phlegm which seemed to rise and fall incessantly in her bronchial tubes.

“The rose.”

“What color are you fond of?”

“Blue.”

“What animal do you prefer?”

“The horse. Why these questions?” he asked.

“Man derives his form from his anterior states,” she said sententiously. “Hence his instincts; and his instincts rule his destiny. What food do you like best to eat,—fish, game, cereals, butcher’s meat, sweet things, vegetables, or fruits?”

“Game.”

“In what month were you born?”

“September.”

“Put out your hand.”

Madame Fontaine looked attentively at the lines of the hand that was shown to her. It was all done seriously, with

no pretence of sorcery; on the contrary, with the simplicity a notary might have shown when asking the intentions of a client about a deed. Presently she shuffled the cards, and asked Gazonal to cut them, and then to make three packs of them himself. After which she took the packs, spread them out before her, and examined them as a gambler examines the thirty-six numbers at roulette before he risks his stake. Gazonal’s bones were freezing; he seemed not to know where he was; but his amazement grew greater and greater when this hideous old woman in a green bonnet, stout and squat, whose false front was frizzed into points of interrogation, proceeded, in a thick voice, to relate to him all the particular circumstances, even the most secret, of his past life: she told him his tastes, his habits, his character; the thoughts of his childhood; everything that had influenced his life; a marriage broken off, why, with whom, the exact description of the woman he had loved; and, finally, the place he came from, his lawsuit, etc.

Gazonal at first thought it was a hoax prepared by his companions; but the absolute impossibility of such a conspiracy appeared to him almost as soon as the idea itself, and he sat

speechless before that truly infernal power, the incarnation of which borrowed from humanity a form which the imagination of painters and poets has throughout all ages regarded as the most awful of created things,—namely, a toothless, hideous, wheezing hag, with cold lips, flattened nose, and whitish eyes. The pupils of those eyes had brightened, through them rushed a ray,—was it from the depths of the future or from hell?

Gazonal asked, interrupting the old creature, of what use the toad and the hen were to her.

“They predict the future. The consulter himself throws grain upon the cards; Bilouche comes and pecks it. Astaroth crawls over the cards to get the food the client holds for him, and those two wonderful intelligences are never mistaken. Will you see them at work?—you will then know your future. The cost is a hundred francs.”

Gazonal, horrified by the gaze of Astaroth, rushed into the antechamber, after bowing to the terrible old woman. He was moist from head to foot, as if under the incubation of some evil spirit.

“Let us get away!” he said to the two artists. “Did you ever

consult that sorceress?”

“I never do anything important without getting Astaroth’s opinion,” said Leon, “and I am always the better for it.”

“I’m expecting the virtuous fortune which Bilouche has promised me,” said Bixiou.

“I’ve a fever,” cried Gazonal. “If I believed what you say I should have to believe in sorcery, in some supernatural power.”

“It may be only natural,” said Bixiou. “One-third of all the lorettes, one-fourth of all the statesmen, and one-half of all artists consult Madame Fontaine; and I know a minister to whom she is an Egeria.”

“Did she tell you about your future?” asked Leon.

“No; I had enough of her about my past. But,” added Gazonal, struck by a sudden thought, “if she can, by the help of those dreadful collaborators, predict the future, how came she to lose in the lottery?”

“Ah! you put your finger on one of the greatest mysteries of occult science,” replied Leon. “The moment that the species of inward mirror on which the past or the future is reflected to their minds become clouded by the breath of a

Unconscious Comedians

personal feeling, by an idea foreign to the purpose of the power they are exerting, sorcerers and sorceresses can see nothing; just as an artist who blurs art with political combinations and systems loses his genius. Not long ago, a man endowed with the gift of divining by cards, a rival to Madame Fontaine, became addicted to vicious practices, and being unable to tell his own fate from the cards, was arrested, tried, and condemned at the court of assizes. Madame Fontaine, who predicts the future eight times out of ten, was never able to know if she would win or lose in a lottery.”

“It is the same thing in magnetism,” remarked Bixiou. “A man can’t magnetize himself.”

“Heavens! now we come to magnetism!” cried Gazonal. “Ah ca! do you know everything?”

“Friend Gazonal,” replied Bixiou, gravely, “to be able to laugh at everything one must know everything. As for me, I’ve been in Paris since my childhood; I’ve lived, by means of my pencil, on its follies and absurdities, at the rate of five caricatures a month. Consequently, I often laugh at ideas in which I have faith.”

“Come, let us get to something else,” said Leon. “We’ll go

to the Chamber and settle the cousin’s affair.”

“This,” said Bixiou, imitating Odry in “Les Funambules,” “is high comedy, for we will make the first orator we meet pose for us, and you shall see that in those halls of legislation, as elsewhere, the Parisian language has but two tones,—Self-interest, Vanity.”

As they got into their citadine, Leon saw in a rapidly driven cabriolet a man to whom he made a sign that he had something to say to him.

“There’s Publicola Masson,” said Leon to Bixiou. “I’m going to ask for a sitting this evening at five o’clock, after the Chamber. The cousin shall then see the most curious of all the originals.”

“Who is he?” asked Gazonal, while Leon went to speak to Publicola Masson.

“An artist-pedicure,” replied Bixiou, “author of a ‘Treatise on Corporistics,’ who cuts your corns by subscription, and who, if the Republications triumph for six months, will assuredly become immortal.”

“Drives his carriage!” ejaculated Gazonal.

“But, my good Gazonal, it is only millionaires who have

time to go afoot in Paris.”

“To the Chamber!” cried Leon to the coachman, getting back into the carriage.

“Which, monsieur?”

“Deputies,” replied Leon, exchanging a smile with Bixiou.

“Paris begins to confound me,” said Gazonal.

“To make you see its immensity,—moral, political, and literary,—we are now proceeding like the Roman cicerone, who shows you in Saint Peter’s the thumb of the statue you took to be life-size, and the thumb proves to be a foot long. You haven’t yet measured so much as a great toe of Paris.”

“And remark, cousin Gazonal, that we take things as they come; we haven’t selected.”

“This evening you shall sup as they feasted at Belshazzar’s; and there you shall see our Paris, our own particular Paris, playing lansquenet, and risking a hundred thousand francs at a throw without winking.”

A quarter of an hour later the citadine stopped at the foot of the steps going up to the Chamber of Deputies, at that end of the Pont de la Concorde which leads to discord.

“I thought the Chamber unapproachable?” said the pro-

vincial, surprised to find himself in the great lobby.

“That depends,” replied Bixiou; “materially speaking, it costs thirty sous for a citadine to approach it; politically, you have to spend rather more. The swallows thought, so a poet says, that the Arc de Triomphe was erected for them; we artists think that this public building was built for us,—to compensate for the stupidities of the Theatre-Francais and make us laugh; but the comedians on this stage are much more expensive; and they don’t give us every day the value of our money.”

“So this is the Chamber!” cried Gazonal, as he paced the great hall in which there were then about a dozen persons, and looked around him with an air which Bixiou noted down in his memory and reproduced in one of the famous caricatures with which he rivalled Gavarni.

Leon went to speak to one of the ushers who go and come continually between this hall and the hall of sessions, with which it communicates by a passage in which are stationed the stenographers of the “Moniteur” and persons attached to the Chamber.

“As for the minister,” replied the usher to Leon as Gazonal

Unconscious Comedians

approached them, “he is there, but I don’t know if Monsieur Giraud has come. I’ll see.”

As the usher opened one side of the double door through which none but deputies, ministers, or messengers from the king are allowed to pass, Gazonal saw a man come out who seemed still young, although he was really forty-eight years old, and to whom the usher evidently indicated Leon de Lora.

“Ha! you here!” he exclaimed, shaking hands with both Bixiou and Lora. “Scamps! what are you doing in the sanctuary of the laws?”

“Parbleu! we’ve come to learn how to blague,” said Bixiou. “We might get rusty if we didn’t.”

“Let us go into the garden,” said the young man, not observing that Gazonal belonged to the party.

Seeing that this new-comer was well-dressed, in black, the provincial did not know in which political category to place him; but he followed the others into the garden contiguous to the hall which follows the line of the quai Napoleon. Once in the garden the ci-devant young man gave way to a peal of laughter which he seemed to have been repressing since he entered the lobby.

“What is it?” asked Leon de Lora.

“My dear friend, to prove the sincerity of the constitutional government we are forced to tell the most frightful lies with incredible self-possession. But as for me, I’m freakish; some days I can lie like a prospectus; other days I can’t be serious. This is one of my hilarious days. Now, at this moment, the prime minister, being summoned by the Opposition to make known a certain diplomatic secret, is going through his paces in the tribune. Being an honest man who never lies on his own account, he whispered to me as he mounted the breach: ‘Heaven knows what I shall say to them.’ A mad desire to laugh overcame me, and as one mustn’t laugh on the ministerial bench I rushed out, for my youth does come back to me most unseasonably at times.”

“At last,” cried Gazonal, “I’ve found an honest man in Paris! You must be a very superior man,” he added, looking at the stranger.

“Ah ca! who is this gentleman?” said the ci-devant young man, examining Gazonal.

“My cousin,” said Leon, hastily. “I’ll answer for his silence and his honor as for my own. It is on his account we have

come here now; he has a case before the administration which depends on your ministry. His prefect evidently wants to ruin him, and we have come to see you in order to prevent the Council of State from ratifying a great injustice.”

“Who brings up the case?”

“Massol.”

“Good.”

“And our friends Giraud and Claude Vignon are on the committee,” said Bixiou.

“Say just a word to them,” urged Leon; “tell them to come to-night to Carabine’s, where du Tillet gives a fete apropos of railways,—they are plundering more than ever on the roads.”

“Ah ca! but isn’t your cousin from the Pyrenees?” asked the young man, now become serious.

“Yes,” replied Gazonal.

“And you did not vote for us in the last elections?” said the statesman, looking hard at Gazonal.

“No; but what you have just said in my hearing has bribed me; on the word of a commandant of the National Guard I’ll have your candidate elected—”

“Very good; will you guarantee your cousin?” asked the young man, turning to Leon.

“We are forming him,” said Bixiou, in a tone irresistibly comic.

“Well, I’ll see about it,” said the young man, leaving his friends and rushing precipitately back to the Chamber.

“Who is that?” asked Gazonal.

“The Comte de Rastignac; the minister of the department in which your affair is brought up.”

“A minister! Isn’t a minister anything more than that?”

“He is an old friend of ours. He now has three hundred thousand francs a year; he’s a peer of France; the king has made him a count; he married Nucingen’s daughter; and he is one of the two or three statesmen produced by the revolution of July. But his fame and his power bore him sometimes, and he comes down to laugh with us.”

“Ah ca! cousin; why didn’t you tell us you belonged to the Opposition?” asked Leon, seizing Gazonal by the arm. “How stupid of you! One deputy more or less to Right or Left and your bed is made.”

“We are all for the Others down my way.”

Unconscious Comedians

“Let ‘em go,” said Bixiou, with a facetious look; “they have Providence on their side, and Providence will bring them back without you and in spite of themselves. A manufacturer ought to be a fatalist.”

“What luck! There’s Maxime, with Canalis and Giraud,” said Leon.

“Come along, friend Gazonal, the promised actors are mustering on the stage,” said Bixiou.

And all three advanced to the above-named personages, who seemed to be sauntering along with nothing to do.

“Have they turned you out, or why are you idling about in this way?” said Bixiou to Giraud.

“No, while they are voting by secret ballot we have come out for a little air,” replied Giraud.

“How did the prime minister pull through?”

“He was magnificent!” said Canalis.

“Magnificent!” repeated Maxime.

“Magnificent!” cried Giraud.

“So! so! Right, Left, and Centre are unanimous!”

“All with a different meaning,” observed Maxime de Trailles. Maxime was the ministerial deputy.

“Yes,” said Canalis, laughing.

Though Canalis had already been a minister, he was at this moment tending toward the Right.

“Ah! but you had a fine triumph just now,” said Maxime to Canalis; “it was you who forced the minister into the tribune.”

“And made him lie like a charlatan,” returned Canalis.

“A worthy victory,” said the honest Giraud. “In his place what would you have done?”

“I should have lied.”

“It isn’t called lying,” said Maxime de Trailles; “it is called protecting the crown.”

So saying, he led Canalis away to a little distance.

“That’s a great orator,” said Leon to Giraud, pointing to Canalis.

“Yes and no,” replied the councillor of state. “A fine bass voice, and sonorous, but more of an artist in words than an orator. In short, he’s a fine instrument but he isn’t music, consequently he has not, and he never will have, the ear of the Chamber; in no case will he ever be master of the situation.”

Canalis and Maxime were returning toward the little group as Giraud, deputy of the Left Centre, pronounced this verdict. Maxime took Giraud by the arm and led him off, probably to make the same confidence he had just made Canalis.

“What an honest, upright fellow that is,” said Leon to Canalis, nodding towards Giraud.

“One of those upright fellows who kill administrators,” replied Canalis.

“Do you think him a good orator?”

“Yes and no,” replied Canalis; “he is wordy; he’s long-winded, a plodder in argument, and a good logician; but he doesn’t understand the higher logic, that of events and circumstances; consequently he has never had, and never will have, the ear of the Chamber.”

At the moment when Canalis uttered this judgment on Giraud, the latter was returning with Maxime to the group; and forgetting the presence of a stranger whose discretion was not known to them like that of Leon and Bixiou, he took Canalis by the hand in a very significant manner.

“Well,” he said, “I consent to what Monsieur de Trailles proposes. I’ll put the question to you in the Chamber, but I

shall do it with great severity.”

“Then we shall have the house with us, for a man of your weight and your eloquence is certain to have the ear of the Chamber,” said Canalis. “I’ll reply to you; but I shall do it sharply, to crush you.”

“You could bring about a change of the cabinet, for on such ground you can do what you like with the Chamber, and be master of the situation.”

“Maxime has trapped them both,” said Leon to his cousin; “that fellow is like a fish in water among the intrigues of the Chamber.”

“Who is he?” asked Gazonal.

“An ex-scoundrel who is now in a fair way to become an ambassador,” replied Bixiou.

“Giraud!” said Leon to the councillor of state, “don’t leave the Chamber without asking Rastignac what he promised to tell you about a suit you are to render a decision on two days hence. It concerns my cousin here; I’ll go and see you tomorrow morning early about it.”

The three friends followed the three deputies, at a distance, into the lobby.

Unconscious Comedians

“Cousin, look at those two men,” said Leon, pointing out to him a former minister and the leader of the Left Centre. “Those are two men who really have ‘the ear of the Chamber,’ and who are called in jest ministers of the department of the Opposition. They have the ear of the Chamber so completely that they are always pulling it.”

“It is four o’clock,” said Bixiou, “let us go back to the rue de Berlin.”

“Yes; you’ve now seen the heart of the government, cousin, and you must next be shown the ascarides, the taenia, the intestinal worm,—the republican, since I must needs name him,” said Leon.

When the three friends were once more packed into their hackney-coach, Gazonal looked at his cousin and Bixiou like a man who had a mind to launch a flood of oratorical and Southern bile upon the elements.

“I distrusted with all my might this great hussy of a town,” he rolled out in Southern accents; “but since this morning I despise her! The poor little province you think so petty is an honest girl; but Paris is a prostitute, a greedy, lying comedian; and I am very thankful not to be robbed of my skin in it.”

“The day is not over yet,” said Bixiou, sententiously, winking at Leon.

“And why do you complain in that stupid way,” said Leon, “of a prostitution to which you will owe the winning of your lawsuit? Do you think you are more virtuous than we, less of a comedian, less greedy, less liable to fall under some temptation, less conceited than those we have been making dance for you like puppets?”

“Try me!”

“Poor lad!” said Leon, shrugging his shoulders, “haven’t you already promised Rastignac your electoral influence?”

“Yes, because he was the only one who ridiculed himself.”

“Poor lad!” repeated Bixiou, “why slight me, who am always ridiculing myself? You are like a pug-dog barking at a tiger. Ha! if you saw us really ridiculing a man, you’d see that we can drive a sane man mad.”

This conversation brought Gazonal back to his cousin’s house, where the sight of luxury silenced him, and put an end to the discussion. Too late he perceived that Bixiou had been making him pose.

At half-past five o’clock, the moment when Leon de Lora

was making his evening toilet to the great wonderment of Gazonal, who counted the thousand and one superfluities of his cousin, and admired the solemnity of the valet as he performed his functions, the “pedicure of monsieur” was announced, and Publicola Masson, a little man fifty years of age, made his appearance, laid a small box of instruments on the floor, and sat down on a small chair opposite to Leon, after bowing to Gazonal and Bixiou.

“How are matters going with you?” asked Leon, delivering to Publicola one of his feet, already washed and prepared by the valet.

“I am forced to take two pupils,—two young fellows who, despairing of fortune, have quitted surgery for corporistics; they were actually dying of hunger; and yet they are full of talent.”

“I’m not asking you about pedestrian affairs, I want to know how you are getting on politically.”

Masson gave a glance at Gazonal, more eloquent than any species of question.

“Oh! you can speak out, that’s my cousin; in a way he belongs to you; he thinks himself legitimist.”

“Well! we are coming along, we are advancing! In five years from now Europe will be with us. Switzerland and Italy are fermenting finely; and when the occasion comes we are all ready. Here, in Paris, we have fifty thousand armed men, without counting two hundred thousand citizens who haven’t a penny to live upon.”

“Pooh,” said Leon, “how about the fortifications?”

“Pie-crust; we can swallow them,” replied Masson.

“In the first place, we sha’n’t let the cannon in, and, in the second, we’ve got a little machine more powerful than all the forts in the world,—a machine, due to a doctor, which cured more people during the short time we worked it than the doctors ever killed.”

“How you talk!” exclaimed Gazonal, whose flesh began to creep at Publicola’s air and manner.

“Ha! that’s the thing we rely on! We follow Saint-Just and Robespierre; but we’ll do better than they; they were timid, and you see what came of it; an emperor! the elder branch! the younger branch! The Montagnards didn’t lop the social tree enough.”

“Ah ca! you, who will be, they tell me, consul, or some-

Unconscious Comedians

thing of that kind, tribune perhaps, be good enough to remember,” said Bixiou, “that I have asked your protection for the last dozen years.”

“No harm shall happen to you; we shall need wags, and you can take the place of Barere,” replied the corn-doctor.

“And I?” said Leon.

“Ah, you! you are my client, and that will save you; for genius is an odious privilege, to which too much is accorded in France; we shall be forced to annihilate some of our greatest men in order to teach others to be simple citizens.”

The corn-cutter spoke with a semi-serious, semi-jesting air that made Gazonal shudder.

“So,” he said, “there’s to be no more religion?”

“No more religion *of the state*,” replied the pedicure, emphasizing the last words; “every man will have his own. It is very fortunate that the government is just now endowing convents; they’ll provide our funds. Everything, you see, conspires in our favour. Those who pity the peoples, who clamor on behalf of proletaries, who write works against the Jesuits, who busy themselves about the amelioration of no matter what,—the communists, the humanitarians, the philanthro-

pists, you understand,—all these people are our advanced guard. While we are storing gunpowder, they are making the tinder which the spark of a single circumstance will ignite.”

“But what do you expect will make the happiness of France?” cried Gazonal.

“Equality of citizens and cheapness of provisions. We mean that there will be no persons lacking anything, no millionaires, no suckers of blood and victims.”

“That’s it!—maximum and minimum,” said Gazonal.

“You’ve said it,” replied the corn-cutter, decisively.

“No more manufacturers?” asked Gazonal.

“The state will manufacture. We shall all be the usufructuaries of France; each will have his ration as on board ship; and all the world will work according to their capacity.”

“Ah!” said Gazonal, “and while awaiting the time when you can cut off the heads of aristocrats—”

“I cut their nails,” said the radical republican, putting up his tools and finishing the jest himself.

Then he bowed very politely and went away.

“Can this be possible in 1845?” cried Gazonal.

“If there were time we could show you,” said his cousin,

“all the personages of 1793, and you could talk with them. You have just seen Marat; well! we know Fouquier-Tinville, Collot d’Herbois, Robespierre, Chabot, Fouche, Barras; there is even a magnificent Madame Roland.”

“Well, the tragic is not lacking in your play,” said Gazonal.

“It is six o’clock. Before we take you to see Odry in ‘Les Saltimbanques’ to-night,” said Leon to Gazonal, “we must go and pay a visit to Madame Cadine,—an actress whom your committee-man Massol cultivates, and to whom you must therefore pay the most assiduous court.”

“And as it is all important that you conciliate that power, I am going to give you a few instructions,” said Bixiou. “Do you employ workwomen in your manufactory?”

“Of course I do,” replied Gazonal.

“That’s all I want to know,” resumed Bixiou. “You are not married, and you are a great—”

“Yes!” cried Gazonal, “you’ve guessed my strong point, I’m a great lover of women.”

“Well, then! if you will execute the little manoeuvre which I am about to prescribe for you, you will taste, without spending a farthing, the sweets to be found in the good graces of

an actress.”

When they reached the rue de la Victoire where the celebrated actress lived, Bixiou, who meditated a trick upon the distrustful provincial, had scarcely finished teaching him his role; but Gazonal was quick, as we shall see, to take a hint.

The three friends went up to the second floor of a rather handsome house, and found Madame Jenny Cadine just finishing dinner, for she played that night in an afterpiece at the Gymnase. Having presented Gazonal to this great power, Leon and Bixiou, in order to leave them alone together, made the excuse of looking at a piece of furniture in another room; but before leaving, Bixiou had whispered in the actress’s ear: “He is Leon’s cousin, a manufacturer, enormously rich; he wants to win a suit before the Council of State against his prefect, and he thinks it wise to fascinate you in order to get Massol on his side.”

All Paris knows the beauty of that young actress, and will therefore understand the stupefaction of the Southerner on seeing her. Though she had received him at first rather coldly, he became the object of her good graces before they had been many minutes alone together.

Unconscious Comedians

“How strange!” said Gazonal, looking round him disdainfully on the furniture of the salon, the door of which his accomplices had left half open, “that a woman like you should be allowed to live in such an ill-furnished apartment.”

“Ah, yes, indeed! but how can I help it? Massol is not rich; I am hoping he will be made a minister.”

“What a happy man!” cried Gazonal, heaving the sigh of a provincial.

“Good!” thought she. “I shall have new furniture, and get the better of Carabine.”

“Well, my dear!” said Leon, returning, “you’ll be sure to come to Carabine’s to-night, won’t you?—supper and lansquenet.”

“Will monsieur be there?” said Jenny Cadine, looking artlessly and graciously at Gazonal.

“Yes, madame,” replied the countryman, dazzled by such rapid success.

“But Massol will be there,” said Bixiou.

“Well, what of that?” returned Jenny. “Come, we must part, my treasures; I must go to the theatre.”

Gazonal gave his hand to the actress, and led her to the

citadine which was waiting for her; as he did so he pressed hers with such ardor that Jenny Cadine exclaimed, shaking her fingers: “Take care! I haven’t any others.”

When the three friends got back into their own vehicle, Gazonal endeavoured to seize Bixiou round the waist, crying out: “She bites! You’re a fine rascal!”

“So women say,” replied Bixiou.

At half-past eleven o’clock, after the play, another citadine took the trio to the house of Mademoiselle Seraphine Sinet, better known under the name of Carabine,—one of those pseudonyms which famous lorettes take, or which are given to them; a name which, in this instance, may have referred to the pigeons she had killed.

Carabine, now become almost a necessity for the banker du Tillet, deputy of the Left, lived in a charming house in the rue Saint-Georges. In Paris there are many houses the destination of which never varies; and the one we now speak of had already seen seven careers of courtesans. A broker had brought there, about the year 1827, Suzanne du Val-Noble, afterwards Madame Gaillard. In that house the famous Esther caused the Baron de Nucingen to commit the only follies of

his life. Florine, and subsequently, a person now called in jest “the late Madame Schontz,” had scintillated there in turn. Bored by his wife, du Tillet bought this modern little house, and there installed the celebrated Carabine, whose lively wit and cavalier manners and shameless brilliancy were a counterpoise to the dulness of domestic life, and the toils of finance and politics.

Whether du Tillet or Carabine were at home or not at home, supper was served, and splendidly served, for ten persons every day. Artists, men of letters, journalists, and the habitués of the house supped there when they pleased. After supper they gambled. More than one member of both Chambers came there to buy what Paris pays for by its weight in gold,—namely, the amusement of intercourse with anomalous untrammelled women, those meteors of the Parisian firmament who are so difficult to class. There wit reigns; for all can be said, and all is said. Carabine, a rival of the no less celebrated Malaga, had finally inherited the salon of Florine, now Madame Raoul Nathan, and of Madame Schontz, now wife of Chief-Justice du Ronceret.

As he entered, Gazonal made one remark only, but that

remark was both legitimate and legitimist: “It is finer than the Tuileries!” The satins, velvets, brocades, the gold, the objects of art that swarmed there, so filled the eyes of the wary provincial that at first he did not see Madame Jenny Cadine, in a toilet intended to inspire respect, who, concealed behind Carabine, watched his entrance observingly, while conversing with others.

“My dear child,” said Leon to Carabine, “this is my cousin, a manufacturer, who descended upon me from the Pyrenees this morning. He knows nothing of Paris, and he wants Massol to help him in a suit he has before the Council of State. We have therefore taken the liberty to bring him—his name is Gazonal—to supper, entreating you to leave him his full senses.”

“That’s as monsieur pleases; wine is dear,” said Carabine, looking Gazonal over from head to foot, and thinking him in no way remarkable.

Gazonal, bewildered by the toilets, the lights, the gilding, the chatter of the various groups whom he thought to be discussing him, could only manage to stammer out the words: “Madame—madame—is—very good.”

“What do you manufacture?” said the mistress of the house, laughing.

“Say laces and offer her some guipure,” whispered Bixiou in Gazonal’s ear.

“La-ces,” said Gazonal, perceiving that he would have to pay for his supper. “It will give me the greatest pleasure to offer you a dress—a scarf—a mantilla of my make.”

“Ah, three things! Well, you are nicer than you look to be,” returned Carabine.

“Paris has caught me!” thought Gazonal, now perceiving Jenny Cadine, and going up to her.

“And I,” said the actress, “what am I to have?”

“All I possess,” replied Gazonal, thinking that to offer all was to give nothing.

Massol, Claude Vignon, du Tillet, Maxime de Trailles, Nucingen, du Bruel, Malaga, Monsieur and Madame Gaillard, Vauvinet, and a crowd of other personages now entered.

After a conversation with the manufacturer on the subject of his suit, Massol, without making any promises, told him that the report was not yet written, and that citizens could always rely on the knowledge and the independence of the

Council of State. Receiving that cold and dignified response, Gazonal, in despair, thought it necessary to set about seducing the charming Jenny, with whom he was by this time in love. Leon de Lora and Bixiou left their victim in the hands of that most roguish and frolicsome member of the anomalous society,—for Jenny Cadine is the sole rival in that respect of the famous Dejazet.

At the supper-table, where Gazonal was fascinated by a silver service made by the modern Benvenuto Cellini, Froment-Meurice, the contents of which were worthy of the container, his mischievous friends were careful to sit at some distance from him; but they followed with cautious eye the manoeuvres of the clever actress, who, being attracted by the insidious hope of getting her furniture renewed, was playing her cards to take the provincial home with her. No sheep upon the day of the Fete-Dieu ever more meekly allowed his little Saint John to lead him along than Gazonal as he followed his siren.

Three days later, Leon and Bixiou, who had not seen Gazonal since that evening, went to his lodgings about two in the afternoon.

“Well, cousin,” said Leon, “the Council of State has decided in favour of your suit.”

“Maybe, but it is useless now, cousin,” said Gazonal, lifting a melancholy eye to his two friends. “I’ve become a republican.”

“What does that mean?” asked Leon.

“I haven’t anything left; not even enough to pay my lawyer,” replied Gazonal. “Madame Jenny Cadine has got notes of hand out of me to the amount of more money than all the property I own—”

“The fact is Cadine is rather dear; but—”

“Oh, but I didn’t get anything for my money,” said Gazonal. “What a woman! Well, I’ll own the provinces are not a match for Paris; I shall retire to La Trappe.”

“Good!” said Bixiou, “now you are reasonable. Come, recognize the majesty of the capital.”

“And of capital,” added Leon, holding out to Gazonal his notes of hand.

Gazonal gazed at the papers with a stupefied air.

“You can’t say now that we don’t understand the duties of hospitality; haven’t we educated you, saved you from pov-

erty, feasted you, and amused you?” said Bixiou.

“*And* fooled you,” added Leon, making the gesture of gamins to express the action of picking pockets.

Unconscious Comedians

Addendum

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Brambourg, Comte de
A Bachelor's Establishment

Cadine, Jenny
Cousin Betty
Beatrix
The Member for Arcis

Canalis, Constant-Cyr-Melchior, Baron de
Letters of Two Brides
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Modeste Mignon
The Magic Skin
Another Study of Woman
A Start in Life
Beatrix

The Member for Arcis

Collin, Jacqueline
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Cousin Betty

Fontaine, Madame
Cousin Pons

Gaillard, Theodore
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Beatrix
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Gaillard, Madame Theodore
Jealousies of a Country Town
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
A Bachelor's Establishment
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Beatrix

Balzac

Giraud, Leon

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Bachelor's Establishment

The Secrets of a Princess

Gobseck, Jean-Esther Van

Gobseck

Father Goriot

Cesar Birotteau

The Government Clerks

Lora, Leon de

A Bachelor's Establishment

A Start in Life

Pierre Grassou

Honorine

Cousin Betty

Beatrix

Lousteau, Etienne

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Bachelor's Establishment

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

A Daughter of Eve

Beatrix

The Muse of the Department

Cousin Betty

A Prince of Bohemia

A Man of Business

The Middle Classes

Marsay, Henri de

The Thirteen

Another Study of Woman

The Lily of the Valley

Father Goriot

Jealousies of a Country Town

Ursule Mirouet

A Marriage Settlement

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Letters of Two Brides

Unconscious Comedians

The Ball at Sceaux

Modest Mignon

The Secrets of a Princess

The Gondreville Mystery

A Daughter of Eve

Massol

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Magic Skin

A Daughter of Eve

Cousin Betty

Nathan, Raoul

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Secrets of a Princess

A Daughter of Eve

Letters of Two Brides

The Seamy Side of History

The Muse of the Department

A Prince of Bohemia

A Man of Business

Nathan, Madame Raoul

The Muse of the Department

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Government Clerks

A Bachelor's Establishment

Ursule Mirouet

Eugenie Grandet

The Imaginary Mistress

A Prince of Bohemia

A Daughter of Eve

Nourrisson, Madame

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Cousin Betty

Balzac

Nucingen, Baron Frederic de

The Firm of Nucingen

Father Goriot

Pierrette

Cesar Birotteau

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Another Study of Woman

The Secrets of a Princess

A Man of Business

Cousin Betty

The Muse of the Department

Rastignac, Eugene de

Father Goriot

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Ball at Sceaux

The Interdiction

A Study of Woman

Another Study of Woman

The Magic Skin

The Secrets of a Princess

A Daughter of Eve

The Gondreville Mystery

The Firm of Nucingen

Cousin Betty

The Member for Arcis

Ridal, Fulgence

A Bachelor's Establishment

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Ronceret, Madame Fabien du

Beatrix

The Muse of the Department

Cousin Betty

Schinner, Hippolyte

The Purse

A Bachelor's Establishment

Unconscious Comedians

Pierre Grassou

A Start in Life

Albert Savarus

The Government Clerks

Modeste Mignon

The Imaginary Mistress

Sinet, Seraphine

Cousin Betty

Stidmann

Modeste Mignon

Beatrice

The Member for Arcis

Cousin Betty

Cousin Pons

Tillet, Ferdinand du

Cesar Birotteau

The Firm of Nucingen

The Middle Classes

A Bachelor's Establishment

Pierrette

Melmoth Reconciled

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

The Secrets of a Princess

A Daughter of Eve

The Member for Arcis

Cousin Betty

Trailles, Comte Maxime de

Cesar Birotteau

Father Goriot

Gobseck

Ursule Mirouet

A Man of Business

The Member for Arcis

The Secrets of a Princess

Cousin Betty

The Member for Arcis

Beatrice

Vauvinet

Cousin Betty

Vignon, Claude

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Daughter of Eve

Honorine

Beatrix

Cousin Betty

**To return to the Electronic
Classics Series, go to
[http://www.hn.psu.edu/
faculty/jmanis/jimspdf.htm](http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jimspdf.htm)**

**To return to the Balzac page,
go to
[http://www.hn.psu.edu/
faculty/jmanis/balzac.htm](http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/balzac.htm)**