



The Brotherhood of Consolation

Honore de Balzac

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FIRST EPISODE. MADAME DE LA CHANTERIE

1. THE MALADY OF THE AGE

On a fine evening in the month of September, 1836, a man about thirty years of age was leaning on the parapet of that quay from which a spectator can look up the Seine from the Jardin des Plantes to Notre-Dame, and down, along the vast perspective of the river, to the Louvre. There is not another point of view to compare with it in the capital of ideas. We feel ourselves on the quarter-deck, as it were, of a gigantic vessel. We dream of Paris from the days of the Romans to those of the Franks, from the Normans to the Burgundians, the Middle-Ages, the Valois, Henri IV., Louis XIV., Napoleon, and Louis-Philippe. Vestiges are before us of all those sovereignties, in monuments that recall their memory. The cupola of Sainte-Genevieve towers above the Latin quarter. Behind us rises the noble apsis of the cathedral. The Hotel de Ville tells of revolutions; the Hotel-Dieu, of the miseries of Paris. After gazing at the splendors of the Louvre we can, by taking two steps, look down upon the rags and tatters of that ignoble nest of houses huddling between the quai de la Tournelle and the Hotel-Dieu,—a foul spot, which a modern municipality is endeavoring at the present moment to remove.

In 1836 this marvellous scene presented still another lesson to the eye: between the Parisian leaning on the parapet and the cathedral lay the "Terrain" (such was the ancient name of this barren spot), still strewn with the ruins of the Archiepiscopal Palace. When we contemplate from that quay so many commemorating scenes, when the soul has grasped the past as it does the present of this city of Paris, then indeed Religion seems to have alighted there as if to spread her hands above the sorrows of both banks and extend her arms from the faubourg Saint-Antoine to the faubourg Saint-Marceau. Let us hope that this sublime unity may be completed by the erection of an episcopal palace of the Gothic order; which shall replace the formless buildings now standing between the "Terrain," the rue d'Arcole, the cathedral, and the quai de la Cite.

This spot, the heart of ancient Paris, is the loneliest and most melancholy of regions. The waters of the Seine break there noisily, the cathedral casts its shadows at the setting of the sun. We can easily believe that serious thoughts must have filled the mind of a man afflicted with a moral malady as he leaned upon that parapet. Attracted perhaps by the harmony between his thoughts and those to which these diverse scenes gave birth, he rested his hands upon the coping and gave way to a double contemplation,—of Paris, and of himself! The shadows deepened, the lights shone out afar, but still he did not move, carried along as he was on the current of a meditation, such as comes to many of us, big with the future and rendered solemn by the past.

After a while he heard two persons coming towards him, whose voices had caught his attention on the bridge which joins the Ile de la Cite with the quai de la Tournelle. These persons no doubt thought themselves alone, and therefore spoke louder than they would have done in more frequented places. The voices betrayed a discussion which apparently, from the few words that reached the ear of the involuntary listener, related to a loan of money. Just as the pair approached the quay, one of them, dressed like a working man, left the other with a despairing gesture. The other stopped and called after him, saying:—

"You have not a sou to pay your way across the bridge. Take this," he added, giving the man a piece of money; "and remember, my friend, that God Himself is speaking to us when a good thought comes into our hearts."

This last remark made the dreamer at the parapet quiver. The man who made it little knew that, to use a proverbial expression, he was killing two birds with one stone, addressing two miseries,—a working life brought to despair, a suffering soul without a compass, the victim of what Panurge's sheep call progress, and what, in France, is called equality. The words, simple in themselves, became sublime from the tone of him who said them, in a voice that possesses a spell. Are there not, in fact, some calm and tender voices that produce upon us the same effect as a far horizon outlook?

By his dress the dreamer knew him to be a priest, and he saw by the last gleams of the fading twilight a white, august, worn face. The sight of a priest issuing from the beautiful cathedral of Saint-Etienne in Vienna, bearing the Extreme Unction to a dying person, determined the celebrated tragic author Werner to become a Catholic. Almost the same effect was produced upon the dreamer when he looked upon the man who had, all unknowing, given him comfort; on the threatening horizon of his future he saw a luminous space where shone the blue of ether, and he followed that light as the shepherds of the Gospel followed the voices that cried to them: "Christ, the Lord, is born this day."

The man who had said the beneficent words passed on by the wall of the cathedral, taking, as a result of chance, which often leads to great results, the direction of the street from which the dreamer came, and to which he was now returning, led by the faults of his life.

This dreamer was named Godefroid. Whoever reads this history will understand the reasons which lead the writer to use the Christian names only of some who are mentioned in it. The motives which led Godefroid, who lived in the quarter of the Chaussee-d'Antin, to the neighborhood of Notre-Dame at such an hour were as follows:—

The son of a retail shopkeeper, whose economy enabled him to lay by a sort of fortune, he was the sole object of ambition to his father and mother, who dreamed of seeing him a notary in Paris. For this reason, at the age of seven, he was sent to an institution, that of the Abbe Liautard,

to be thrown among children of distinguished families who, during the Empire, chose this school for the education of their sons in preference to the lyceums, where religion was too much overlooked. Social inequalities were not noticeable among schoolmates; but in 1821, his studies being ended, Godefroid, who was then with a notary, became aware of the distance that separated him from those with whom he had hitherto lived on familiar terms.

Obliged to go through the law school, he there found himself among a crowd of the sons of the bourgeoisie, who, without fortunes to inherit or hereditary distinctions, could look only to their own personal merits or to persistent toil. The hopes that his father and mother, then retired from business, placed upon him stimulated the youth's vanity without exciting his pride. His parents lived simply, like the thrifty Dutch, spending only one fourth of an income of twelve thousand francs. They intended their savings, together with half their capital, for the purchase of a notary's practice for their son. Subjected to the rule of this domestic economy, Godefroid found his immediate state so disproportioned to the visions of himself and his parents, that he grew discouraged. In some feeble natures discouragement turns to envy; others, in whom necessity, will, reflection, stand in place of talent, march straight and resolutely in the path traced out for bourgeois ambitions. Godefroid, on the contrary, revolted, wished to shine, tried several brilliant ways, and blinded his eyes. He endeavored to succeed; but all his efforts ended in proving the fact of his own impotence. Admitting at last the inequality that existed between his desires and his capacities, he began to hate all social supremacies, became a Liberal, and attempted to reach celebrity by writing a book; but he learned, to his cost, to regard talent as he did nobility. Having tried the law, the notariat, and literature, without distinguishing himself in any way, his mind now turned to the magistracy.

About this time his father died. His mother, who contented herself in her old age with two thousand francs a year, gave the rest of the fortune to Godefroid. Thus possessed, at the age of twenty-five, of ten thousand francs a year, he felt himself rich; and he was so, relatively to the past. Until then his life had been spent on acts without will, on wishes that were impotent; now, to advance with the age, to act, to play a part, he resolved to enter some career or find some connection that should further his fortunes. He first thought of journalism, which always opens its arms to any capital that may come in its way. To be the owner of a newspaper is to become a personage at once; such a man works intellect, and has all the gratifications of it and none of the labor. Nothing is more tempting to inferior minds than to be able to rise in this way on the talents of others. Paris has seen two or three parvenus of this kind,—men whose success is a disgrace, both to the epoch and to those who have lent them their shoulders.

In this sphere Godefroid was soon outdone by the brutal Machiavellianism of some, or by the lavish prodigality of others; by the fortunes of ambitious capitalists, or by the wit and shrewdness of editors. Meantime he was drawn into all the dissipations that arise from literary or political life, and he yielded to the temptations incurred by journalists behind the scenes. He soon found himself in bad company; but this experience taught him that his appearance was insignificant, that he had one shoulder higher than the other, without the inequality being redeemed by either malignancy or kindness of nature. Such were the truths these artists made him feel.

Small, ill-made, without superiority of mind or settled purpose, what chance was there for a man like that in an age when success in any career demands that the highest qualities of the mind be furthered by luck, or by tenacity of will which commands luck.

The revolution of 1830 stanchd Godefroid's wounds. He had the courage of hope, which is equal to that of despair. He obtained an appointment, like other obscure journalists, to a government situation in the provinces, where his liberal ideas, conflicting with the necessities of the new power, made him a troublesome instrument. Bitten with liberalism, he did not know, as cleverer men did, how to steer a course. Obedience to ministers he regarded as sacrificing his opinions. Besides, the government seemed to him to be disobeying the laws of its own origin. Godefroid declared for progress, where the object of the government was to maintain the *statu quo*. He returned to Paris almost poor, but faithful still to the doctrines of the Opposition.

Alarmed by the excesses of the press, more alarmed still by the attempted outrages of the republican party, he sought in retirement from the world the only life suitable for a being whose faculties were incomplete, and without sufficient force to bear up against the rough jostling of political life, the struggles and sufferings of which confer no credit,—a being, too, who was wearied with his many miscarriages; without friends, for friendship demands either striking merits or striking defects, and yet possessing a sensibility of soul more dreamy than profound. Surely a retired life was the course left for a young man whom pleasure had more than once misled,—whose heart was already aged by contact with a world as restless as it was disappointing.

His mother, who was dying in the peaceful village of Auteuil, recalled her son to live with her, partly to have him near her, and partly to put him in the way of finding an equable, tranquil happiness which might satisfy a soul like his. She had ended by judging Godefroid, finding him at twenty-eight with two-thirds of his fortune gone, his desires dulled, his pretended capacities extinct, his activity dead, his ambition humbled, and his hatred against all that reached legitimate success increased by his own shortcomings.

She tried to marry him to an excellent young girl, the only daughter of a retired merchant,—a woman well fitted to play the part of guardian to the sickened soul of her son. But the father had the business spirit which never abandons an old merchant, especially in matrimonial negotiations, and after a year of attentions and neighborly intercourse, Godefroid was not accepted. In the first place, his former career seemed to these worthy people profoundly immoral; then, during this very year, he had made still further inroads into his capital, as much to dazzle the parents as to please the daughter. This vanity, excusable as it was, caused his final rejection by the family, who held dissipation of property in holy horror, and who now discovered that in six years Godefroid had spent or lost a hundred and fifty thousand francs of his capital.

This blow struck the young man's already wounded heart the more deeply because the girl herself had no personal beauty. But, guided by his mother in judging her character, he had ended by recognizing in the woman he sought the great value of an earnest soul, and the vast advantages of a sound mind. He had grown accustomed to the face; he had studied the countenance; he loved the voice, the manners, the glance of that young girl. Having cast on this attachment the last stake of his life, the disappointment he endured was the bitterest of all. His mother died, and he found himself, he who had always desired luxury, with five thousand francs a year for his whole fortune, and with the certainty that never in his future life could he repair any loss whatsoever; for he felt himself incapable of the effort expressed in that terrible injunction, to *make his way*.

Weak, impatient grief cannot easily be shaken off. During his mourning, Godefroid tried the various chances and distractions of Paris; he dined at table-d'hotes; he made acquaintances heedlessly; he sought society, with no result but that of increasing his expenditures. Walking along the boulevards, he often suffered deeply at the sight of a mother walking with a marriageable daughter,—a sight which caused him as painful an emotion as he formerly felt when a young man passed him riding to the Bois, or driving in an elegant equipage. The sense of his impotence told him that he could never hope for the best of even secondary positions, nor for any easily won career; and he had heart enough to feel constantly wounded, mind enough to make in his own breast the bitterest of elegies.

Unfitted to struggle against circumstances, having an inward consciousness of superior faculties without the will that could put them in action, feeling himself incomplete, without force to undertake any great thing, without resistance against the tastes derived from his earlier life, his education, and his indolence, he was the victim of three maladies, any one of which would be enough to sicken of life a young man long alienated from religious faith.

Thus it was that Godefroid presented, even to the eye, the face that we meet so often in Paris that it might be called the type of the Parisian; in it we may see ambitions deceived or dead, inward wretchedness, hatred sleeping in the indolence of a life passed in watching the daily and external life of Paris, apathy which seeks stimulation, lament without talent, a mimicry of strength, the venom of past disappointments which excites to cynicism, and spits upon all that enlarges and grows, misconceives all necessary authority, rejoicing in its embarrassments, and will not hold to any social form. This Parisian malady is to the active and permanent impulse towards conspiracy in persons of energy what the sapwood is to the sap of the trees; it preserves it, feeds it, and conceals it.

2. OLD HOUSE, OLD PEOPLE, OLD CUSTOMS

Weary of himself, Godefroid attempted one day to give a meaning to his life, after meeting a former comrade who had been the tortoise in the fable, while he in earlier days had been the hare. In one of those conversations which arise when schoolmates meet again in after years, —a conversation held as they were walking together in the sunshine on the boulevard des Italiens,—he was startled to learn the success of a man endowed apparently with less gifts, less means, less fortune than himself; but who had bent his will each morning to the purpose resolved upon the night before. The sick soul then determined to imitate that simple action.

"Social existence is like the soil," his comrade had said to him; "it makes us a return in proportion to our efforts."

Godefroid was in debt. As a first test, a first task, he resolved to live in some retired place, and pay his debts from his income. To a man accustomed to spend six thousand francs when he had but five, it was no small undertaking to bring himself to live on two thousand. Every morning he studied advertisements, hoping to find the offer of some asylum where his expenses could be fixed, where he might have the solitude a man wants when he makes a return upon himself, examines himself, and endeavors to give himself a vocation. The manners and customs of bourgeois boarding-houses shocked his delicacy, sanitariums seemed to him unhealthy, and he was about to fall back into the fatal irresolution of persons without will, when the following advertisement met his eye:—

"To Let. A small lodging for seventy francs a month; suitable for an ecclesiastic. A quiet tenant desired. Board supplied; the rooms can be furnished at a moderate cost if mutually acceptable.

"Inquire of M. Millet, grocer, rue Chanoinesse, near Notre-Dame, where all further information can be obtained."

Attracted by a certain kindness concealed beneath these words, and the middle-class air which exhaled from them, Godefroid had, on the afternoon when we found him on the quay, called at four o'clock on the grocer, who told him that Madame de la Chanterie was then dining, and did not receive any one when at her meals. The lady, he said, was visible in the evening after seven o'clock, or in the morning between ten and

twelve. While speaking, Monsieur Millet examined Godefroid, and made him submit to what magistrates call the "first degree of interrogation."
"Was monsieur unmarried? Madame wished a person of regular habits; the gate was closed at eleven at the latest. Monsieur certainly seemed of an age to suit Madame de la Chanterie."

"How old do you think me?" asked Godefroid.

"About forty!" replied the grocer.

This ingenuous answer threw the young man into a state of misanthropic gloom. He went off and dined at a restaurant on the quai de la Tournelle, and afterwards went to the parapet to contemplate Notre-Dame at the moment when the fires of the setting sun were rippling and breaking about the manifold buttresses of the apsis.

The young man was floating between the promptings of despair and the moving voice of religious harmonies sounding in the bell of the cathedral when, amid the shadows, the silence, the half-veiled light of the moon, he heard the words of the priest. Though, like most of the sons of our century, he was far from religious, his sensibilities were touched by those words, and he returned to the rue Chanoinesse, although he had almost made up his mind not to do so.

The priest and Godefroid were both surprised when they entered together the rue Massilon, which is opposite to the small north portal of the cathedral, and turned together into the rue Chanoinesse, at the point where, towards the rue de la Colombe, it becomes the rue des Marmousets. When Godefroid stopped before the arched portal of Madame de la Chanterie's house, the priest turned towards him and examined him by the light of the hanging street-lamp, probably one of the last to disappear from the heart of old Paris.

"Have you come to see Madame de la Chanterie, monsieur?" said the priest.

"Yes," replied Godefroid. "The words I heard you say to that workman show me that, if you live here, this house must be salutary for the soul."

"Then you were a witness of my defeat," said the priest, raising the knocker of the door, "for I did not succeed."

"I thought, on the contrary, it was the workman who did not succeed; he demanded money energetically."

"Alas!" replied the priest, "one of the great evils of revolutions in France is that each offers a fresh premium to the ambitions of the lower classes. To get out of his condition, to make his fortune (which is regarded to-day as the only social standard), the working-man throws himself into some of those monstrous associations which, if they do not succeed, ought to bring the speculators to account before human justice. This is what trusts often lead to."

The porter opened a heavy door. The priest said to Godefroid: "Monsieur has perhaps come about the little suite of rooms?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The priest and Godefroid then crossed a wide courtyard, at the farther end of which loomed darkly a tall house flanked by a square tower which rose above the roof, and appeared to be in a dilapidated condition. Whoever knows the history of Paris, knows that the soil before and around the cathedral has been so raised that there is not a vestige now of the twelve steps which formerly led up to it. To-day the base of the columns of the porch is on a level with the pavement; consequently what was once the ground-floor of the house of which we speak is now its cellar. A portico, reached by a few steps, leads to the entrance of the tower, in which a spiral stairway winds up round a central shaft carved with a grape-vine. This style, which recalls the stairways of Louis XII. at the chateau of Blois, dates from the fourteenth century. Struck by these and other evidences of antiquity, Godefroid could not help saying, with a smile, to the priest: "This tower is not of yesterday."

"It sustained, they say, an assault of the Normans, and probably formed part of the first palace of the kings of Paris; but, according to actual tradition, it was certainly the dwelling of the famous Canon Fulbert, the uncle of Heloise."

As he ended these words, the priest opened the door of the apartment which appeared now to be the ground-floor of the house, but was in reality towards both the front and back courtyard (for there was a small interior court) on the first floor.

In the antechamber a maid-servant, wearing a cambric cap with fluted frills for its sole decoration, was knitting by the light of a little lamp. She stuck her needles into her hair, held her work in her hand, and rose to open the door of a salon which looked out on the inner court. The dress of the woman was somewhat like that of the Sisters of Mercy.

"Madame, I bring you a tenant," said the priest, ushering Godefroid into the salon, where the latter saw three persons sitting in armchairs near Madame de la Chanterie.

These three persons rose; the mistress of the house rose; then, when the priest had drawn up another armchair for Godefroid, and when the future tenant had seated himself in obedience to a gesture of Madame de la Chanterie, accompanied by the old-fashioned words, "Be seated, monsieur," the man of the boulevards fancied himself at some enormous distance from Paris,—in lower Brittany or the wilds of Canada.

Silence has perhaps its own degrees. Godefroid, already penetrated with the silence of the rues Massillon and Chanoinesse, where two carriages do not pass in a month, and grasped by the silence of the courtyard and the tower, may have felt that he had reached the very heart of silence in this still salon, guarded by so many old streets, old courts, old walls.

This part of the Ile, which is called "the Cloister," has preserved the character of all cloisters; it is damp, cold, and monastically silent even at the noisiest hours of the day. It will be remarked, also, that this portion

of the Cite, crowded between the flank of Notre-Dame and the river, faces the north, and is always in the shadow of the cathedral. The east winds swirl through it unopposed, and the fogs of the Seine are caught and retained by the black walls of the old metropolitan church. No one will therefore be surprised at the sensations Godefroid felt when he found himself in this old dwelling, in presence of four silent human beings, who seemed as solemn as the things which surrounded them. He did not look about him, being seized with curiosity as to Madame de la Chanterie, whose name was already a puzzle to him. This lady was evidently a person of another epoch, not to say of another world. Her face was placid, its tones both soft and cold; the nose aquiline; the forehead full of sweetness; the eyes brown; the chin double; and all were framed in silvery white hair. Her gown could only be called by its ancient name of "fourreau," so tightly was she sheathed within it, after the fashion of the eighteenth century. The material—a brown silk, with very fine and multiplied green lines—seemed also of that period. The bodice, which was one with the skirt, was partly hidden beneath a mantle of *poult-de-soie* edged with black lace, and fastened on the bosom by a brooch enclosing a miniature. Her feet, in black velvet boots, rested on a cushion. Madame de la Chanterie, like her maid, was knitting a stocking, and she, too, had a needle stuck through her white curls beneath the lace of her cap.

"Have you seen Monsieur Millet?" she said to Godefroid, in the head voice peculiar to the dowagers of the faubourg Saint-Germain, observing that her visitor seemed confused, and as if to put the words into his mouth.

"Yes, madame."

"I fear that the apartment will scarcely suit you," she said, noticing the elegance and newness of his clothes.

Godefroid was wearing polished leather boots, yellow gloves, handsome studs, and a very pretty gold chain passed through the buttonhole of his waistcoat of black silk with blue flowers. Madame de la Chanterie took a little silver whistle from her pocket and blew it. The serving-woman came.

"Manon, my child, show this gentleman the apartment. Would you, my dear vicar, be so kind as to accompany him?" she said, addressing the priest. "If by chance," she added, rising and again looking at Godefroid, "the apartment suits you, we will talk of the conditions."

Godefroid bowed and went out. He heard the rattle of keys which Manon took from a drawer, and he saw her light the candle in a large brass candlestick. Manon went first, without uttering a word. When Godefroid found himself again on the staircase, winding up two flights, he doubted the reality of life, he dreamed awake, he saw with his eyes the fantastic world of romances he had read in his idle hours. Any Parisian leaving, as he did, the modern quarter, with its luxury of houses and furniture, the

glitter of its restaurants and theatres, the tumult and movement of the heart of Paris, would have shared his feeling.

The candle carried by the woman feebly lighted the winding stair, where spiders swung their draperies gray with dust. Manon wore a petticoat with heavy plaits of a coarse woollen stuff; the bodice was square before and square behind, and all her clothes seemed to hang together. When she reached the second floor, which, it will be remembered, was actually the third, Manon stopped, turned a key in an ancient lock, and opened a door painted in a coarse imitation of mahogany.

"This is it," she said, entering first.

Was it a miser, was it an artist dying in penury, was it a cynic to whom the world was naught, or some religious soul detached from life, who had occupied this apartment? That triple question might well be asked by one who breathed the odor of that poverty, who saw the greasy spots upon the papers yellow with smoke, the blackened ceilings, the dusty windows with their casement panes, the discolored floor-bricks, the wainscots layered with a sort of sticky glaze. A damp chill came from the chimneys with their mantels of painted stone, surmounted by mirrors in panels of the style of the seventeenth century. The apartment was square, like the house, and looked out upon the inner court, which could not now be seen because of the darkness.

"Who has lived here?" asked Godefroid of the priest.

"A former councillor of the parliament, a great-uncle of madame, Monsieur de Boisfrelon. After the Revolution he fell into dotage; but he did not die until 1832, at the age of ninety-six. Madame could not at first make up her mind to let his rooms to a stranger, but she finds she cannot afford to lose the rent."

"Madame will have the apartment cleaned and furnished in a manner to satisfy monsieur," said Manon.

"That will depend on the arrangement you make with her," said the priest. "You have here a fine parlor, a large sleeping-room and closet, and those little rooms in the angle will make an excellent study. It is the same arrangement as in my apartment below, also in the one overhead."

"Yes," said Manon, "Monsieur Alain's apartment is just like this, only his has a view of the tower."

"I think I had better see the rooms by daylight," said Godefroid, timidly.

"Perhaps so," said Manon.

The priest and Godefroid went downstairs, leaving the woman to lock the doors. When they re-entered the salon, Godefroid, who was getting inured to the surroundings, looked about him while discoursing with Madame de la Chanterie, and examined the persons and things there present.

The salon had curtains at its windows of old red damask, with lambrequins, tied back at the sides with silken cords. The red-tiled floor showed at the edges of an old tapestry carpet too small to cover the

whole room. The woodwork was painted gray. The plastered ceiling, divided in two parts by a heavy beam which started from the fireplace, seemed a concession tardily made to luxury. Armchairs, with their woodwork painted white, were covered with tapestry. A paltry clock, between two copper-gilt candlesticks, decorated the mantel-shelf. Beside Madame de la Chanterie was an ancient table with spindle legs, on which lay her balls of worsted in a wicker basket. A hydrostatic lamp lighted the scene. The four men, who were seated there, silent, immovable, like bronze statues, had evidently stopped their conversation with Madame de la Chanterie when they heard the stranger returning. They all had cold, discreet faces, in keeping with the room, the house, the quarter of the town.

Madame de la Chanterie admitted the justice of Godefroid's observations; but told him that she did not wish to make any change until she knew the intentions of her lodger, or rather her boarder. If he would conform to the customs of the house he could become her boarder; but these customs were widely different from those of Paris. Life in the rue Chanoinesse was like provincial life: the lodger must always be in by ten o'clock at night; they disliked noise; and could have no women or children to break up their customary habits. An ecclesiastic might conform to these ways. Madame de la Chanterie desired, above all, some one of simple life, who would not be exacting; she could afford to put only the strictest necessaries into the apartment. Monsieur Alain (here she designated one of the four men present) was satisfied, and she would do for a new tenant just as she did for the others.

"I do not think," said the priest, "that monsieur is inclined to enter our convent."

"Eh! why not?" said Monsieur Alain; "we are all well off here; we have nothing to complain of."

"Madame," said Godefroid, rising, "I shall have the honor of calling again to-morrow."

Though he was a young man, the four old men and Madame de la Chanterie rose, and the vicar accompanied him to the portico. A whistle sounded. At that signal the porter came with a lantern, guided Godefroid to the street, and closed behind him the enormous yellow door,—ponderous as that of a prison, and decorated with arabesque ironwork of a remote period that was difficult to determine. Though Godefroid got into a cabriolet, and was soon rolling into the living, lighted, glowing regions of Paris, what he had seen still appeared to him a dream, and his impressions, as he made his way along the boulevard des Italiens, had already the remoteness of a memory. He asked himself, "Shall I to-morrow find those people there?"
