

***HONORÉ
DE BALZAC***



***THE PHYSIOLOGY
OF MARRIAGE,
COMPLETE***

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The Physiology of Marriage, Complete

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INTRODUCTION

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“Marriage is not an institution of nature. The family in the east is entirely different from the family in the west. Man is the servant of nature, and the institutions of society are grafts, not spontaneous growths of nature. Laws are made to suit manners, and manners vary.

“Marriage must therefore undergo the gradual development towards perfection to which all human affairs submit.”

These words, pronounced in the presence of the Conseil d’Etat by Napoleon during the discussion of the civil code, produced a profound impression upon the author of this book; and perhaps unconsciously he received the suggestion of this work, which he now presents to the public. And indeed at the period during which, while still in his youth, he studied French law, the word ADULTERY made a singular impression upon him. Taking, as it did, a prominent place in the code, this word never occurred to his mind without conjuring up its mournful train of consequences. Tears, shame, hatred, terror, secret crime, bloody wars, families without a head, and social misery rose like a sudden line of phantoms before him when he read the solemn word ADULTERY! Later on, when he became acquainted with the most cultivated circles of society, the author perceived that the rigor of marriage laws was very generally modified by adultery. He found that the number of unhappy homes was larger than that of happy marriages. In fact, he was the first to notice that of all human sciences

that which relates to marriage was the least progressive. But this was the observation of a young man; and with him, as with so many others, this thought, like a pebble flung into the bosom of a lake, was lost in the abyss of his tumultuous thoughts. Nevertheless, in spite of himself the author was compelled to investigate, and eventually there was gathered within his mind, little by little, a swarm of conclusions, more or less just, on the subject of married life. Works like the present one are formed in the mind of the author with as much mystery as that with which truffles grow on the scented plains of Perigord. Out of the primitive and holy horror which adultery caused him and the investigation which he had thoughtlessly made, there was born one morning a trifling thought in which his ideas were formulated. This thought was really a satire upon marriage. It was as follows: A husband and wife found themselves in love with each other for the first time after twenty-seven years of marriage.

He amused himself with this little axiom and passed a whole week in delight, grouping around this harmless epigram the crowd of ideas which came to him unconsciously and which he was astonished to find that he possessed. His humorous mood yielded at last to the claims of serious investigation. Willing as he was to take a hint, the author returned to his habitual idleness. Nevertheless, this slight germ of science and of joke grew to perfection, unfostered, in the fields of thought. Each phase of the work which had been condemned by others took root and gathered strength, surviving like the slight branch of a tree which, flung upon the sand by a winter's storm, finds itself

covered at morning with white and fantastic icicles, produced by the caprices of nightly frosts. So the sketch lived on and became the starting point of myriad branching moralizations. It was like a polypus which multiplies itself by generation. The feelings of youth, the observations which a favorable opportunity led him to make, were verified in the most trifling events of his after life. Soon this mass of ideas became harmonized, took life, seemed, as it were, to become a living individual and moved in the midst of those domains of fancy, where the soul loves to give full rein to its wild creations. Amid all the distractions of the world and of life, the author always heard a voice ringing in his ears and mockingly revealing the secrets of things at the very moment he was watching a woman as she danced, smiled, or talked. Just as Mephistopheles pointed out to Faust in that terrific assemblage at the Brocken, faces full of frightful augury, so the author was conscious in the midst of the ball of a demon who would strike him on the shoulder with a familiar air and say to him: "Do you notice that enchanting smile? It is a grin of hatred." And then the demon would strut about like one of the captains in the old comedies of Hardy. He would twitch the folds of a lace mantle and endeavor to make new the fretted tinsel and spangles of its former glory. And then like Rabelais he would burst into loud and unrestrainable laughter, and would trace on the street-wall a word which might serve as a pendant to the "Drink!" which was the only oracle obtainable from the heavenly bottle. This literary Trilby would often appear seated on piles of books, and with hooked fingers would point out with a grin of malice two yellow volumes whose title dazzled the

eyes. Then when he saw he had attracted the author's attention he spelt out, in a voice alluring as the tones of a harmonica, *Physiology of Marriage!* But, almost always he appeared at night during my dreams, gentle as some fairy guardian; he tried by words of sweetness to subdue the soul which he would appropriate to himself. While he attracted, he also scoffed at me; supple as a woman's mind, cruel as a tiger, his friendliness was more formidable than his hatred, for he never yielded a caress without also inflicting a wound. One night in particular he exhausted the resources of his sorceries, and crowned all by a last effort. He came, he sat on the edge of the bed like a young maiden full of love, who at first keeps silence but whose eyes sparkle, until at last her secret escapes her.

"This," said he, "is a prospectus of a new life-buoy, by means of which one can pass over the Seine dry-footed. This other pamphlet is the report of the Institute on a garment by wearing which we can pass through flames without being burnt. Have you no scheme which can preserve marriage from the miseries of excessive cold and excessive heat? Listen to me! Here we have a book on the *Art* of preserving foods; on the *Art* of curing smoky chimneys; on the *Art* of making good mortar; on the *Art* of tying a cravat; on the *Art* of carving meat."

In a moment he had named such a prodigious number of books that the author felt his head go round.

"These myriads of books," says he, "have been devoured by readers; and while everybody does not build a house, and some grow hungry, and others have no cravat, or no

fire to warm themselves at, yet everybody to some degree is married. But come look yonder.”

He waved his hand, and appeared to bring before me a distant ocean where all the books of the world were tossing up and down like agitated waves. The octodecimos bounded over the surface of the water. The octavos as they were flung on their way uttered a solemn sound, sank to the bottom, and only rose up again with great difficulty, hindered as they were by duodecimos and works of smaller bulk which floated on the top and melted into light foam. The furious billows were crowded with journalists, proof-readers, paper-makers, apprentices, printers’ agents, whose hands alone were seen mingled in the confusion among the books. Millions of voices rang in the air, like those of schoolboys bathing. Certain men were seen moving hither and thither in canoes, engaged in fishing out the books, and landing them on the shore in the presence of a tall man, of a disdainful air, dressed in black, and of a cold, unsympathetic expression. The whole scene represented the libraries and the public. The demon pointed out with his finger a skiff freshly decked out with all sails set and instead of a flag bearing a placard. Then with a peal of sardonic laughter, he read with a thundering voice: *Physiology of Marriage*.

The author fell in love, the devil left him in peace, for he would have undertaken more than he could handle if he had entered an apartment occupied by a woman. Several years passed without bringing other torments than those of love, and the author was inclined to believe that he had been healed of one infirmity by means of another which took its place. But one evening he found himself in a Parisian

drawing-room where one of the men among the circle who stood round the fireplace began the conversation by relating in a sepulchral voice the following anecdote:

A peculiar thing took place at Ghent while I was staying there. A lady ten years a widow lay on her bed attacked by mortal sickness. The three heirs of collateral lineage were waiting for her last sigh. They did not leave her side for fear that she would make a will in favor of the convent of Beguins belonging to the town. The sick woman kept silent, she seemed dozing and death appeared to overspread very gradually her mute and livid face. Can't you imagine those three relations seated in silence through that winter midnight beside her bed? An old nurse is with them and she shakes her head, and the doctor sees with anxiety that the sickness has reached its last stage, and holds his hat in one hand and with the other makes a sign to the relations, as if to say to them: "I have no more visits to make here." Amid the solemn silence of the room is heard the dull rustling of a snow-storm which beats upon the shutters. For fear that the eyes of the dying woman might be dazzled by the light, the youngest of the heirs had fitted a shade to the candle which stood near that bed so that the circle of light scarcely reached the pillow of the deathbed, from which the sallow countenance of the sick woman stood out like a figure of Christ imperfectly gilded and fixed upon a cross of tarnished silver. The flickering rays shed by the blue flames of a crackling fire were therefore the sole light of this sombre chamber, where the denouement of a drama was just ending. A log suddenly rolled from the fire onto the floor, as if presaging some catastrophe. At the sound of it the sick

woman quickly rose to a sitting posture. She opened two eyes, clear as those of a cat, and all present eyed her in astonishment. She saw the log advance, and before any one could check an unexpected movement which seemed prompted by a kind of delirium, she bounded from her bed, seized the tongs and threw the coal back into the fireplace. The nurse, the doctor, the relations rushed to her assistance; they took the dying woman in their arms. They put her back in bed; she laid her head upon her pillow and after a few minutes died, keeping her eyes fixed even after her death upon that plank in the floor which the burning brand had touched. Scarcely had the Countess Van Ostroem expired when the three co-heirs exchanged looks of suspicion, and thinking no more about their aunt, began to examine the mysterious floor. As they were Belgians their calculations were as rapid as their glances. An agreement was made by three words uttered in a low voice that none of them should leave the chamber. A servant was sent to fetch a carpenter. Their collateral hearts beat excitedly as they gathered round the treasured flooring, and watched their young apprentice giving the first blow with his chisel. The plank was cut through.

“My aunt made a sign,” said the youngest of the heirs.

“No; it was merely the quivering light that made it appear so,” replied the eldest, who kept one eye on the treasure and the other on the corpse.

The afflicted relations discovered exactly on the spot where the brand had fallen a certain object artistically enveloped in a mass of plaster.

“Proceed,” said the eldest of the heirs.

The chisel of the apprentice then brought to light a human head and some odds and ends of clothing, from which they recognized the count whom all the town believed to have died at Java, and whose loss had been bitterly deplored by his wife.

The narrator of this old story was a tall spare man, with light eyes and brown hair, and the author thought he saw in him a vague resemblance to the demon who had before this tormented him; but the stranger did not show the cloven foot. Suddenly the word ADULTERY sounded in the ears of the author; and this word woke up in his imagination the most mournful countenances of that procession which before this had streamed by on the utterance of the magic syllables. From that evening he was haunted and persecuted by dreams of a work which did not yet exist; and at no period of his life was the author assailed with such delusive notions about the fatal subject of this book. But he bravely resisted the fiend, although the latter referred the most unimportant incidents of life to this unknown work, and like a customhouse officer set his stamp of mockery upon every occurrence.

Some days afterwards the author found himself in the company of two ladies. The first of them had been one of the most refined and the most intellectual women of Napoleon's court. In his day she occupied a lofty position, but the sudden appearance of the Restoration caused her downfall; she became a recluse. The second, who was young and beautiful, was at that time living at Paris the life of a fashionable woman. They were friends, because, the one being forty and the other twenty-two years old, they

were seldom rivals on the same field. The author was considered quite insignificant by the first of the two ladies, and since the other soon discovered this, they carried on in his presence the conversation which they had begun in a frank discussion of a woman's lot.

"Have you noticed, dear, that women in general bestow their love only upon a fool?"

"What do you mean by that, duchess? And how can you make your remark fit in with the fact that they have an aversion for their husbands?"

"These women are absolute tyrants!" said the author to himself. "Has the devil again turned up in a mob cap?"

"No, dear, I am not joking," replied the duchess, "and I shudder with fear for myself when I coolly consider people whom I have known in other times. Wit always has a sparkle which wounds us, and the man who has much of it makes us fear him perhaps, and if he is a proud man he will be capable of jealousy, and is not therefore to our taste. In fact, we prefer to raise a man to our own height rather than to have to climb up to his. Talent has great successes for us to share in, but the fool affords enjoyment to us; and we would sooner hear said 'that is a very handsome man' than to see our lover elected to the Institute."

"That's enough, duchess! You have absolutely startled me."

And the young coquette began to describe the lovers about whom all the women of her acquaintance raved; there was not a single man of intellect among them.

"But I swear by my virtue," she said, "their husbands are worth more."

“But these are the sort of people they choose for husbands,” the duchess answered gravely.

“Tell me,” asked the author, “is the disaster which threatens the husband in France quite inevitable?”

“It is,” replied the duchess, with a smile; “and the rage which certain women breathe out against those of their sex, whose unfortunate happiness it is to entertain a passion, proves what a burden to them is their chastity. If it were not for fear of the devil, one would be Lais; another owes her virtue to the dryness of her selfish heart; a third to the silly behaviour of her first lover; another still—”

The author checked this outpour of revelation by confiding to the two ladies his design for the work with which he had been haunted; they smiled and promised him their assistance. The youngest, with an air of gaiety suggested one of the first chapters of the undertaking, by saying that she would take upon herself to prove mathematically that women who are entirely virtuous were creatures of reason.

When the author got home he said at once to his demon: “Come! I am ready; let us sign the compact.”

But the demon never returned.

If the author has written here the biography of his book he has not acted on the prompting of fatuity. He relates facts which may furnish material for the history of human thought, and will without doubt explain the work itself. It may perhaps be important to certain anatomists of thought to be told that the soul is feminine. Thus although the author made a resolution not to think about the book which he was forced to write, the book, nevertheless, was

completed. One page of it was found on the bed of a sick man, another on the sofa of a boudoir. The glances of women when they turned in the mazes of a waltz flung to him some thoughts; a gesture or a word filled his disdainful brain with others. On the day when he said to himself, "This work, which haunts me, shall be achieved," everything vanished; and like the three Belgians, he drew forth a skeleton from the place over which he had bent to seize a treasure.

A mild, pale countenance took the place of the demon who had tempted me; it wore an engaging expression of kindness; there were no sharp pointed arrows of criticism in its lineaments. It seemed to deal more with words than with ideas, and shrank from noise and clamor. It was perhaps the household genius of the honorable deputies who sit in the centre of the Chamber.

"Wouldn't it be better," it said, "to let things be as they are? Are things so bad? We ought to believe in marriage as we believe in the immortality of the soul; and you are certainly not making a book to advertise the happiness of marriage. You will surely conclude that among a million of Parisian homes happiness is the exception. You will find perhaps that there are many husbands disposed to abandon their wives to you; but there is not a single son who will abandon his mother. Certain people who are hit by the views which you put forth will suspect your morals and will misrepresent your intentions. In a word, in order to handle social sores, one ought to be a king, or a first consul at least."

Reason, although it appeared under a form most pleasing to the author, was not listened to; for in the distance Folly tossed the coxcomb of Panurge, and the author wished to seize it; but, when he tried to catch it, he found that it was as heavy as the club of Hercules. Moreover, the cure of Meudon adorned it in such fashion that a young man who was less pleased with producing a good work than with wearing fine gloves could not even touch it.

“Is our work completed?” asked the younger of the two feminine assistants of the author.

“Alas! madame,” I said, “will you ever requite me for all the hatreds which that work will array against me?”

She waved her hand, and then the author replied to her doubt by a look of indifference.

“What do you mean? Would you hesitate? You must publish it without fear. In the present day we accept a book more because it is in fashion than because it has anything in it.”

Although the author does not here represent himself as anything more than the secretary of two ladies, he has in compiling their observations accomplished a double task. With regard to marriage he has here arranged matters which represent what everybody thinks but no one dares to say; but has he not also exposed himself to public displeasure by expressing the mind of the public? Perhaps, however, the eclecticism of the present essay will save it from condemnation. All the while that he indulges in banter the author has attempted to popularize certain ideas which are particularly consoling. He has almost always endeavored to lay bare the hidden springs which move the human soul.

While undertaking to defend the most material interests of man, judging them or condemning them, he will perhaps bring to light many sources of intellectual delight. But the author does not foolishly claim always to put forth his pleasantries in the best of taste; he has merely counted upon the diversity of intellectual pursuits in expectation of receiving as much blame as approbation. The subject of his work was so serious that he is constantly launched into anecdote; because at the present day anecdotes are the vehicle of all moral teaching, and the anti-narcotic of every work of literature. In literature, analysis and investigation prevail, and the wearying of the reader increases in proportion with the egotism of the writer. This is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall a book, and the present author has been quite aware of it. He has therefore so arranged the topics of this long essay as to afford resting places for the reader. This method has been successfully adopted by a writer, who produced on the subject of Taste a work somewhat parallel to that which is here put forth on the subject of Marriage. From the former the present writer may be permitted to borrow a few words in order to express a thought which he shares with the author of them. This quotation will serve as an expression of homage to his predecessor, whose success has been so swiftly followed by his death:

“When I write and speak of myself in the singular, this implies a confidential talk with the reader; he can examine the statement, discuss it, doubt and even ridicule it; but when I arm myself with the formidable WE, I become the

professor and demand submission.”—Brillat-Savarin, Preface to the *Physiology of Taste*.

DECEMBER 5, 1829.

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FIRST PART. A GENERAL CONSIDERATION.

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We will declaim against stupid laws until they are changed, and in the meantime blindly submit to them.—Diderot, *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville*.

MEDITATION I. THE SUBJECT.

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Physiology, what must I consider your meaning?

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Is not your object to prove that marriage unites for life two beings who do not know each other?

That life consists in passion, and that no passion survives marriage?

That marriage is an institution necessary for the preservation of society, but that it is contrary to the laws of nature?

That divorce, this admirable release from the misfortunes of marriage, should with one voice be reinstated?

That, in spite of all its inconveniences, marriage is the foundation on which property is based?

That it furnishes invaluable pledges for the security of government?

That there is something touching in the association of two human beings for the purpose of supporting the pains of life?

That there is something ridiculous in the wish that one and the same thoughts should control two wills?

That the wife is treated as a slave?

That there has never been a marriage entirely happy?

That marriage is filled with crimes and that the known murders are not the worst?

That fidelity is impossible, at least to the man?

That an investigation if it could be undertaken would prove that in the transmission of patrimonial property there was more risk than security?

That adultery does more harm than marriage does good?

That infidelity in a woman may be traced back to the earliest ages of society, and that marriage still survives this perpetuation of treachery?

That the laws of love so strongly link together two human beings that no human law can put them asunder?

That while there are marriages recorded on the public registers, there are others over which nature herself has presided, and they have been dictated either by the mutual memory of thought, or by an utter difference of mental disposition, or by corporeal affinity in the parties named; that it is thus that heaven and earth are constantly at variance?

That there are many husbands fine in figure and of superior intellect whose wives have lovers exceedingly ugly, insignificant in appearance or stupid in mind?

All these questions furnish material for books; but the books have been written and the questions are constantly reappearing.

Physiology, what must I take you to mean?

Do you reveal new principles? Would you pretend that it is the right thing that woman should be made common? Lycurgus and certain Greek peoples as well as Tartars and savages have tried this.

Can it possibly be right to confine women? The Ottomans once did so, and nowadays they give them their liberty.

Would it be right to marry young women without providing a dowry and yet exclude them from the right of succeeding to property? Some English authors and some moralists have proved that this with the admission of divorce is the surest method of rendering marriage happy.

Should there be a little Hagar in each marriage establishment? There is no need to pass a law for that. The provision of the code which makes an unfaithful wife liable

to a penalty in whatever place the crime be committed, and that other article which does not punish the erring husband unless his concubine dwells beneath the conjugal roof, implicitly admits the existence of mistresses in the city.

Sanchez has written a dissertation on the penal cases incident to marriage; he has even argued on the illegitimacy and the opportuneness of each form of indulgence; he has outlined all the duties, moral, religious and corporeal, of the married couple; in short his work would form twelve volumes in octavo if the huge folio entitled *De Matrimonio* were thus represented.

Clouds of lawyers have flung clouds of treatises over the legal difficulties which are born of marriage. There exist several works on the judicial investigation of impotency.

Legions of doctors have marshaled their legions of books on the subject of marriage in its relation to medicine and surgery.

In the nineteenth century the *Physiology of Marriage* is either an insignificant compilation or the work of a fool written for other fools; old priests have taken their balances of gold and have weighed the most trifling scruples of the marriage consciences; old lawyers have put on their spectacles and have distinguished between every kind of married transgression; old doctors have seized the scalpel and drawn it over all the wounds of the subject; old judges have mounted to the bench and have decided all the cases of marriage dissolution; whole generations have passed unuttered cries of joy or of grief on the subject, each age has cast its vote into the urn; the Holy Spirit, poets and writers have recounted everything from the days of Eve to

the Trojan war, from Helen to Madame de Maintenon, from the mistress of Louis XIV to the woman of their own day.

Physiology, what must I consider your meaning?

Shall I say that you intend to publish pictures more or less skillfully drawn, for the purpose of convincing us that a man marries:

From ambition—that is well known;

From kindness, in order to deliver a girl from the tyranny of her mother;

From rage, in order to disinherit his relations;

From scorn of a faithless mistress;

From weariness of a pleasant bachelor life;

From folly, for each man always commits one;

In consequence of a wager, which was the case with Lord Byron;

From interest, which is almost always the case;

From youthfulness on leaving college, like a blockhead;

From ugliness,—fear of some day failing to secure a wife;

Through Machiavelism, in order to be the heir of some old woman at an early date;

From necessity, in order to secure the standing to *our* son;

From obligation, the damsel having shown herself weak;

From passion, in order to become more surely cured of it;

On account of a quarrel, in order to put an end to a lawsuit;

From gratitude, by which he gives more than he has received;

From goodness, which is the fate of doctrinaires;

From the condition of a will when a dead uncle attaches his legacy to some girl, marriage with whom is the condition of succession;

From custom, in imitation of his ancestors;

From old age, in order to make an end of life;

From *yatidi*, that is the hour of going to bed and signifies amongst the Turks all bodily needs;

From religious zeal, like the Duke of Saint-Aignan, who did not wish to commit sin?[*]

[*] The foregoing queries came in (untranslatable) alphabetic order in the original.—Editor

But these incidents of marriage have furnished matter for thirty thousand comedies and a hundred thousand romances.

Physiology, for the third and last time I ask you—What is your meaning?

So far everything is commonplace as the pavement of the street, familiar as a crossway. Marriage is better known than the Barabbas of the Passion. All the ancient ideas which it calls to light permeate literature since the world is the world, and there is not a single opinion which might serve to the advantage of the world, nor a ridiculous project which could not find an author to write it up, a printer to print it, a bookseller to sell it and a reader to read it.

Allow me to say to you like Rabelais, who is in every sense our master:

“Gentlemen, God save and guard you! Where are you? I cannot see you; wait until I put on my spectacles. Ah! I see you now; you, your wives, your children. Are you in good health? I am glad to hear it.”

But it is not for you that I am writing. Since you have grown-up children that ends the matter.

Ah! it is you, illustrious tipplers, pampered and gouty, and you, tireless pie-cutters, favorites who come dear; day-long pantagruellists who keep your private birds, gay and gallant, and who go to tierce, to sexts, to nones, and also to vespers and compline and never tire of going.

It is not for you that the *Physiology of Marriage* is addressed, for you are not married and may you never be married. You herd of bigots, snails, hypocrites, dotards, lechers, booted for pilgrimage to Rome, disguised and marked, as it were, to deceive the world. Go back, you scoundrels, out of my sight! Gallows birds are ye all—now in the devil's name will you not begone? There are none left now but the good souls who love to laugh; not the snivelers who burst into tears in prose or verse, whatever their subject be, who make people sick with their odes, their sonnets, their meditation; none of these dreamers, but certain old-fashioned pantagruellists who don't think twice about it when they are invited to join a banquet or provoked to make a repartee, who can take pleasure in a book like *Pease and the Lard* with commentary of Rabelais, or in the one entitled *The Dignity of Breeches*, and who esteem highly the fair books of high degree, a quarry hard to run down and redoubtable to wrestle with.

It no longer does to laugh at a government, my friend, since it has invented means to raise fifteen hundred millions by taxation. High ecclesiastics, monks and nuns are no longer so rich that we can drink with them; but let St. Michael come, he who chased the devil from heaven, and

we shall perhaps see the good time come back again! There is only one thing in France at the present moment which remains a laughing matter, and that is marriage. Disciples of Panurge, ye are the only readers I desire. You know how seasonably to take up and lay down a book, how to get the most pleasure out of it, to understand the hint in a half word—how to suck nourishment from a marrow-bone.

The men of the microscope who see nothing but a speck, the census-mongers—have they reviewed the whole matter? Have they pronounced without appeal that it is as impossible to write a book on marriage as to make new again a broken pot?

Yes, master fool. If you begin to squeeze the marriage question you squirt out nothing but fun for the bachelors and weariness for the married men. It is everlasting morality. A million printed pages would have no other matter in them.

In spite of this, here is my first proposition: marriage is a fight to the death, before which the wedded couple ask a blessing from heaven, because it is the rashest of all undertakings to swear eternal love; the fight at once commences and victory, that is to say liberty, remains in the hands of the cleverer of the two.

Undoubtedly. But do you see in this a fresh idea?

Well, I address myself to the married men of yesterday and of to-day; to those who on leaving the Church or the registration office indulge the hope of keeping their wives for themselves alone; to those whom some form or other of egotism or some indefinable sentiment induces to say when

they see the marital troubles of another, "This will never happen to me."

I address myself to those sailors who after witnessing the foundering of other ships still put to sea; to those bachelors who after witnessing the shipwreck of virtue in a marriage of another venture upon wedlock. And this is my subject, eternally now, yet eternally old!

A young man, or it may be an old one, in love or not in love, has obtained possession by a contract duly recorded at the registration office in heaven and on the rolls of the nation, of a young girl with long hair, with black liquid eyes, with small feet, with dainty tapering fingers, with red lips, with teeth of ivory, finely formed, trembling with life, tempting and plump, white as a lily, loaded with the most charming wealth of beauty. Her drooping eyelashes seem like the points of the iron crown; her skin, which is as fresh as the calyx of a white camelia, is streaked with the purple of the red camelia; over her virginal complexion one seems to see the bloom of young fruit and the delicate down of a young peach; the azure veins spread a kindling warmth over this transparent surface; she asks for life and she gives it; she is all joy and love, all tenderness and candor; she loves her husband, or at least believes she loves him.

The husband who is in love says in the bottom of his heart: "Those eyes will see no one but me, that mouth will tremble with love for me alone, that gentle hand will lavish the caressing treasures of delight on me alone, that bosom will heave at no voice but mine, that slumbering soul will awake at my will alone; I only will entangle my fingers in those shining tresses; I alone will indulge myself in dreamily

caressing that sensitive head. I will make death the guardian of my pillow if only I may ward off from the nuptial couch the stranger who would violate it; that throne of love shall swim in the blood of the rash or of my own. Tranquillity, honor, happiness, the ties of home, the fortune of my children, all are at stake there; I would defend them as a lioness defends her cubs. Woe unto him who shall set foot in my lair!”

Well now, courageous athlete, we applaud your intention. Up to the present moment no geographer has ventured to trace the lines of longitude and latitude in the ocean of marriage. Old husbands have been ashamed to point out the sand banks, the reefs, the shallows, the breakers, the monsoons, the coasts and currents which have wrecked their ships, for their shipwrecks brought them shame. There was no pilot, no compass for those pilgrims of marriage. This work is intended to supply the desideratum.

Without mentioning grocers and drapers, there are so many people occupied in discovering the secret motives of women, that it is really a work of charity to classify for them, by chapter and verse, all the secret situations of marriage; a good table of contents will enable them to put their finger on each movement of their wives’ heart, as a table of logarithms tells them the product of a given multiplication.

And now what do you think about that? Is not this a novel undertaking, and one which no philosopher has as yet approached, I mean this attempt to show how a woman may be prevented from deceiving her husband? Is not this the comedy of comedies? Is it not a second *speculum vitae humanae*. We are not now dealing with the abstract

questions which we have done justice to already in this Meditation. At the present day in ethics as in exact science, the world asks for facts for the results of observation. These we shall furnish.

Let us begin then by examining the true condition of things, by analyzing the forces which exist on either side. Before arming our imaginary champion let us reckon up the number of his enemies. Let us count the Cossacks who intend to invade his little domain.

All who wish may embark with us on this voyage, all who can may laugh. Weigh anchor; hoist sail! You know exactly the point from which you start. You have this advantage over a great many books that are written.

As for our fancy of laughing while we weep, and of weeping while we laugh, as the divine Rabelais drank while he ate and ate while he drank; as for our humor, to put Heraclitus and Democritus on the same page and to discard style or premeditated phrase—if any of the crew mutiny, overboard with the doting cranks, the infamous classicists, the dead and buried romanticists, and steer for the blue water!

Everybody perhaps will jeeringly remark that we are like those who say with smiling faces, “I am going to tell you a story that will make you laugh!” But it is the proper thing to joke when speaking of marriage! In short, can you not understand that we consider marriage as a trifling ailment to which all of us are subject and upon which this volume is a monograph?

“But you, your bark or your work starts off like those postilions who crack their whips because their passengers

are English. You will not have galloped at full speed for half a league before you dismount to mend a trace or to breathe your horses. What is the good of blowing the trumpet before victory?"

Ah! my dear pantagruellists, nowadays to claim success is to obtain it, and since, after all, great works are only due to the expansion of little ideas, I do not see why I should not pluck the laurels, if only for the purpose of crowning those dirty bacon faces who join us in swallowing a dram. One moment, pilot, let us not start without making one little definition.

Reader, if from time to time you meet in this work the terms virtue or virtuous, let us understand that virtue means a certain labored facility by which a wife keeps her heart for her husband; at any rate, that the word is not used in a general sense, and I leave this distinction to the natural sagacity of all.

MEDITATION II. MARRIAGE STATISTICS.

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The administration has been occupied for nearly twenty years in reckoning how many acres of woodland, meadow, vineyard and fallow are comprised in the area of France. It has not stopped there, but has also tried to learn the number and species of the animals to be found there. Scientific men have gone still further; they have reckoned up the cords of wood, the pounds of beef, the apples and eggs consumed in Paris. But no one has yet undertaken either in the name of marital honor or in the interest of marriageable people, or for the advantage of morality and the progress of human institutions, to investigate the number of honest wives. What! the French government, if inquiry is made of it, is able to say how many men it has under arms, how many spies, how many employees, how many scholars; but, when it is asked how many virtuous women, it can answer nothing! If the King of France took into his head to choose his august partner from among his subjects, the administration could not even tell him the number of white lambs from whom he could make his choice. It would be obliged to resort to some competition which awards the rose of good conduct, and that would be a laughable event.