

FICTION

Honore de Balzac

Ursula

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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URSULA

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DEDICATION

To Mademoiselle Sophie Surville,

It is a true pleasure, my dear niece, to dedicate to you this book, the subject and details of which have won the approbation, so difficult to win, of a young girl to whom the world is still unknown, and who has compromised with none of the lofty principles of a saintly education. Young girls are indeed a formidable public, for they ought not to be allowed to read books less pure than the purity of their souls; they are forbidden certain reading, just as they are carefully prevented from seeing social life as it is. Must it not therefore be a source of pride to a writer to find that he has pleased you?

God grant that your affection for me has not misled you. Who can tell the future; which you, I hope, will see, though not, perhaps.

*Your uncle,
De Balzac.*

URSULA

CHAPTER I. THE FRIGHTENED HEIRS

Entering Nemours by the road to Paris, we cross the canal du Loing, the steep banks of which serve the double purpose of ramparts to the fields and of picturesque promenades for the inhabitants of that pretty little town. Since 1830 several houses had unfortunately been built on the farther side of the bridge. If this sort of suburb increases, the place will lose its present aspect of graceful originality.

In 1829, however, both sides of the road were clear, and the master of the post route, a tall, stout man about sixty years of age, sitting one fine autumn morning at the highest part of the bridge, could take in at a glance the whole of what is called in his business a "ruban de queue." The month of September was displaying its treasures; the atmosphere glowed above the grass and the pebbles; no cloud dimmed the blue of the sky, the purity of which in all parts, even close to the horizon, showed the extreme rarefaction of the air. So Minoret-Levrault (for that was the post master's name) was obliged to shade his eyes with one hand to keep them from being dazzled. With the air of a man who was tired of waiting, he looked first to the charming meadows which lay to the right of the road where the aftermath was springing up, then to the hill-slopes covered with copses which extend, on the left, from Nemours to Bouron. He could hear in the valley of the Loing, where the sounds on the road were echoed back from the hills, the trot of his own horses and the crack of his postilion's whip.

None but a post master could feel impatient within sight of such meadows, filled with cattle worthy of Paul Potter and glowing beneath a Raffaele sky, and beside a canal shaded with trees after Hobbema. Whoever knows Nemours knows that nature is there as beautiful as art, whose mission is to spiritualize it; there, the landscape has ideas and creates thought. But, on catching sight of Minoret-Levrault an artist would very likely have left the view to sketch the man, so original was his in his native commonness. Unite in a human being all the conditions of the brute and you have a Caliban, who is certainly a great thing. Wherever form rules, sentiment disappears. The post master, a living proof of that axiom, presented a physiognomy in which an observer could with difficulty trace, beneath the vivid carnation of its coarsely developed flesh, the semblance of a soul. His cap of blue cloth, with a small peak, and sides fluted like a melon, outlined a head of vast dimensions, showing that Gall's science has not yet produced its chapter of exceptions. The gray and rather shiny hair which appeared below the cap showed that other causes than mental toil or grief had whitened it. Large ears stood out from the head, their edges scarred with the eruptions of his over-abundant blood, which seemed ready to gush at the least exertion. His skin was crimson under an outside layer of brown, due to the habit of standing in the sun. The roving gray eyes, deep-sunken, and hidden by bushy black brows, were like those of the Kalmucks who entered France in 1815; if they ever sparkled it was only under the influence of a covetous thought. His broad pug nose was flattened at the base. Thick lips, in keeping with a repulsive double chin, the beard of which, rarely cleaned more than once a week, was encircled with a dirty silk handkerchief twisted to a cord; a short neck, rolling in fat, and heavy cheeks completed the characteristics of brute force which sculptors give to their caryatids. Minoret-Levrault was like those statues, with this difference, that whereas they supported an edifice, he had more than he could well do to support himself. You will meet many such Atlases in the world. The man's torso was a block; it was like that of a bull standing on his hind-legs. His vigorous arms ended in a pair of thick, hard hands, broad and strong and well able to handle whip, reins, and pitchfork; hands which his postilions never attempted to trifle with. The enormous stomach of this giant rested on thighs which were as large as the body of an ordinary adult, and feet like those of an elephant. Anger was a rare thing with him, but it was terrible, apoplectic, when it did burst forth. Though violent and quite incapable of reflection, the man had never done anything that justified the sinister suggestions of his bodily presence. To all those who felt afraid of him his postilions would reply, "Oh! he's not bad."

The master of Nemours, to use the common abbreviation of the country, wore a velveteen shooting-jacket of bottle-green, trousers of green linen with great stripes, and an ample yellow waistcoat of goat's skin, in the pocket of which might be discerned the round outline of a monstrous snuff-box. A snuff-box to a pug nose is a law without exception.

A son of the Revolution and a spectator of the Empire, Minoret-Levrault did not meddle with politics; as

to his religious opinions, he had never set foot in a church except to be married; as to his private principles, he kept them within the civil code; all that the law did not forbid or could not prevent he considered right. He never read anything but the journal of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, and a few printed instructions relating to his business. He was considered a clever agriculturist; but his knowledge was only practical. In him the moral being did not belie the physical. He seldom spoke, and before speaking he always took a pinch of snuff to give himself time, not to find ideas, but words. If he had been a talker you would have felt that he was out of keeping with himself. Reflecting that this elephant minus a trumpet and without a mind was called Minoret-Levrault, we are compelled to agree with Sterne as to the occult power of names, which sometimes ridicule and sometimes foretell characters.

In spite of his visible incapacity he had acquired during the last thirty-six years (the Revolution helping him) an income of thirty thousand francs, derived from farm lands, woods and meadows. If Minoret, being master of the coach-lines of Nemours and those of the Gatinais to Paris, still worked at his business, it was less from habit than for the sake of an only son, to whom he was anxious to give a fine career. This son, who was now (to use an expression of the peasantry) a "monsieur," had just completed his legal studies and was about to take his degree as licentiate, preparatory to being called to the Bar. Monsieur and Madame Minoret-Levrault for behind our colossus every one will perceive a woman without whom this signal good-fortune would have been impossible left their son free to choose his own career; he might be a notary in Paris, king's-attorney in some district, collector of customs no matter where, broker, or post master, as he pleased. What fancy of his could they ever refuse him? to what position of life might he not aspire as the son of a man about whom the whole countryside, from Montargis to Essonne, was in the habit of saying, "Pere Minoret doesn't even know how rich he is"?

This saying had obtained fresh force about four years before this history begins, when Minoret, after selling his inn, built stables and a splendid dwelling, and removed the post-house from the Grand'Rue to the wharf. The new establishment cost two hundred thousand francs, which the gossip of thirty miles in circumference more than doubled. The Nemours mail-coach service requires a large number of horses. It goes to Fontainebleau on the road to Paris, and from there diverges to Montargis and also to Montereau. The relays are long, and the sandy soil of the Montargis road calls for the mythical third horse, always paid for but never seen. A man of Minoret's build, and Minoret's wealth, at the head of such an establishment might well be called, without contradiction, the master of Nemours. Though he never thought of God or devil, being a practical materialist, just as he was a practical agriculturist, a practical egoist, and a practical miser, Minoret had enjoyed up to this time a life of unmixed happiness, if we can call pure materialism happiness. A physiologist, observing the rolls of flesh which covered the last vertebrae and pressed upon the giant's cerebellum, and, above all, hearing the shrill, sharp voice which contrasted so absurdly with his huge body, would have understood why this ponderous, coarse being adored his only son, and why he had so long expected him, a fact proved by the name, Desire, which was given to the child.

The mother, whom the boy fortunately resembled, rivaled the father in spoiling him. No child could long have resisted the effects of such idolatry. As soon as Desire knew the extent of his power he milked his mother's coffer and dipped into his father's purse, making each author of his being believe that he, or she, alone was petitioned. Desire, who played a part in Nemours far beyond that of a prince royal in his father's capital, chose to gratify his fancies in Paris just as he had gratified them in his native town; he had therefore spent a yearly sum of not less than twelve thousand francs during the time of his legal studies. But for that money he had certainly acquired ideas that would never had come to him in Nemours; he had stripped off the provincial skin, learned the power of money and seen in the magistracy a means of advancement which he fancied. During the last year he had spent an extra sum of ten thousand francs in the company of artists, journalists, and their mistresses. A confidential and rather disquieting letter from his son, asking for his consent to a marriage, explains the watch which the post master was now keeping on the bridge; for Madame Minoret-Levrault, busy in preparing a sumptuous breakfast to celebrate the triumphal return of the licentiate, had sent her husband to the mail road, advising him to take a horse and ride out if he saw nothing of the diligence. The coach which was conveying the precious son usually arrived at five in the morning and it was now nine! What could be the meaning of such delay? Was the coach overturned? Could Desire be dead? Or was it nothing worse than a broken leg?

Three distinct volleys of cracking whips rent the air like a discharge of musketry; the red waistcoats of the postilions dawned in sight, ten horses neighed. The master pulled off his cap and waved it; he was seen. The best mounted postilion, who was returning with two gray carriage-horses, set spurs to his beast and came on in advance of the five diligence horses and the three other carriage-horses, and soon reached his master.

"Have you seen the 'Ducler'?"

On the great mail routes names, often fantastic, are given to the different coaches; such, for instance, as the "Caillard," the "Ducler" (the coach between Nemours and Paris), the "Grand Bureau." Every new enterprise is called the "Competition." In the days of the Lecompte company their coaches were called the "Countess." "Caillard" could not overtake the 'Countess'; but 'Grand Bureau' caught up with her finely," you will hear the men say. If you see a postilion pressing his horses and refusing a glass of wine, question the conductor and he will tell you, snuffing the air while his eye gazes far into space, "The 'Competition' is ahead." "We can't get in sight of her," cries the postilion; "the vixen! she wouldn't stop to let her passengers dine." "The question is, has she got any?" responds the conductor. "Give it to Polignac!" All lazy and bad horses are called Polignac. Such are the jokes and the basis of conversation between postilions and conductors on the roofs of the coaches. Each profession, each calling in France has its slang.

"Have you seen the 'Ducler'?" asked Minoret.

"Monsieur Desire?" said the postilion, interrupting his master. "Hey! you must have heard us, didn't our whips tell you? we felt you were somewhere along the road."

Just then a woman dressed in her Sunday clothes, for the bells were pealing from the clock tower and calling the inhabitants to mass, a woman about thirty-six years of age came up to the post master.

"Well, cousin," she said, "you wouldn't believe me Uncle is with Ursula in the Grand'Rue, and they are going to mass."

In spite of the modern poetic canons as to local color, it is quite impossible to push realism so far as to repeat the horrible blasphemy mingled with oaths which this news, apparently so unexciting, brought from the huge mouth of Minoret-Levrault; his shrill voice grew sibilant, and his face took on the appearance of what people oddly enough call a sunstroke.

"Is that true?" he asked, after the first explosion of his wrath was over.

The postilions bowed to their master as they and their horses passed him, but he seemed to neither see nor hear them. Instead of waiting for his son, Minoret-Levrault hurried up to the Grand'Rue with his cousin.

"Didn't I always tell you so?" she resumed. "When Doctor Minoret goes out of his head that demure little hypocrite will drag him into religion; whoever lays hold of the mind gets hold of the purse, and she'll have our inheritance."

"But, Madame Massin" said the post master, dumbfounded.

"There now!" exclaimed Madame Massin, interrupting her cousin. "You are going to say, just as Massin does, that a little girl of fifteen can't invent such plans and carry them out, or make an old man of eighty-three, who has never set foot in a church except to be married, change his opinions, now don't tell me he has such a horror of priests that he wouldn't even go with the girl to the parish church when she made her first communion. I'd like to know why, if Doctor Minoret hates priests, he has spent nearly every evening for the last fifteen years of his life with the Abbe Chaperon. The old hypocrite never fails to give Ursula twenty francs for wax tapers every time she takes the sacrament. Have you forgotten the gift Ursula made to the church in gratitude to the cure for preparing her for her first communion? She spent all her money on it, and her godfather returned it to her doubled. You men! you don't pay attention to things. When I heard that, I said to myself, 'Farewell baskets, the vintage is done!' A rich uncle doesn't behave that way to a little brat picked up in the streets without some good reason."

"Pooh, cousin; I dare say the good man is only taking her to the door of the church," replied the post master. "It is a fine day, and he is out for a walk."

"I tell you he is holding a prayer-book, and looks sanctimonious you'll see him."

"They hide their game pretty well," said Minoret, "La Bougival told me there was never any talk of

religion between the doctor and the abbe. Besides, the abbe is one of the most honest men on the face of the globe; he'd give the shirt off his back to a poor man; he is incapable of a base action, and to cheat a family out of their inheritance is"

"Theft," said Madame Massin.

"Worse!" cried Minoret-Levrault, exasperated by the tongue of his gossiping neighbour.

"Of course I know," said Madame Massin, "that the Abbe Chaperon is an honest man; but he is capable of anything for the sake of his poor. He must have mined and undermined uncle, and the old man has just tumbled into piety. We did nothing, and here he is perverted! A man who never believed in anything, and had principles of his own! Well! we're done for. My husband is absolutely beside himself."

Madame Massin, whose sentences were so many arrows stinging her fat cousin, made him walk as fast as herself, in spite of his obesity and to the great astonishment of the church-goers, who were on their way to mass. She was determined to overtake this uncle and show him to the post master.

Nemours is commanded on the Gatinais side by a hill, at the foot of which runs the road to Montargis and the Loing. The church, on the stones of which time has cast a rich discolored mantle (it was rebuilt in the fourteenth century by the Guises, for whom Nemours was raised to a peerage-duchy), stands at the end of the little town close to a great arch which frames it. For buildings, as for men, position does everything. Shaded by a few trees, and thrown into relief by a neatly kept square, this solitary church produces a really grandiose effect. As the post master of Nemours entered the open space, he beheld his uncle with the young girl called Ursula on his arm, both carrying prayer-books and just entering the church. The old man took off his hat in the porch, and his head, which was white as a hill-top covered with snow, shone among the shadows of the portal.

"Well, Minoret, what do you say to the conversion of your uncle?" cried the tax-collector of Nemours, named Cremiere.

"What do you expect me to say?" replied the post master, offering him a pinch of snuff.

"Well answered, Pere Levrault. You can't say what you think, if it is true, as an illustrious author says it is, that a man must think his words before he speaks his thoughts," cried a young man, standing near, who played the part of Mephistopheles in the little town.

This ill-conditioned youth, named Goupil, was head clerk to Monsieur Cremiere-Dionis, the Nemours notary. Notwithstanding a past conduct that was almost debauched, Dionis had taken Goupil into his office when a career in Paris where the clerk had wasted all the money he inherited from his father, a well-to-do farmer, who educated him for a notary was brought to a close by his absolute pauperism. The mere sight of Goupil told an observer that he had made haste to enjoy life, and had paid dear for his enjoyments. Though very short, his chest and shoulders were developed at twenty-seven years of age like those of a man of forty. Legs small and weak, and a broad face, with a cloudy complexion like the sky before a storm, surmounted by a bald forehead, brought out still further the oddity of his conformation. His face seemed as though it belonged to a hunchback whose hunch was inside of him. One singularity of that pale and sour visage confirmed the impression of an invisible gobbosity; the nose, crooked and out of shape like those of many deformed persons, turned from right to left of the face instead of dividing it down the middle. The mouth, contracted at the corners, like that of a Sardinian, was always on the qui vive of irony. His hair, thin and reddish, fell straight, and showed the skull in many places. His hands, coarse and ill-joined at the wrists to arms that were far too long, were quick-fingered and seldom clean. Goupil wore boots only fit for the dust-heap, and raw silk stockings now of a russet black; his coat and trousers, all black, and threadbare and greasy with dirt, his pitiful waistcoat with half the button-moulds gone, an old silk handkerchief which served as a cravat in short, all his clothing revealed the cynical poverty to which his passions had reduced him. This combination of disreputable signs was guarded by a pair of eyes with yellow circles round the pupils, like those of a goat, both lascivious and cowardly. No one in Nemours was more feared nor, in a way, more deferred to than Goupil. Strong in the claims made for him by his very ugliness, he had the odious style of wit peculiar to men who allow themselves all license, and he used it to gratify the bitterness of his life-long envy. He wrote the satirical couplets sung during the carnival, organized charivaris, and was himself a "little journal" of the gossip of the town. Dionis, who was clever and insincere, and for that reason timid, kept

Goupil as much through fear as for his keen mind and thorough knowledge of all the interests of the town. But the master so distrusted his clerk that he himself kept the accounts, refused to let him live in his house, held him at arm's length, and never confided any secret or delicate affair to his keeping. In return the clerk fawned upon the notary, hiding his resentment at this conduct, and watching Madame Dionis in the hope that he might get his revenge there. Gifted with a ready mind and quick comprehension he found work easy.

"You!" exclaimed the post master to the clerk, who stood rubbing his hands, "making game of our misfortunes already?"

As Goupil was known to have pandered to Dionis' passions for the last five years, the post master treated him cavalierly, without suspecting the hoard of ill-feeling he was piling up in Goupil's heart with every fresh insult. The clerk, convinced that money was more necessary to him than it was to others, and knowing himself superior in mind to the whole bourgeoisie of Nemours, was now counting on his intimacy with Minoret's son Desire to obtain the means of buying one or the other of three town offices, that of clerk of the court, or the legal practice of one of the sheriffs, or that of Dionis himself. For this reason he put up with the affronts of the post master and the contempt of Madame Minoret-Levrault, and played a contemptible part towards Desire, consoling the fair victims whom that youth left behind him after each vacation, devouring the crumbs of the loaves he had kneaded.

"If I were the nephew of a rich old fellow, he never would have given God to ME for a co-heir," retorted Goupil, with a hideous grin which exhibited his teeth few, black, and menacing.

Just then Massin-Levrault, junior, the clerk of the court, joined his wife, bringing with him Madame Cremiere, the wife of the tax-collector of Nemours. This man, one of the hardest natures of the little town, had the physical characteristics of a Tartar: eyes small and round as sloes beneath a retreating brow, crimped hair, an oily skin, huge ears without any rim, a mouth almost without lips, and a scanty beard. He spoke like a man who was losing his voice. To exhibit him thoroughly it is enough to say that he employed his wife and eldest daughter to serve his legal notices.

Madame Cremiere was a stout woman, with a fair complexion injured by red blotches, always too tightly laced, intimate with Madame Dionis, and supposed to be educated because she read novels. Full of pretensions to wit and elegance, she was awaiting her uncle's money to "take a certain stand," decorate her salon, and receive the bourgeoisie. At present her husband denied her Carcel lamps, lithographs, and all the other trifles the notary's wife possessed. She was excessively afraid of Goupil, who caught up and retailed her "slapsus-linques" as she called them. One day Madame Dionis chanced to ask what "Eau" she thought best for the teeth.

"Try opium," she replied.

Nearly all the collateral heirs of old Doctor Minoret were now assembled in the square; the importance of the event which brought them was so generally felt that even groups of peasants, armed with their scarlet umbrellas and dressed in those brilliant colors which make them so picturesque on Sundays and fete-days, stood by, with their eyes fixed on the frightened heirs. In all little towns which are midway between large villages and cities those who do not go to mass stand about in the square or market-place. Business is talked over. In Nemours the hour of church service was a weekly exchange, to which the owners of property scattered over a radius of some miles resorted.

"Well, how would you have prevented it?" said the post master to Goupil in reply to his remark.

"I should have made myself as important to him as the air he breathes. But from the very first you failed to get hold of him. The inheritance of a rich uncle should be watched as carefully as a pretty woman for want of proper care they'll both escape you. If Madame Dionis were here she could tell you how true that comparison is."

"But Monsieur Bongrand has just told me there is nothing to worry about," said Massin.

"Oh! there are plenty of ways of saying that!" cried Goupil, laughing. "I would like to have heard your sly justice of the peace say it. If there is nothing to be done, if he, being intimate with your uncle, knows that all is lost, the proper thing for him to say to you is, 'Don't be worried.'"

As Goupil spoke, a satirical smile overspread his face, and gave such meaning to his words that the other heirs began to feel that Massin had let Bongrand deceive him. The tax-collector, a fat little man, as

insignificant as a tax-collector should be, and as much of a cipher as a clever woman could wish, hereupon annihilated his co-heir, Massin, with the words: "Didn't I tell you so?"

Tricky people always attribute trickiness to others. Massin therefore looked askance at Monsieur Bongrand, the justice of the peace, who was at that moment talking near the door of the church with the Marquis du Rouvre, a former client.

"If I were sure of it!" he said.

"You could neutralize the protection he is now giving to the Marquis du Rouvre, who is threatened with arrest. Don't you see how Bongrand is sprinkling him with advice?" said Goupil, slipping an idea of retaliation into Massin's mind. "But you had better go easy with your chief; he's a clever old fellow; he might use his influence with your uncle and persuade him not to leave everything to the church."

"Pooh! we sha'n't die of it," said Minoret-Levrault, opening his enormous snuff-box.

"You won't live of it, either," said Goupil, making the two women tremble. More quick-witted than their husbands, they saw the privations this loss of inheritance (so long counted on for many comforts) would be to them. "However," added Goupil, "we'll drown this little grief in floods of champagne in honor of Desire! sha'n't we, old fellow?" he cried, tapping the stomach of the giant, and inviting himself to the feast for fear he should be left out.

CHAPTER II. THE RICH UNCLE

Before proceeding further, persons of an exact turn of mind may like to read a species of family inventory, so as to understand the degrees of relationship which connected the old man thus suddenly converted to religion with these three heads of families or their wives. This cross-breeding of families in the remote provinces might be made the subject of many instructive reflections.

There are but three or four houses of the lesser nobility in Nemours; among them, at the period of which we write, that of the family of Portenduere was the most important. These exclusives visited none but nobles who possessed lands or chateaus in the neighbourhood; of the latter we may mention the d'Aiglemonts, owners of the beautiful estate of Saint-Lange, and the Marquis du Rouvre, whose property, crippled by mortgages, was closely watched by the bourgeoisie. The nobles of the town had no money. Madame de Portenduere's sole possessions were a farm which brought a rental of forty-seven hundred francs, and her town house.

In opposition to this very insignificant Faubourg St. Germain was a group of a dozen rich families, those of retired millers, or former merchants; in short a miniature bourgeoisie; below which, again, lived and moved the retail shopkeepers, the proletaries and the peasantry. The bourgeoisie presented (like that of the Swiss cantons and of other small countries) the curious spectacle of the ramifications of certain autochthonous families, old-fashioned and unpolished perhaps, but who rule a whole region and pervade it, until nearly all its inhabitants are cousins. Under Louis XI., an epoch at which the commons first made real names of their surnames (some of which are united with those of feudalism) the bourgeoisie of Nemours was made up of Minorets, Massins, Levraults and Cremieres. Under Louis XIII. these four families had already produced the Massin-Cremieres, the Levrault-Massins, the Massin-Minorets, the Minoret-Minorets, the Cremiere-Levraults, the Levrault-Minoret-Massins, Massin-Levraults, Minoret-Massins, Massin-Massins, and Cremiere-Massins, all these varied with juniors and diversified with the names of eldest sons, as for instance, Cremiere-Francois, Levrault-Jacques, Jean-Minoret enough to drive a Pere Anselme of the People frantic, if the people should ever want a genealogist.

The variations of this family kaleidoscope of four branches was now so complicated by births and marriages that the genealogical tree of the bourgeoisie of Nemours would have puzzled the Benedictines of the Almanach of Gotha, in spite of the atomic science with which they arrange those zigzags of German alliances. For a long time the Minorets occupied the tanneries, the Cremieres kept the mills, the Massins were in trade, and the Levraults continued farmers. Fortunately for the neighbourhood these four stocks threw out suckers instead of depending only on their tap-roots; they scattered cuttings by the expatriation of sons who sought their fortune elsewhere; for instance, there are Minorets who are cutlers at Melun; Levraults at Montargis; Massins at Orleans; and Cremieres of some importance in Paris. Divers are the destinies of these bees from the parent hive. Rich Massins employ, of course, the poor working Massins just as Austria and Prussia take the German princes into their service. It may happen that a public office is managed by a Minoret millionaire and guarded by a Minoret sentinel. Full of the same blood and called by the same name (for sole likeness), these four roots had ceaselessly woven a human network of which each thread was delicate or strong, fine or coarse, as the case might be. The same blood was in the head and in the feet and in the heart, in the working hands, in the weakly lungs, in the forehead big with genius.

The chiefs of the clan were faithful to the little town, where the ties of family were relaxed or tightened according to the events which happened under this curious cognomenism. In whatever part of France you may be, you will find the same thing under changed names, but without the poetic charm which feudalism gave to it, and which Walter Scott's genius reproduced so faithfully. Let us look a little higher and examine humanity as it appears in history. All the noble families of the eleventh century, most of them (except the royal race of Capet) extinct to-day, will be found to have contributed to the birth of the Rohans, Montmorencys, Beaufremonts, and Mortemarts of our time, in fact they will all be found in the blood of the last gentleman who is indeed a gentleman. In other words, every bourgeois is cousin to a bourgeois, and every noble is cousin to a noble. A splendid page of biblical genealogy shows that in one thousand years three families, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, peopled the globe. One family may become a nation; unfortunately, a

nation may become one family. To prove this we need only search back through our ancestors and see their accumulation, which time increases into a retrograde geometric progression, which multiplies of itself; reminding us of the calculation of the wise man who, being told to choose a reward from the king of Persia for inventing chess, asked for one ear of wheat for the first move on the board, the reward to be doubled for each succeeding move; when it was found that the kingdom was not large enough to pay it. The net-work of the nobility, hemmed in by the net-work of the bourgeoisie, the antagonism of two protected races, one protected by fixed institutions, the other by the active patience of labor and the shrewdness of commerce, produced the revolution of 1789. The two races almost reunited are to-day face to face with collaterals without a heritage. What are they to do? Our political future is big with the answer.

The family of the man who under Louis XV. was simply called Minoret was so numerous that one of the five children (the Minoret whose entrance into the parish church caused such interest) went to Paris to seek his fortune, and seldom returned to his native town, until he came to receive his share of the inheritance of his grandfather. After suffering many things, like all young men of firm will who struggle for a place in the brilliant world of Paris, this son of the Minorets reached a nobler destiny than he had, perhaps, dreamed of at the start. He devoted himself, in the first instance, to medicine, a profession which demands both talent and a cheerful nature, but the latter qualification even more than talent. Backed by Dupont de Nemours, connected by a lucky chance with the Abbe Morellet (whom Voltaire nicknamed Mords-les), and protected by the Encyclopedists, Doctor Minoret attached himself as liegeman to the famous Doctor Bordeu, the friend of Diderot, D'Alembert, Helvetius, the Baron d'Holbach and Grimm, in whose presence he felt himself a mere boy. These men, influenced by Bordeu's example, became interested in Minoret, who, about the year 1777, found himself with a very good practice among deists, encyclopedists, sensualists, materialists, or whatever you are pleased to call the rich philosophers of that period.

Though Minoret was very little of a humbug, he invented the famous balm of Lelievre, so much extolled by the "Mercure de France," the weekly organ of the Encyclopedists, in whose columns it was permanently advertised. The apothecary Lelievre, a clever man, saw a stroke of business where Minoret had only seen a new preparation for the dispensary, and he loyally shared his profits with the doctor, who was a pupil of Rouelle in chemistry as well as of Bordeu in medicine. Less than that would make a man a materialist.

The doctor married for love in 1778, during the reign of the "Nouvelle Heloise," when persons did occasionally marry for that reason. His wife was a daughter of the famous harpsichordist Valentin Mirouet, a celebrated musician, frail and delicate, whom the Revolution slew. Minoret knew Robespierre intimately, for he had once been instrumental in awarding him a gold medal for a dissertation on the following subject: "What is the origin of the opinion that covers a whole family with the shame attaching to the public punishment of a guilty member of it? Is that opinion more harmful than useful? If yes, in what way can the harm be warded off." The Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences at Metz, to which Minoret belonged, must possess this dissertation in the original. Though, thanks to this friendship, the Doctor's wife need have had no fear, she was so in dread of going to the scaffold that her terror increased a disposition to heart disease caused by the over-sensitiveness of her nature. In spite of all the precautions taken by the man who idolized her, Ursula unfortunately met the tumbril of victims among whom was Madame Roland, and the shock caused her death. Minoret, who in tenderness to his wife had refused her nothing, and had given her a life of luxury, found himself after her death almost a poor man. Robespierre gave him an appointment as surgeon-in-charge of a hospital.

Though the name of Minoret obtained during the lively debates to which mesmerism gave rise a certain celebrity which occasionally recalled him to the minds of his relatives, still the Revolution was so great a destroyer of family relations that in 1813 Nemours knew little of Doctor Minoret, who was induced to think of returning there to die, like the hare to its form, by a circumstance that was wholly accidental.

Who has not felt in traveling through France, where the eye is often wearied by the monotony of plains, the charming sensation of coming suddenly, when the eye is prepared for a barren landscape, upon a fresh cool valley, watered by a river, with a little town sheltering beneath a cliff like a swarm of bees in the hollow of an old willow? Wakened by the "hu! hu!" of the postilion as he walks beside his horses, we shake off sleep and admire, like a dream within a dream, the beautiful scene which is to the traveler what a noble passage in a book is to a reader, a brilliant thought of Nature. Such is the sensation caused by a first sight of

Nemours as we approach it from Burgundy. We see it encircled with bare rocks, gray, black, white, fantastic in shape like those we find in the forest of Fontainebleau; from them spring scattered trees, clearly defined against the sky, which give to this particular rock formation the dilapidated look of a crumbling wall. Here ends the long wooded hill which creeps from Nemours to Bouron, skirting the road. At the bottom of this irregular amphitheater lie meadow-lands through which flows the Loing, forming sheets of water with many falls. This delightful landscape, which continues the whole way to Montargis, is like an opera scene, for its effects really seem to have been studied.

One morning Doctor Minoret, who had been summoned into Burgundy by a rich patient, was returning in all haste to Paris. Not having mentioned at the last relay the route he intended to take, he was brought without his knowledge through Nemours, and beheld once more, on waking from a nap, the scenery in which his childhood had been passed. He had lately lost many of his old friends. The votary of the Encyclopedists had witnessed the conversion of La Harpe; he had buried Lebrun-Pindare and Marie-Joseph de Chenier, and Morellet, and Madame Helvetius. He assisted at the quasi-fall of Voltaire when assailed by Geoffroy, the continuator of Freton. For some time past he had thought of retiring, and so, when his post chaise stopped at the head of the Grand'Rue of Nemours, his heart prompted him to inquire for his family. Minoret-Levrault, the post master, came forward himself to see the doctor, who discovered him to be the son of his eldest brother. The nephew presented the doctor to his wife, the only daughter of the late Levrault-Cremiere, who had died twelve years earlier, leaving him the post business and the finest inn in Nemours.

"Well, nephew," said the doctor, "have I any other relatives?"

"My aunt Minoret, your sister, married a Massin-Massin"

"Yes, I know, the bailiff of Saint-Lange."

"She died a widow leaving an only daughter, who has lately married a Cremiere-Cremiere, a fine young fellow, still without a place."

"Ah! she is my own niece. Now, as my brother, the sailor, died a bachelor, and Captain Minoret was killed at Monte-Legino, and here I am, that ends the paternal line. Have I any relations on the maternal side? My mother was a Jean-Massin-Levrault."

"Of the Jean-Massin-Levrault's there's only one left," answered Minoret-Levrault, "namely, Jean-Massin, who married Monsieur Cremiere-Levrault-Dionis, a purveyor of forage, who perished on the scaffold. His wife died of despair and without a penny, leaving one daughter, married to a Levrault-Minoret, a farmer at Montereau, who is doing well; their daughter has just married a Massin-Levrault, notary's clerk at Montargis, where his father is a locksmith."

"So I've plenty of heirs," said the doctor gayly, immediately proposing to take a walk through Nemours accompanied by his nephew.

The Loing runs through the town in a waving line, banked by terraced gardens and neat houses, the aspect of which makes one fancy that happiness must abide there sooner than elsewhere. When the doctor turned into the Rue des Bourgeois, Minoret-Levrault pointed out the property of Levrault-Levrault, a rich iron merchant in Paris who, he said, had just died.

"The place is for sale, uncle, and a very