researches by means of a small gate, similar to that close to the *concierge's* door, and which merits a particular description.

It was a little entrance that seemed never to have been opened since the house was built, so entirely was it covered with dust and dirt; but the well-oiled hinges and locks told quite another story. This door was a mockery to the *concierge*, from whose vigilance and jurisdiction it was free, and, like that famous portal in the *Arabian Nights*, opening at the '*Sesame*' of Ali Baba, it was wont to swing backward at a cabalistic word or a concerted tap from without from the sweetest voices or whitest fingers in the world.

At the end of a long corridor, with which the door communicated, and which formed the antechamber, was, on the right, Albert's breakfast-room, looking into the court, and on the left the salon, looking into the garden. Shrubs and creeping plants covered the windows, and hid from the garden and court these two apartments, the only rooms into which, as they were on the ground floor, the prying eyes of the curious could penetrate.

On the floor above were similar rooms, with the addition of a third, formed out of the antechamber; these three rooms were a salon, a boudoir, and a bedroom. The salon downstairs was only an Algerian divan, for the use of smokers. The boudoir upstairs communicated with the bedchamber by an invisible door on the staircase; it was evident that every precaution had been taken. Above this floor was a large *atelier*, which had been increased in size by pulling down the partitions—a pandemonium, in which the artist and the dandy strove for pre-eminence.

There were collected and piled up all Albert's successive caprices, hunting-horns, bass-viols, flutes—a whole orchestra, for Albert had had not a taste but a fancy for music; easels, palettes, brushes, pencils—for music had been succeeded by painting; foils, boxing-gloves, broadswords, and single-sticks—for, following the example of the fashionable young men of the time, Albert de Morcerf cultivated, with far more perseverance than music and drawing, the three arts that complete a dandy's education, i.e., fencing, boxing, and single-stick; and it was here that he received Grisier, Cooks, and Charles Leboucher.

The rest of the furniture of this privileged apartment consisted of old cabinets, filled with Chinese porcelain and Japanese vases, Lucca della Robbia *faïences*, and Palissy platters; of old armchairs, in which perhaps had sat Henry IV. or Sully, Louis XIII. or Richelieu—for two of these armchairs, adorned

with a carved shield, on which were engraved the fleur-de-lis of France on an azure field, evidently came from the Louvre, or, at least, some royal residence.

Over these dark and sombre chairs were thrown splendid stuffs, dyed beneath Persia's sun, or woven by the fingers of the women of Calcutta or of Chandernagor. What these stuffs did there, it was impossible to say; they awaited, while gratifying the eyes, a destination unknown to their owner himself; in the meantime they filled the place with their golden and silky reflections.

In the centre of the room was a Roller and Blanchet 'baby grand' piano in rosewood, but holding the potentialities of an orchestra in its narrow and sonorous cavity, and groaning beneath the weight of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Beethoven, Weber, Mozart, Haydn, Grétry, and Porpora.

On the walls, over the doors, on the ceiling, were swords, daggers, Malay creeses, maces, battle-axes; gilded, damasked, and inlaid suits of armor; dried plants, minerals, and stuffed birds, their flame-coloured wings outspread in motionless flight, and their beaks forever open. This was Albert's favourite lounging place.

However, the morning of the appointment, the young man had established himself in the small salon downstairs. There, on a table, surrounded at some distance by a large and luxurious divan, every species of tobacco known,—from the yellow tobacco of Petersburg to the black of Sinai, and so on along the scale from Maryland and Porto Rico, to Latakia,—was exposed in pots of crackled earthenware of which the Dutch are so fond; beside them, in boxes of fragrant wood, were ranged, according to their size and quality, puros, regalias, havanas, and manillas; and, in an open cabinet, a collection of German pipes, of chibouques, with their amber mouth-pieces ornamented with coral, and of narghiles, with their long tubes of morocco, awaiting the caprice or the sympathy of the smokers.

Albert had himself presided at the arrangement, or, rather, the symmetrical derangement, which, after coffee, the guests at a breakfast of modern days love to contemplate through the vapor that escapes from their mouths, and ascends in long and fanciful wreaths to the ceiling.

At a quarter to ten, a valet entered; he composed, with a little groom named John, and who only spoke English, all Albert's establishment, although the cook of the hotel was always at his service, and on great occasions the count's *chasseur* also. This valet, whose name was Germain, and who enjoyed the entire

confidence of his young master, held in one hand a number of papers, and in the other a packet of letters, which he gave to Albert. Albert glanced carelessly at the different missives, selected two written in a small and delicate hand, and enclosed in scented envelopes, opened them and perused their contents with some attention.

'How did these letters come?' said he.

'One by the post, Madame Danglars' footman left the other.'

'Let Madame Danglars know that I accept the place she offers me in her box. Wait; then, during the day, tell Rosa that when I leave the Opera I will sup with her as she wishes. Take her six bottles of different wine—Cyprus, sherry, and Malaga, and a barrel of Ostend oysters; get them at Borel's, and be sure you say they are for me.'

'At what o'clock, sir, do you breakfast?' 'What time is it now?'

'A quarter to ten.'

'Very well, at half past ten. Debray will, perhaps, be obliged to go to the minister—and besides' (Albert looked at his tablets), 'it is the hour I told the count, 21st May, at half past ten; and though I do not much rely upon his promise, I wish to be punctual. Is the countess up yet?'

'If you wish, I will inquire.'

'Yes, ask her for one of her *liqueur* cellarets, mine is incomplete; and tell her I shall have the honour of seeing her about three o'clock, and that I request permission to introduce someone to her.'

The valet left the room. Albert threw himself on the divan, tore off the cover of two or three of the papers, looked at the theatre announcements, made a face seeing they gave an opera, and not a ballet; hunted vainly amongst the advertisements for a new tooth-powder of which he had heard, and threw down, one after the other, the three leading papers of Paris, muttering,

'These papers become more and more stupid every day.'

A moment after, a carriage stopped before the door, and the servant announced M. Lucien Debray. A tall young man, with light hair, clear gray eyes, and thin and compressed lips, dressed in a blue coat with beautifully carved gold buttons, a white neckcloth, and a tortoiseshell eye-glass suspended by a silken thread, and which, by an effort of the superciliary and zygomatic muscles, he fixed in his eye, entered, with a half-official air, without smiling or speaking.

Chapter XXXIX

The Guests

In the house in the Rue du Helder, where Albert had invited the Count of Monte Cristo, everything was being prepared on the morning of the 21st of May to do honour to the occasion. Albert de Morcerf inhabited a pavilion situated at the corner of a large court, and directly opposite another building, in which were the servants' apartments. Two windows only of the pavilion faced the street; three other windows looked into the court, and two at the back into the garden.

Between the court and the garden, built in the heavy style of the imperial architecture, was the large and fashionable dwelling of the Count and Countess of Morcerf.

A high wall surrounded the whole of the property, surmounted at intervals by vases filled with flowers, and broken in the centre by a large gate of gilded iron, which served as the carriage entrance. A small door, close to the lodge of the *concierge*, gave ingress and egress to the servants and masters when they were on foot.

It was easy to discover that the delicate care of a mother, unwilling to part from her son, and yet aware that a young man of the viscount's age required the full exercise of his liberty, had chosen this habitation for Albert. There were not lacking, however, evidences of what we may call the intelligent egoism of a youth who is charmed with the indolent, careless life of an only son, and who lives as it were in a gilded cage. By means of the two windows looking into the street, Albert could see all that passed; the sight of what is going on is necessary to young men, who always want to see the world traverse their horizon, even if that horizon is only a public thoroughfare. Then, should anything appear to merit a more minute examination, Albert de Morcerf could follow up his

'I confess he asked me none.'

'No; he merely came and freed me from the hands of Signor Vampa, where, I can assure you, in spite of all my outward appearance of ease and unconcern, I did not very particularly care to remain. Now, then, Franz, when, for services so promptly and unhesitatingly rendered, he but asks me in return to do for him what is done daily for any Russian prince or Italian nobleman who may pass through Paris—merely to introduce him into society—would you have me refuse? My good fellow, you must have lost your senses to think it possible I could act with such cold-blooded policy.'

And this time it must be confessed that, contrary to the usual state of affairs in discussions between the young men, the effective arguments were all on Albert's side.

'Well,' said Franz with a sigh, 'do as you please my dear viscount, for your arguments are beyond my powers of refutation. Still, in spite of all, you must admit that this Count of Monte Cristo is a most singular personage.'

'He is a philanthropist,' answered the other; 'and no doubt his motive in visiting Paris is to compete for the Monthyon prize, given, as you are aware, to whoever shall be proved to have most materially advanced the interests of virtue and humanity. If my vote and interest can obtain it for him, I will readily give him the one and promise the other. And now, my dear Franz, let us talk of something else. Come, shall we take our luncheon, and then pay a last visit to St. Peter's?'

Franz silently assented; and the following afternoon, at half-past five o'clock, the young men parted. Albert de Morcerf to return to Paris, and Franz d'Épinay to pass a fortnight at Venice.

But, ere he entered his travelling carriage, Albert, fearing that his expected guest might forget the engagement he had entered into, placed in the care of a waiter at the hotel a card to be delivered to the Count of Monte Cristo, on which, beneath the name of Viscount Albert de Morcerf, he had written in pencil:

'27, *Rue du Helder, on the* 21*st May, half-past ten* A.M.'

'Good-morning, Lucien, good-morning,' said Albert; 'your punctuality really alarms me. What do I say? punctuality! You, whom I expected last, you arrive at five minutes to ten, when the time fixed was half-past! Has the ministry resigned?'

'No, my dear fellow,' returned the young man, seating himself on the divan; 'reassure yourself; we are tottering always, but we never fall, and I begin to believe that we shall pass into a state of immobility, and then the affairs of the Peninsula will completely consolidate us.'

'Ah, true; you drive Don Carlos out of Spain.'

'No, no, my dear fellow, do not confound our plans. We take him to the other side of the French frontier, and offer him hospitality at Bourges.'

'At Bourges?'

'Yes, he has not much to complain of; Bourges is the capital of Charles VII. Do you not know that all Paris knew it yesterday, and the day before it had already transpired on the Bourse, and M. Danglars (I do not know by what means that man contrives to obtain intelligence as soon as we do) made a million!'

'And you another order, for I see you have a blue ribbon at your button-hole.'

'Yes; they sent me the order of Charles III.,' returned Debray carelessly.

'Come, do not affect indifference, but confess you were pleased to have it.'

'Oh, it is very well as a finish to the toilet. It looks very neat on a black coat buttoned up.'

'And makes you resemble the Prince of Wales or the Duke of Reichstadt.'

'It is for that reason you see me so early.'

'Because you have the order of Charles III., and you wish to announce the good news to me?'

'No, because I passed the night writing letters,—five-and-twenty despatches. I returned home at daybreak, and strove to sleep; but my head ached and I got up to have a ride for an hour. At the Bois de Boulogne, *ennui* and hunger attacked me at once,—two enemies who rarely accompany each other, and who are yet leagued against me, a sort of Carlo-republican alliance. I then recollected you gave a breakfast this morning, and here I am. I am hungry, feed me; I am bored, amuse me.'

'It is my duty as your host,' returned Albert, ringing the bell, while Lucien turned over, with his gold-mounted cane, the papers that lay on the table. 'Germain, a glass of sherry and a biscuit. In the meantime, my dear Lucien, here are cigars—contraband, of course—try them, and persuade the minister to sell us such instead of poisoning us with cabbage leaves.'

'*Peste!* I will do nothing of the kind; the moment they come from government you would find them execrable. Besides, that does not concern the home but the financial department. Address yourself to M. Humann, section of the indirect contributions, corridor A., № 26.'

'On my word,' said Albert, 'you astonish me by the extent of your knowledge. Take a cigar.'

'Really, my dear Albert,' replied Lucien, lighting a manilla at a rose-coloured taper that burnt in a beautifully enamelled stand—'how happy you are to have nothing to do. You do not know your own good fortune!'

'And what would you do, my dear diplomatist,' replied Morcerf, with a slight degree of irony in his voice, 'if you did nothing? What? private secretary to a minister, plunged at once into European cabals and Parisian intrigues; having kings, and, better still, queens, to protect, parties to unite, elections to direct; making more use of your cabinet with your pen and your telegraph than Napoleon did of his battle-fields with his sword and his victories; possessing five-and-twenty thousand francs a year, besides your place; a horse, for which Château-Renaud offered you four hundred louis, and which you would not part with; a tailor who never disappoints you; with the opera, the jockey-club, and other diversions, can you not amuse yourself? Well, I will amuse you.'

'How?'

'By introducing to you a new acquaintance.'

'A man or a woman?'

'A man.'

'I know so many men already.'

'But you do not know this man.'

'Where does he come from—the end of the world?'

'Farther still, perhaps.'

'The deuce! I hope he does not bring our breakfast with him.'

'Oh, no; our breakfast comes from my father's kitchen. Are you hungry?'

'Why, really the thing seems to me simple enough. Nobody knows better than yourself that the bandits of Corsica are not rogues or thieves, but purely and simply fugitives, driven by some sinister motive from their native town or village, and that their fellowship involves no disgrace or stigma; for my own part, I protest that, should I ever go to Corsica, my first visit, ere even I presented myself to the mayor or prefect, should be to the bandits of Colomba, if I could only manage to find them; for, on my conscience, they are a race of men I admire greatly.'

'Still,' persisted Franz, 'I suppose you will allow that such men as Vampa and his band are regular villains, who have no other motive than plunder when they seize your person. How do you explain the influence the count evidently possessed over those ruffians?'

'My good friend, as in all probability I own my present safety to that influence, it would ill become me to search too closely into its source; therefore, instead of condemning him for his intimacy with outlaws, you must give me leave to excuse any little irregularity there may be in such a connection; not altogether for preserving my life, for my own idea was that it never was in much danger, but certainly for saving me 4,000 piastres, which, being translated, means neither more nor less than 24,000 livres of our money—a sum at which, most assuredly, I should never have been estimated in France, proving most indisputably,' added Albert with a laugh, 'that no prophet is honoured in his own country.'

'Talking of countries,' replied Franz, 'of what country is the count, what is his native tongue, whence does he derive his immense fortune, and what were those events of his early life—a life as marvellous as unknown—that have tinctured his succeeding years with so dark and gloomy a misanthropy? Certainly these are questions that, in your place, I should like to have answered.'

'My dear Franz,' replied Albert, 'when, upon receipt of my letter, you found the necessity of asking the count's assistance, you promptly went to him, saying, "My friend Albert de Morcerf is in danger; help me to deliver him." Was not that nearly what you said?' 'It was.'

'Well, then, did he ask you, "Who is M. Albert de Morcerf? how does he come by his name—his fortune? what are his means of existence? what is his birthplace? of what country is he a native?" Tell me, did he put all these questions to you?'

Corsican bandits with them. He dwelt with considerable force and energy on the almost magical hospitality he had received from the count, and the magnificence of his entertainment in the grotto of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

He recounted, with circumstantial exactitude, all the particulars of the supper, the hashish, the statues, the dream, and how, at his awakening, there remained no proof or trace of all these events, save the small yacht, seen in the distant horizon driving under full sail toward Porto-Vecchio.

Then he detailed the conversation overheard by him at the Colosseum, between the count and Vampa, in which the count had promised to obtain the release of the bandit Peppino,—an engagement which, as our readers are aware, he most faithfully fulfilled.

At last he arrived at the adventure of the preceding night, and the embarrassment in which he found himself placed by not having sufficient cash by six or seven hundred piastres to make up the sum required, and finally of his application to the count and the picturesque and satisfactory result that followed. Albert listened with the most profound attention.

'Well,' said he, when Franz had concluded, 'what do you find to object to in all you have related? The count is fond of travelling, and, being rich, possesses a vessel of his own. Go but to Portsmouth or Southampton, and you will find the harbors crowded with the yachts belonging to such of the English as can afford the expense, and have the same liking for this amusement. Now, by way of having a resting-place during his excursions, avoiding the wretched cookery—which has been trying its best to poison me during the last four months, while you have manfully resisted its effects for as many years,—and obtaining a bed on which it is possible to slumber, Monte Cristo has furnished for himself a temporary abode where you first found him; but, to prevent the possibility of the Tuscan government taking a fancy to his enchanted palace, and thereby depriving him of the advantages naturally expected from so large an outlay of capital, he has wisely enough purchased the island, and taken its name. Just ask yourself, my good fellow, whether there are not many persons of our acquaintance who assume the names of lands and properties they never in their lives were masters of?'

'But,' said Franz, 'the Corsican bandits that were among the crew of his vessel?'

'Humiliating as such a confession is, I am. But I dined at M. de Villefort's, and lawyers always give you very bad dinners. You would think they felt some remorse; did you ever remark that?'

'Ah, depreciate other persons' dinners; you ministers give such splendid ones.'

'Yes; but we do not invite people of fashion. If we were not forced to entertain a parcel of country boobies because they think and vote with us, we should never dream of dining at home, I assure you.'

'Well, take another glass of sherry and another biscuit.'

'Willingly. Your Spanish wine is excellent. You see we were quite right to pacify that country.'

'Yes; but Don Carlos?'

'Well, Don Carlos will drink Bordeaux, and in ten years we will marry his son to the little queen.'

'You will then obtain the Golden Fleece, if you are still in the ministry.'

'I think, Albert, you have adopted the system of feeding me on smoke this morning.'

'Well, you must allow it is the best thing for the stomach; but I hear Beauchamp in the next room; you can dispute together, and that will pass away the time.'

'About what?'

'About the papers.'

'My dear friend,' said Lucien with an air of sovereign contempt, 'do I ever read the papers?'

'Then you will dispute the more.'

'M. Beauchamp,' announced the servant. 'Come in, come in,' said Albert, rising and advancing to meet the young man. 'Here is Debray, who detests you without reading you, so he says.'

'He is quite right,' returned Beauchamp; 'for I criticise him without knowing what he does. Good-day, commander!'

'Ah, you know that already,' said the private secretary, smiling and shaking hands with him.

'*Pardieu!*'

'And what do they say of it in the world?'

'In which world? we have so many worlds in the year of grace 1838.'

'In the entire political world, of which you are one of the leaders.'

'They say that it is quite fair, and that sowing so much red, you ought to reap a little blue.'

'Come, come, that is not bad!' said Lucien. 'Why do you not join our party, my dear Beauchamp? With your talents you would make your fortune in three or four years.'

'I only await one thing before following your advice; that is, a minister who will hold office for six months. My dear Albert, one word, for I must give poor Lucien a respite. Do we breakfast or dine? I must go to the Chamber, for our life is not an idle one.'

'You only breakfast; I await two persons, and the instant they arrive we shall sit down to table.'

'Well, since we must part,' said the count, holding out a hand to each of the young men, 'allow me to wish you both a safe and pleasant journey.'

It was the first time the hand of Franz had come in contact with that of the mysterious individual before him, and unconsciously he shuddered at its touch, for it felt cold and icy as that of a corpse. 'Let us understand each other,' said Albert; 'it is agreed—is it not?—that you are to be at № 27, in the Rue du Helder, on the 21st of May, at half-past ten in the morning, and your word of honour passed for your punctuality?'

'The 21st of May, at half-past ten in the morning, Rue du Helder, № 27,' replied the count.

The young men then rose, and bowing to the count, quitted the room.

'What is the matter?' asked Albert of Franz, when they had returned to their own apartments; 'you seem more than commonly thoughtful.'

'I will confess to you, Albert,' replied Franz, 'the count is a very singular person, and the appointment you have made to meet him in Paris fills me with a thousand apprehensions.'

'My dear fellow,' exclaimed Albert, 'what can there possibly be in that to excite uneasiness? Why, you must have lost your senses.'

'Whether I am in my senses or not,' answered Franz, 'that is the way I feel.'

'Listen to me, Franz,' said Albert; 'I am glad that the occasion has presented itself for saying this to you, for I have noticed how cold you are in your bearing towards the count, while he, on the other hand, has always been courtesy itself to us. Have you anything particular against him?'

'Possibly.'

'Did you ever meet him previously to coming hither?'

'I have.'

'And where?'

'Will you promise me not to repeat a single word of what I am about to tell you?'

'I promise.'

'Upon your honour?'

'Upon my honour.'

'Then listen to me.'

Franz then related to his friend the history of his excursion to the Island of Monte Cristo and of his finding a party of smugglers there, and the two

'Nay,' said the Count; 'I will give you three months ere I join you; you see I make an ample allowance for all delays and difficulties.'

'And in three months' time,' said Albert, 'you will be at my house?'

'Shall we make a positive appointment for a particular day and hour?' inquired the count; 'only let me warn you that I am proverbial for my punctilious exactitude in keeping my engagements.'

'Day for day, hour for hour,' said Albert; 'that will suit me to a dot.'

'So be it, then,' replied the count, and extending his hand towards a calendar, suspended near the chimney-piece, he said, 'today is the 21st of February;' and drawing out his watch, added, 'it is exactly half-past ten o'clock. Now promise me to remember this, and expect me the 21st of May at the same hour in the forenoon.'

'Capital!' exclaimed Albert; 'your breakfast shall be waiting.'

'Where do you live?'

'№ 27, Rue du Helder.'

'Have you bachelor's apartments there? I hope my coming will not put you to any inconvenience.'

'I reside in my father's house, but occupy a pavilion at the farther side of the courtyard, entirely separated from the main building.'

'Quite sufficient,' replied the count, as, taking out his tablets, he wrote down '№ 27, Rue du Helder, 21st May, half-past ten in the morning.'

'Now then,' said the count, returning his tablets to his pocket, 'make yourself perfectly easy; the hand of your time-piece will not be more accurate in marking the time than myself.'

'Shall I see you again ere my departure?' asked Albert.

'That depends; when do you leave?'

'Tomorrow evening, at five o'clock.'

'In that case I must say adieu to you, as I am compelled to go to Naples, and shall not return hither before Saturday evening or Sunday morning. And you, baron,' pursued the count, addressing Franz, 'do you also depart tomorrow?'

'Yes.'

'For France?'

'No, for Venice; I shall remain in Italy for another year or two.'

'Then we shall not meet in Paris?'

'I fear I shall not have that honour.'

Chapter XL

The Breakfast

'And what sort of persons do you expect to breakfast?' said Beauchamp.

'A gentleman, and a diplomatist.'

'Then we shall have to wait two hours for the gentleman, and three for the diplomatist. I shall come back to dessert; keep me some strawberries, coffee, and cigars. I shall take a cutlet on my way to the Chamber.'

'Do not do anything of the sort; for were the gentleman a Montmorency, and the diplomatist a Metternich, we will breakfast at eleven; in the meantime, follow Debray's example, and take a glass of sherry and a biscuit.'

'Be it so; I will stay; I must do something to distract my thoughts.'

'You are like Debray, and yet it seems to me that when the minister is out of spirits, the opposition ought to be joyous.'

'Ah, you do not know with what I am threatened. I shall hear this morning that M. Danglars make a speech at the Chamber of Deputies, and at his wife's this evening I shall hear the tragedy of a peer of France. The devil take the constitutional government, and since we had our choice, as they say, at least, how could we choose that?'

'I understand; you must lay in a stock of hilarity.'

'Do not run down M. Danglars' speeches,' said Debray; 'he votes for you, for he belongs to the opposition.'

'*Pardieu*, that is exactly the worst of all. I am waiting until you send him to speak at the Luxembourg, to laugh at my ease.'

'My dear friend,' said Albert to Beauchamp, 'it is plain that the affairs of Spain are settled, for you are most desperately out of humor this morning. Recollect that Parisian gossip has spoken of a marriage between myself and Mlle. Eugénie Danglars; I cannot in conscience, therefore, let you run down

the speeches of a man who will one day say to me, "Vicomte, you know I give my daughter two millions."'

'Ah, this marriage will never take place,' said Beauchamp. 'The king has made him a baron, and can make him a peer, but he cannot make him a gentleman, and the Count of Morcerf is too aristocratic to consent, for the paltry sum of two million francs, to a *mésalliance*. The Viscount of Morcerf can only wed a marchioness.'

'But two million francs make a nice little sum,' replied Morcerf.

'It is the social capital of a theatre on the boulevard, or a railroad from the Jardin des Plantes to La Râpée.'

'Never mind what he says, Morcerf,' said Debray, 'do you marry her. You marry a money-bag label, it is true; well, but what does that matter? It is better to have a blazon less and a figure more on it. You have seven martlets on your arms; give three to your wife, and you will still have four; that is one more than M. de Guise had, who so nearly became King of France, and whose cousin was Emperor of Germany.'

'On my word, I think you are right, Lucien,' said Albert absently.

'To be sure; besides, every millionaire is as noble as a bastard—that is, he can be.'

'Do not say that, Debray,' returned Beauchamp, laughing, 'for here is Château-Renaud, who, to cure you of your mania for paradoxes, will pass the sword of Renaud de Montauban, his ancestor, through your body.'

'He will sully it then,' returned Lucien; 'for I am low—very low.'

'Oh, heavens,' cried Beauchamp, 'the minister quotes Béranger, what shall we come to next?'

'M. de Château-Renaud—M. Maximilian Morrel,' said the servant, announcing two fresh guests.

'Now, then, to breakfast,' said Beauchamp; 'for, if I remember, you told me you only expected two persons, Albert.'

'Morrel,' muttered Albert—'Morrel—who is he?'

But before he had finished, M. de Château-Renaud, a handsome young man of thirty, gentleman all over,—that is, with the figure of a Guiche and the wit of a Mortemart,—took Albert's hand.

peculiar smile), 'whether you undertake, upon my arrival in France, to open to me the doors of that fashionable world of which I know no more than a Huron or a native of Cochin-China?'

'Oh, that I do, and with infinite pleasure,' answered Albert; 'and so much the more readily as a letter received this morning from my father summons me to Paris, in consequence of a treaty of marriage (my dear Franz, do not smile, I beg of you) with a family of high standing, and connected with the very cream of Parisian society.'

'Connected by marriage, you mean,' said Franz, laughingly.

'Well, never mind how it is,' answered Albert, 'it comes to the same thing in the end. Perhaps by the time you return to Paris, I shall be quite a sober, staid father of a family! A most edifying representative I shall make of all the domestic virtues—don't you think so? But as regards your wish to visit our fine city, my dear count, I can only say that you may command me and mine to any extent you please.'

'Then it is settled,' said the count, 'and I give you my solemn assurance that I only waited an opportunity like the present to realize plans that I have long meditated.'

Franz did not doubt that these plans were the same concerning which the count had dropped a few words in the grotto of Monte Cristo, and while the count was speaking the young man watched him closely, hoping to read something of his purpose in his face, but his countenance was inscrutable especially when, as in the present case, it was veiled in a sphinx-like smile.

'But tell me now, count,' exclaimed Albert, delighted at the idea of having to chaperon so distinguished a person as Monte Cristo; 'tell me truly whether you are in earnest, or if this project of visiting Paris is merely one of the chimerical and uncertain air castles of which we make so many in the course of our lives, but which, like a house built on the sand, is liable to be blown over by the first puff of wind?'

'I pledge you my honour,' returned the count, 'that I mean to do as I have said; both inclination and positive necessity compel me to visit Paris.'

'When do you propose going thither?'

'Have you made up your mind when you shall be there yourself?'

'Certainly I have; in a fortnight or three weeks' time, that is to say, as fast as I can get there!'