

## "Histoire d'une Parisienne."\*

OCTAVE FEUILLET's latest novel will, as usual, fascinate the women who read it and exasperate the men. It is pernicious stuff. It has all the qualities of its author's best manner—dramatic vigor, keen wit, perfect style. It has all the vices of his later work, his blemishes of taste, his delight in unsavoriness, which make one feel something akin to pity for an Academician, a master of the craft, who can find no better employment for the closing years of his literary career than the creation of imaginary monsters and the weaving of impossible crimes. Luckily the "Story of a Woman of Paris," like its predecessors, carries its antidote with it. Its logic is ridiculously defective. Its characters act about as rationally as the characters of a fairy tale. Jeanne de Latour-Mesnil, its heroine, was, before her marriage with M. de Maurescamp, one of the purest and most perfect girls in France. She was separated from the men whom she met in her mother's drawing-room by a moral and intellectual abyss as wide as that which separated her from a Zulu or a Hottentot. She had been so carefully guarded by maternal care that no thought of evil had ever entered her head. Her favorite poet was Tennyson, her favorite musician Chopin, and she had imbibed from them a mild little spirit of romance. But M. de Maurescamp had a particular objection to romance. When his wife read Tennyson, he thumped the piano; when she played Chopin, he read the newspaper aloud. This conduct estranged the pair. In real life they might have bickered, fought, and made it up again; or, as Jeanne was such a paragon of virtue, she might have yielded, given up her romance, and sought consolation in the child that was born to her. But that is not the kind of life that Octave Feuillet finds it worth his while to describe.

Jeanne de Maurescamp had two friends, Mme. d'Hermans and Mme. de Lerne. The former she detected in a clear case of *crim. con.*, and, being herself perfectly pure, proceeded to embrace and console her friend, and then spent the night "with her eyes fixed on the void." The latter having a son of not too moral proclivities, thought that the best way to reclaim him would be to make Jeanne his mistress. With the help of Chopin and Tennyson she succeeded so well that when M. de Maurescamp began to suspect that something was wrong, and killed the young man in a duel, the chaste Jeanne determined to avenge her lover, and hired a fencing-master to kill her husband. The fencing-master, not understanding her, wrote, "For your sake I will handle him gently." Jeanne replied, "Pray do nothing of the sort." The moral is addressed to the mothers of France, and it is this: "Social monsters are not created by God, but by men. Here was an angelic creature who, after less than two years of married life, tried to murder her husband because he wanted to deprive her of Chopin and Tennyson. Henceforth, if you marry your daughters to unromantic blockheads, you must be prepared to take the consequences."

One can only conclude from this book, which is both silly and nasty, that Octave Feuillet and his literature are passing out of date. The vigorous treatment of social sores, which the present age demands, is very different from this dalliance with immoral absurdities. When Parisian society was rotting under the Second Empire, Feuillet was its chosen annalist. Now that the Republic has put new life into it, and the home-life of Paris is not unlike that of the provinces, his dapper elegancies and studied fopperies have the effect of a vulgar caricature.

\* *Histoire d'une Parisienne*. By Octave Feuillet. Paris: Calmann Levy.