

Robineau. But what a behaviour all at once, dear cousin! First such a friendly reception, and now this rude way of speaking to me. — That is not acting in an honest and straight-forward manner, excuse me, that is double-dealing — and if I were to tell others how you treated me — it would not redound to your honour! No, it would not!

Selicour (*terrified*). Tell it to others! What!

Robineau. Yes, yes, cousin!

Selicour. If you dare, you lout! — I will get a place for you — I will provide amply for my mother. Be quiet! I will get you a situation, depend upon it.

Robineau. Well, if you do that —

Selicour. But we can't speak about it here! Be off, and come to my room!

Robineau. Yes, mind, cousin! I should like to get a quiet and comfortable berth! If you could get me some employment in the excise office.

Selicour. I'll put you in the right place, depend upon it. — To the village with that stupid boor, to the village as soon as possible! (*Exit.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

La Roche and Charles Firmin (*meet one another*).

La Roche. I have been looking for you some time. — I say! — Well, I have kept my word — I have given the minister a nice description of that Selicour.

Charles. Indeed? And is it all up with him? all up?

La Roche. Not exactly! — not yet quite — for I must tell you he extricated himself by a host of lies, that I stood there like a blockhead. — The hypocrite pretended to be affected, he played the tender friend, the generous man with me, he loaded me with asseverations of friendship, and wants to appoint me head of the office.

Charles. How? what? That is capital! I wish you joy.

La Roche. I have hitherto considered him an adventurer; I thought he only cared for place and money, but I had never believed him to be so false and treacherous. That hypocrite with his bland twaddle! But I was not his fool, and gave him a flat refusal.

Charles. And so we are still where we were? And my father is no better off than before?

La Roche. True enough — but leave it to me! leave it to me!

Charles. And I have not got any further either. I went into the garden by stealth to see, if, perchance, I might meet my love there. But all in vain! A few verses, which I composed in my loneliness, are the only fruits I bring back.

La Roche. Capital! well done! Compose verses to your love! In the meantime, I will pursue the track of the game. The rogue deceives himself very much if he believes that I have given up my plan.

Charles. Dear La Roche! That is beneath our dignity. Let this wretch carry on his dirty work, and let us obtain by our own merit what he gets by his sneaking baseness.

La Roche. Away with pride! It is weakness, it is prejudice! — How? If we wait till honesty rules the world — we shall have to wait a long time. Everybody schemes and plots! Well, let us try to do the same for the good cause. That is, however, no business of yours. — Compose your verses, cultivate your talent; I will bring it out at the proper time, I will — that is my affair!

Charles. Yes, but don't neglect prudence. — You have very awkwardly allowed yourself to be caught napping to-day.

La Roche. And it won't be the last time either. — But it does not matter! I go straight ahead, I don't let myself be frightened. I will continue to attack him so long, and so often, till I can deal him a blow at last. I have been his fool a long time; now I will play him a trick, too. If we allow the knave to go on as he began, I shall soon have to be the rogue, and your father, the blockhead.

Charles. Somebody is coming.

La Roche. 'tis himself!

Charles. I cannot bear the sight of him. I will return to the garden and finish my poem. (*Exit.*)

La Roche. I will go, too! I'll go to work at once. But no — it is better for me to stay here, otherwise the coxcomb might think I was afraid of him.

SCENE II.

Selicour and La Roche.

Selicour. Ah, look there! Do I find Mr. La Roche here?

La Roche. Quite so, Mr. Selicour!

Selicour. Very much ashamed, as I see.

La Roche. Not particularly.

Selicour. Your furious onslaught upon me has not been successful — The friend has spent his shafts in vain.

La Roche. It does not matter.

Selicour. Indeed, my dear La Roche! hard as you were upon me, — I felt sorry for you with your silly whims.

La Roche. Mr. Narbonne is not present now — don't constrain yourself.

Selicour. What do you mean?

La Roche. Be insolent, as much as you please.

Selicour. Look there!

La Roche. Be proud of your triumph. You've got the better of me.

Selicour. Truly, it can make one proud to have vanquished so formidable an adversary.

La Roche. If I did not do it well to-day, I'll soon learn in your school how to do it better.

Selicour. How, Mr. La Roche? You have not yet given it up to injure me?

La Roche. One does not give up a game on account of one unlucky move.

Selicour. A faithful shield-bearer of honest Mr. Firmin! — See, see!

La Roche. He must often help you in your difficulties, this honest Firmin.

Selicour. How much does he pay you for your chivalrous assistance?

La Roche. How much do you pay him for the elaborate state papers he writes for you?

Selicour. Take care, friend La Roche! — I might get you into hot water.

La Roche. Don't be angry, friend Selicour! — Anger betrays a bad conscience.

Selicour. Truly, I ought merely to laugh at your folly.

La Roche. You despise an enemy who appears to be too weak in your eyes. I will do my best to deserve your esteem. (*Exit.*)

SCENE III.

Selicour (*alone*).

They wish to see Firmin appointed ambassador. — Gently, comrade! — We are not yet so far. But Firmin always behaved so well towards me. — It is the son, I suppose — the young fellow who dabbles in poetry, quite certain — and this La Roche is the man who urges them on! This Firmin is a man of great merit, I can't deny it, and if they stir up his ambition, I don't know any one, who might be more dangerous to me. — That must be prevented! — But in what a plight do I see myself! Just these two Firmins could now be of the greatest use to me, the father, by his intelligence, and the son, with his verses. — Let us first make use of them, and then, when the proper time comes, get rid of them.

SCENE IV.

Firmin, the father, and **Selicour**.

Selicour. Is it you, Mr. Firmin? I was just coming to you.

Firmin. To me?

Selicour. To get a misunderstanding cleared up between us.

Firmin. What about?

Selicour. About a paltry affair. — Dear Firmin, it is a great consolation to me to see you. — They wanted to set us at variance.

Firmin. To set us at variance?

Selicour. Certainly. But they shall not succeed, I hope. I am your true and sincere friend, and I have proved it to-day, I think, whilst that crazy La Roche tried to defame my character to the minister.

Firmin. How? Should La Roche —

Selicour. He has most shamefully exposed me.

Firmin. He has lost his situation. Put yourself in his place!

Selicour. He is an ungrateful wretch! after all I have done for him. — And he did it, he says, to do you a service. — But he did you an ill turn by trying to injure me. What else do I want but your advancement? — But I know better than this hot-headed fellow what can be of use to you. Therefore I have already formed a plan for you. You hate the noisy bustle of the office, that I know; you don't like to live in the noisy town. You shall be otherwise provided for, Mr. Firmin. — You select for yourself some retired spot in the country, get a good salary, I sent you work out there, you like to work, and shall not be in want of it.

Firmin. But how —

Selicour. These are as yet merely some crude ideas of mine, there will be time enough by-and-by. — Happy he who spends his days amidst rural scenes. Alas! Mr. Firmin. I shall not be so fortu-

nate! I am shut up within the precincts of the town, a slave to circumstances, and exposed to the shafts of malice. — I, therefore, considered it the duty of a good relation to send a cousin, who wished to settle here, head over heels back into the country. The good cousin! I gladly paid his travelling expenses — for, don't you say yourself that it is infinitely better to enjoy full liberty in the country, in obscurity, than drudge and toil here in town.

Firmin. That is also my opinion. But what did you really come to me for?

Salicour. Well, as I said, above all things to convince myself of the friendship of my dear colleague. And then — you have so often helped me out of difficulties; I don't conceal it, I owe you so much — so very much! My position kills me — I have so much to do — indeed, it requires my whole head to get through my work. — You are satisfied with our minister?

Firmin. I admire him.

Salicour. Yes, that is what I call an able chief! And, indeed, it was high time that such a man took the helm, or else everything would have gone to ruin. — All is not yet, as it ought to be, I told him so to-day — If you wish that all should go on well, you must present a memoir, wherein all that is to be reformed, should be stated according to the strictest truth. This idea of mine he eagerly took up, and desires such a memoir to be drawn up without delay. — He charged me to do so at once; — but the manifold duties that weigh me down — indeed, I tremble, when I think of an increase of work.

Firmin. And therefore you count upon me — don't you?

Selicour. Well, yes! I will confess it!

Firmin. You could this time not apply to a better man.

Selicour. Oh, I know that! I know that!

Firmin. For, having been so long an eye-witness of the abuses under the late administration — and not wishing merely to lament them as an idle spectator, I have confided my complaints and my plans of improvement to paper — and so it happens that the work which is required of *you* is, in fact, already done by *me* — I had not designed it for any particular use. — I only wrote it to ease my own heart.

Selicour. Is it possible? — You had —

Firmin. It is quite finished, if you wish to make use of it.

Selicour. Of course, I will! Oh with the greatest pleasure! That is indeed a most unexpected piece of good luck!

Firmin. But the papers are not in the best order!

Selicour. Oh, I willingly take upon myself this little trouble. This very evening the minister shall have the memoir. — I'll tell him who is the author, you shall have all the glory of it.

Firmin. You know that I don't much care about that! If I can but do some good by it, I don't mind under what name it is done.

Selicour. Worthy, charming man! No one does your unassuming merit more justice than myself. — And the papers you really will —

Firmin. I can fetch them immediately, if you will wait so long.

Selicour. Yes, do, please! I'll stay here.

Firmin. There is my son coming — he can, in the meantime, keep you company — But don't tell him anything about it — do you hear! I beg you!

Selicour. Indeed! why not, pray!

Firmin. For different reasons.

Selicour. Well, if you wish it! — but it will be very hard for me to keep your kindness secret! — *(when Firmin is gone)* The poor fool! He is most likely afraid his son might scold him.

SCENE V.

Charles. Selicour.

Charles *(enters reading a paper, which, on seeing Selicour, he quickly conceals)*. There's that Selicour again. — *(wishing to go away)*.

Selicour. Please to tarry a little, my young friend. Why do you seek solitude so much?

Charles. Pardon me, Mr. Selicour! — *(aside)* Confound it! that I must run in the way of that prater!

Selicour. I have been longing to see you for some time, my dear Sir! — How are the Muses getting on? How do the verses flow? Good Mr. Firmin greatly objects to them, I know, but he is wrong. You have such a decided talent! — If the world only knew you — but that will come by-and-by! This very morning I spoke of you —

Charles. Of me?

Selicour. With the mother of our minister — and one is already prepossessed in your favour in consequence of what I said about you.

Charles. Indeed — On what occasion was it?

Selicour. She pretends to be a connoisseur — I don't know what makes her do so. People flatter her on account of her son! — How? Suppose you were to try to gain her favour in a clever, delicate manner — for this very reason I wanted to see you. — She requested of me a few couplets for this evening. — Now, I have, it is true, composed some verses in my time, too, like others, but my wit is dried up amidst the irksome duties of office! What do you say, suppose you were to write these few verses instead of me? You entrust them to me — I read them out — one is charmed with them — one wants to know — I — mention your name! I seize this opportunity to speak of you in terms of high praise, and in a very short time the new poet is finished, just as famous by his wit as by his sword.

Charles. You hold out to me a brilliant prospect!

Selicour. It is quite in your power to realise it!

Charles (*aside*). He will talk me over! It is all deceit; I know well enough that he is false — but how easily am I overcome by praise! He could persuade me against my will! — (*to Selicour*) One requires for this evening —

Selicour. A trifle! A mere nothing! A little song — where, in an easy manner, a delicate allusion in praise of the minister might be put in.

Charles. Adulation is not in my line! The dignity of poesy shall not be degraded by me. Every praise, however much deserved, is flattery if addressed to men in high positions.

Selicour. The thorough pride of a true son of the Muses! Well then, no praises — but a little dash of love, tenderness — sentiment —

Charles (*looks at his paper*). Could I have imagined that when I wrote them, I should so soon have an opportunity? —

Selicour. What? How? Those are surely no verses —

Charles. Oh, pardon me! A very weak attempt —

Selicour. Heyday! By George! There we have just what we want! — Give them to me, quickly! You shall soon see the effect of them. — It need not be a romance — these little things — these pretty trifles often do more than we imagine — by them one wins the ladies, and ladies can do anything. — Give them to me! Give them to me! — How! you hesitate! Well, as you like! I wanted to be of service to you — to make you known — you don't wish to gain renown — keep your verses! It is your interest, not mine, that I had in view.

Charles. If only —

Selicour. If you are bashful —

Charles. But I don't know —

Selicour (*snatches the paper out of his hand*). You are a child! Give it to me! I will serve you in spite of yourself — your father himself shall soon do justice to your talent. Here he comes! (*He puts the paper in his right pocket.*)

SCENE VI.

The two **Firmins** and **Selicour**.

Firmin. Here, my friend! — but not a word about it to any one. (*Secretly giving him the paper.*)

Selicour. I know how to keep silence. (*Puts the paper in his left coat-pocket.*)

Charles (*aside*). Was I wrong in giving them to him? — What can he do after all with me verses?

Selicour. My worthy friends! I've spent in your company a most delightful half-hour — but one altogether forgets one's self in your society — The minister is most likely waiting for me — I regret that I have to leave you now, for one always gains something by conversing with such worthy gentlemen. (*Exit holding his coat-pockets with both his hands.*)

SCENE VII.

The two Firmins.

Firmin. Now, that is the man whom you call an artful plotter and schemer — and nobody here takes more interest in me than he does!

Charles. You may take me for a dreamer — but the more he flatters you, the less I trust him. — This bland tone, that he adopts with you — he either wants you, or desires to ruin you.

Firmin. Fie upon that mistrust! — No, my son! And though I were to become the victim of malice, I will be as slow as possible in thinking evil of others.

SCENE VIII.

The same. La Roche.

La Roche. You, here, Mr. Firmin! — It gives me great pleasure — The minister will pay a visit to you.

Charles. To my father —

Firmin. To me?

La Roche. Yes, to you! — I noticed directly

I dropped a word about you that you had already excited his attention. This Selicour does not feel at all easy about it. — The step, then, I took to-day has at least done some good.

Charles. So you see yourself drawn into light against your own will! What a happy occurrence!

Firmin. Yes! yes! You see me already in your fancy as ambassador and minister. — Mr. de Narbonne will have to give me some trifling commission, that will be all!

La Roche. No, no, I tell you he wants to become more intimately acquainted with you — and that it is not all! No! no! He, at last, begins to see clearly! This Selicour, I know, is near his fall! Even to-day — it is disgraceful and abominable — but I'll say nothing — The minister sent to inquire after you in your house, and they told him you were at the office. — He'll certainly look you up here! Did I not say so? See, here he is already!
(He retires to the back of the stage.)

SCENE IX.

Narbonne to the same.

Narbonne. I have seen some of your work, Mr. Firmin, which has given me a high idea of your intelligence, and I hear your honesty and modesty extolled on all sides. I am in great want of men of your stamp — on that account I've come to ask for your assistance, your advice, and your co-operation in the arduous work that has been entrusted to me. — Will you honour me with your friendship, Mr. Firmin?

Firmin. So much confidence makes me feel at once ashamed and proud. — I accept this kind offer with joy and gratitude — but I fear, somebody has given you too high an opinion of me.

Charles. One has not told you more than what is true, Mr. de Narbonne! — I beg you not to believe my father on this point.

Firmin. Don't make too much ado, my dear son, about some very ordinary merit of mine.

Narbonne. Is that your son, Mr. Firmin?

Firmin. Yes, Sir.

Narbonne. The same Charles Firmin whom my mother and daughter mentioned this very morning?

Charles. Did your mother and the charming Miss Charlotte remember Charles Firmin?

Narbonne. They have made many very flattering remarks about you.

Charles. Would that I deserved so much kindness!

Narbonne. It will give me great pleasure to become more intimately acquainted with you, my noble young friend, and with your worthy father. — Mr. Firmin! If it is my duty so seek you, it is no less yours to let yourself be found. Let incapacity give itself up to ignominious idleness! The man of talent, who loves his country, seeks himself the eye of his chief, and endeavours to obtain the post which he is conscious of deserving. — The blockhead and the villain are ever ready to brag about their arrogated merits. — How can one distinguish true merit when it does not even enter the lists with its contemptible rivals? Consider, Mr. Firmin, that we are answerable for the good which

we leave undone, as well as for the evil we connive at.

Charles. Do you hear it now, father?

Firmin. Give me the opportunity to serve my country, and I shall seize it with joy.

Narbonne. More I don't desire — and in order to get better acquainted with one another, you will both do me the honour of dining with me this evening. — You will find a pleasant party, a few friends, some relations. There will be no ceremoniousness of any kind, and my mother, who has not grown prouder in consequence of my new position, will receive you in the most friendly manner possible, I promise you that.

Firmin. We accept your kind invitation.

Charles (*to himself*). I shall see Charlotte!

La Roche (*aside*). Things are going on well — the moment is favourable — quick, another attack upon that Selicour! (*Advancing.*) So, at last, you do justice to merit. Well! Something, however, is still to be done, viz. to unmask vice. — Luckily I find you here, and can go on where I left off this morning. — This Selicour silenced me to-day — I was awkward, I confess, to go so clumsily straight at it; but truth remains truth. I am right after all! You wished to have facts — I've got them.

Narbonne. What? How?

La Roche. This man, who pretends to support his mother and his whole family, gave a nice reception to a poor devil of a cousin, who, in his simplicity and full of confidence in him, came to town to-day to get, through his influence, some place or other whereby he might earn his livelihood. The

hypocrite drove him away, as if he were a scamp! That's how he treats his relations — and how hard his heart is, that his starving mother can —

Firmin. You do him great injustice, dear La Roche! This very cousin, whom you say he drove away, returns to his village loaded with his benefits, and cured of his false hopes.

Narbonne. To this very cousin he behaved most nobly.

La Roche. How? What?

Narbonne. My mother was present at the conversation.

Firmin. Dear La Roche! Pray, don't yield so readily to the suggestions of blind vengeance.

La Roche. Well, Mr. Firmin! plead for him still, pray do! —

Firmin. He is absent, it is my duty to defend him. —

Narbonne. This sentiment does you honour, Mr. Firmin. Mr. Selicour has done the very same with regard to you to-day. — How it pleases me to see myself surrounded by such worthy men. (*To La Roche.*) But you who so implacably persecute poor Selicour, you really do not appear to me to be the good man you are taken for! — All that I have as yet seen of you, does indeed not redound to your honour!

La Roche (*to himself*). I could burst with rage — but patience!

Narbonne. I am inclined to think the better of good Selicour, the worse others speak to me of him, and I purpose linking him more closely to my interests.

Charles (*surprised*). How so?

Narbonne. My mother has certain plans which I approve of. — And your interests, too, Mr. Firmin, I intend to advance! — this evening more about it. — Don't keep us waiting too long. — (*To Charles.*) You, my young friend, are devoted to poetry, I hear; my mother has spoken to me in high terms of praise of your talent to-day. — Let us soon hear from you something in that line. I am also a friend of the Muses, though I cannot devote my life to their service. — Your servant, gentlemen! — No ceremonies, pray! (*Exit.*)

SCENE X.

The same without Narbonne.

Charles. I shall see her! I shall speak to her! — But those certain plans of the grandmother — Good Heavens! I tremble! — There can no longer be the slightest doubt that she is intended for this Selicour.

Firmin. Well, my son! This is certainly a lucky day.

La Roche. Certainly for you, Mr. Firmin — but for me?

Firmin. Make your mind easy! I hope to set matters all right again. — (*To Charles*) Behave prudently, my son; at least, don't forget yourself under the eyes of the minister.

Charles. Never fear! but you too, my dear father, bestir yourself for once in a way!

Firmin. Well! I am getting my lecture too.

Charles. And am I not right, Mr. La Roche?

Firmin. Let *his* example, at least, be a warning to you. — Courage, La Roche! If my mediation be of any weight, your case is not yet lost. (*Exit.*)

SCENE XI.

Charles Firmin and La Roche.

La Roche. Well, what do you say? Is it fair that even your father disavows me, and speaks in defence of the rogue?

Charles. Dear friend, I have to-day rejected your services, now I implore your aid. It is no longer to be doubted that Selicour is designed to become her husband. I am not worthy to possess her, but this villain deserves her still less!

La Roche. Does it still require the prick of a spur to urge me on? You have witnessed how badly I was treated on his account. Listen to me! I have heard that the minister has asked him to draw up to-day a very important and ticklish paper touching the management of public affairs, which is to be ready before this evening. He will either not be able to do it at all, or produce something utterly worthless. In this manner, his incapacity will be brought to light. In spite in his fawning manners, all hate him and wish his fall. Not one will assist him, that I am absolutely certain of; so much is he hated!

Charles. My father shall not help him, I'll take care of that. I see now for what purpose he coaxed me out of my poem. Should he, perchance, have the impudence to pass himself off as the author in my presence?

La Roche. Come with me into the garden, he

must not find us together. — You call yourself my master, friend Selicour! Look out — — Your disciple is making progress, and, before this very evening, you shall learn a thing or two from him. (*Exeunt.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Mrs. Belmont and Charlotte.

Mrs. Belmont. Stay here, Charlotte. We have a word to say to one another, before the company arrives — Tell me, my child, what do you think of Mr. Selicour?

Charlotte. I, mamma?

Mrs. Belmont. Yes, you!

Charlotte. Well, he appears to be a very pleasant, well deserving, worthy man.

Mrs. Belmont. I am glad to hear that! I am rejoiced, my child, that you have such a good opinion of him — for, if your father and myself can in any way influence your heart, Mr. Selicour will soon be your husband!

Charlotte (*surprised*). My husband! —

Mrs. Belmont. Does that astonish you?

Charlotte. Mr. Selicour?

Mrs. Belmont. We do not think we can better provide for you.

Charlotte. From your hands and my dear father's, I will gladly accept a husband — but you will consider me to be very capricious, dear grand-