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OTHMAR.

BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "SIGNA," "BIMBI," "WANDA," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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O T H M A R.



CHAPTER I.

AMYÔT was to the great world of the hour what Compiègne used to be to it in the finest days of the Second Empire. More indeed, for whilst nearly all patrician France would never pass an imperial threshold, there was no one of such eminence in all the nobilities of Europe that he or she did not covet, and feel flattered to obtain, their invitation to those summer and autumnal festivities of the Château Othmar. But enraptured as her guests all were, the châtelaine of Amyôt remained moderately pleased by what pleased her guests so excessively, and less and less pleased with every year.

"After all, there is nothing really new in anything we do here," she said slightly to Loris Loswa, who occupied there a half-privileged and half-subordinate position as chief director of the various entertainments; it was he who brought the greatest actors on the stage, who initiated the greatest singers to direct

the concerts, who invented new figures for the cotillons, and who organised the moonlight *fêtes* in the gardens with the docility of a courtier and the ready imagination of a clever artist steeped to his fingers' ends in the traditions of the eighteenth century.

"Vereschaguin would certainly not be one half so useful in the summer in a French château," said Nadine, with her contemptuous appreciation of his merits and accomplishments.

"Take care that your poodle does not bite one day," Othmar answered. "You hurt his vanity very often."

"He may bite me for aught I know," she replied. "But be very sure he will never quarrel with Amyôt. He is very prudent in his own self-interest."

"But no man likes to be merely used as you show that you use him."

"I pay him. I have made him the fashion. I can unmake him."

Othmar ventured to demur to that.

"You can do a great deal in *faisant la pluie et le beau temps*, we all know; but surely the fashion which Loswa has attained (for it is fashion and not fame) is, though a great deal of it may be owing to full artificial support, yet real enough to stand alone. For his own generation, at any rate."

"My dear Otho, nothing is ever easier than to *dénigrer*: Pope has said it before us. It costs an im-