GUY DE MAUPASSANT

A SELECTION FROM THE WRITINGS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT, VOL. I

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Of the French writers of romance of the latter part of the nineteenth century no one made a reputation as quickly as did Guy de Maupassant. Not one has preserved that reputation with more ease, not only during life, but in death. None so completely hides his personality in his glory. In an epoch of the utmost publicity, in which the most insignificant deeds of a celebrated man are spied, recorded, and commented on, the author of "Boule de Suif," of "Pierre et Jean," of "Notre Coeur," found a way of effacing his personality in his work.

Of De Maupassant we know that he was born in Normandy about 1850; that he was the favorite pupil, if one may so express it, the literary protege, of Gustave Flaubert; that he made his debut late in 1880, with a novel inserted in a small collection, published by Emile Zola and his young friends, under the title: "The Soirees of Medan"; that subsequently he did not fail to publish stories and romances every year up to 1891, when a disease of the brain struck him down in the fullness of

production; and that he died, finally, in 1893, without having recovered his reason.

We know, too, that he passionately loved a strenuous physical life and long journeys, particularly long journeys upon the sea. He owned a little sailing yacht, named after one of his books, "Bel-Ami," in which he used to sojourn for weeks and months. These meager details are almost the only ones that have been gathered as food for the curiosity of the public.

I leave the legendary side, which is always in evidence in the case of a celebrated man, – that gossip, for example, which avers that Maupassant was a high liver and a worldling. The very number of his volumes is a protest to the contrary. One could not write so large a number of pages in so small a number of years without the virtue of industry, a virtue incompatible with habits of dissipation. This does not mean that the writer of these great romances had no love for pleasure and had not tasted the world, but that for him these were secondary things. The psychology of his work ought, then, to find an interpretation other than that afforded by wholly false or exaggerated anecdotes. I wish to indicate here how this work, illumined by the three or four positive data which I have given, appears to me to demand it.

And first, what does that anxiety to conceal his personality prove, carried as it was to such an extreme degree? The answer rises spontaneously in the minds of those who have studied closely the history of literature. The absolute silence about himself, preserved by one whose position among us was that of a

Tourgenief, or of a Merimee, and of a Moliere or a Shakespeare among the classic great, reveals, to a person of instinct, a nervous sensibility of extreme depth. There are many chances for an artist of his kind, however timid, or for one who has some grief, to show the depth of his emotion. To take up again only two of the names just cited, this was the case with the author of "Terres Vierges," and with the writer of "Colomba."

A somewhat minute analysis of the novels and romances of Maupassant would suffice to demonstrate, even if we did not know the nature of the incidents which prompted them, that he also suffered from an excess of nervous emotionalism. Nine times out of ten, what is the subject of these stories to which freedom of style gives the appearance of health? A tragic episode. I cite, at random, "Mademoiselle Fifi," "La Petite Roque," "Inutile Beaute," "Le Masque," "Le Horla," "L'Epreuve," "Le Champ d'Oliviers," among the novels, and among the romances, "Une Vie," "Pierre et Jean," "Fort comme la Mort," "Notre Coeur." His imagination aims to represent the human being as imprisoned in a situation at once insupportable and inevitable. The spell of this grief and trouble exerts such a power upon the writer that he ends stories commenced in pleasantry with some sinister drama. Let me instance "Saint-Antonin," "A Midnight Revel," "The Little Cask," and "Old Amable." You close the book at the end of these vigorous sketches, and feel how surely they point to constant suffering on the part of him who executed them.

This is the leading trait in the literary physiognomy of Maupassant, as it is the leading and most profound trait in the psychology of his work, viz, that human life is a snare laid by nature, where joy is always changed to misery, where noble words and the highest professions of faith serve the lowest plans and the most cruel egoism, where chagrin, crime, and folly are forever on hand to pursue implacably our hopes, nullify our virtues, and annihilate our wisdom. But this is not the whole.

Maupassant has been called a literary nihilist – but (and this is the second trait of his singular genius) in him nihilism finds itself coexistent with an animal energy so fresh and so intense that for a long time it deceives the closest observer. In an eloquent discourse, pronounced over his premature grave, Emile Zola well defined this illusion: "We congratulated him," said he, "upon that health which seemed unbreakable, and justly credited him with the soundest constitution of our band, as well as with the clearest mind and the sanest reason. It was then that this frightful thunderbolt destroyed him."

It is not exact to say that the lofty genius of De Maupassant was that of an absolutely sane man. We comprehend it to-day, and, on re-reading him, we find traces everywhere of his final malady. But it is exact to say that this wounded genius was, by a singular circumstance, the genius of a robust man. A physiologist would without doubt explain this anomaly by the coexistence of a nervous lesion, light at first, with a muscular, athletic temperament. Whatever the cause, the effect is

undeniable. The skilled and dainty pessimism of De Maupassant was accompanied by a vigor and physique very unusual. His sensations are in turn those of a hunter and of a sailor, who have, as the old French saying expressively puts it, "swift foot, eagle eye," and who are attuned to all the whisperings of nature.

The only confidences that he has ever permitted his pen to tell of the intoxication of a free, animal existence are in the opening pages of the story entitled "Mouche," where he recalls, among the sweetest memories of his youth, his rollicking canoe parties upon the Seine, and in the description in "La Vie Errante" of a night spent on the sea, – "to be alone upon the water under the sky, through a warm night," – in which he speaks of the happiness of those "who receive sensations through the whole surface of their flesh, as they do through their eyes, their mouth, their ears, and sense of smell."

His unique and too scanty collection of verses, written in early youth, contains the two most fearless, I was going to say the most ingenuous, paeans, perhaps, that have been written since the Renaissance: "At the Water's Edge" (Au Bord de l'Eau) and the "Rustic Venus" (La Venus Rustique). But here is a paganism whose ardor, by a contrast which brings up the ever present duality of his nature, ends in an inexpressible shiver of scorn:

> "We look at each other, astonished, immovable,
> And both are so pale that it makes us fear."
> *   *   *   *   *
> "Alas! through all our senses slips life itself away."

This ending of the "Water's Edge" is less sinister than the murder and the vision of horror which terminate the pantheistic hymn of the "Rustic Venus." Considered as documents revealing the cast of mind of him who composed them, these two lyrical essays are especially significant, since they were spontaneous. They explain why De Maupassant, in the early years of production, voluntarily chose, as the heroes of his stories, creatures very near to primitive existence, peasants, sailors, poachers, girls of the farm, and the source of the vigor with which he describes these rude figures. The robustness of his animalism permits him fully to imagine all the simple sensations of these beings, while his pessimism, which tinges these sketches of brutal customs with an element of delicate scorn, preserves him from coarseness. It is this constant and involuntary antithesis which gives unique value to those Norman scenes which have contributed so much to his glory. It corresponds to, those two contradictory tendencies in literary art, which seek always to render life in motion with the most intense coloring, and still to make more and more subtle the impression of this life. How is one ambition to be satisfied at the same time as the other, since all gain in color and movement brings about a diminution of sensibility, and conversely? The paradox of his constitution permitted to Maupassant this seemingly impossible accord, aided as he was by an intellect whose influence was all powerful upon his development – the writer I mention above,

Gustave Flaubert.

These meetings of a pupil and a master, both great, are indeed rare. They present, in fact, some troublesome conditions, the first of which is a profound analogy between two types of thought. There must have been, besides, a reciprocity of affection, which does not often obtain between a renowned senior who is growing old and an obscure junior, whose renown is increasing. From generation to generation, envy reascends no less than she redescends. For the honor of French men of letters, let us add that this exceptional phenomenon has manifested itself twice in the nineteenth century. Merimee, whom I have also named, received from Stendhal, at twenty, the same benefits that Maupassant received from Flaubert.

The author of "Une Vie" and the writer of "Clara Jozul" resemble each other, besides, in a singular and analogous circumstance. Both achieved renown at the first blow, and by a masterpiece which they were able to equal but never surpass. Both were misanthropes early in life, and practised to the end the ancient advice that the disciple of Beyle carried upon his seal: [Greek: memneso apistein] – "Remember to distrust." And, at the same time, both had delicate, tender hearts under this affectation of cynicism, both were excellent sons, irreproachable friends, indulgent masters, and both were idolized by their inferiors. Both were worldly, yet still loved a wanderer's life; both joined to a constant taste for luxury an irresistible desire for solitude. Both belonged to the extreme left of the literature

of their epoch, but kept themselves from excess and used with a judgment marvelously sure the sounder principles of their school. They knew how to remain lucid and classic, in taste as much as in form – Merimee through all the audacity of a fancy most exotic, and Maupassant in the realism of the most varied and exact observation. At a little distance they appear to be two patterns, identical in certain traits, of the same family of minds, and Tourgenief, who knew and loved the one and the other, never failed to class them as brethren.

They are separated, however, by profound differences, which perhaps belong less to their nature than to that of the masters from whom they received their impulses: Stendhal, so alert, so mobile, after a youth passed in war and a ripe age spent in vagabond journeys, rich in experiences, immediate and personal; Flaubert so poor in direct impressions, so paralyzed by his health, by his family, by his theories even, and so rich in reflections, for the most part solitary.

Among the theories of the anatomist of "Madame Bovary," there are two which appear without ceasing in his Correspondence, under one form or another, and these are the ones which are most strongly evident in the art of De Maupassant. We now see the consequences which were inevitable by reason of them, endowed as Maupassant was with a double power of feeling life bitterly, and at the same time with so much of animal force. The first theory bears upon the choice of personages and the story of the romance, the second upon the

character of the style. The son of a physician, and brought up in the rigors of scientific method, Flaubert believed this method to be efficacious in art as in science. For instance, in the writing of a romance, he seemed to be as scientific as in the development of a history of customs, in which the essential is absolute exactness and local color. He therefore naturally wished to make the most scrupulous and detailed observation of the environment.

Thus is explained the immense labor in preparation which his stories cost him – the story of "Madame Bovary," of "The Sentimental Education," and "Bouvard and Pecuchet," documents containing as much minutiae as his historical stories. Beyond everything he tried to select details that were eminently significant. Consequently he was of the opinion that the romance writer should discard all that lessened this significance, that is, extraordinary events and singular heroes. The exceptional personage, it seemed to him, should be suppressed, as should also high dramatic incident, since, produced by causes less general, these have a range more restricted. The truly scientific romance writer, proposing to paint a certain class, will attain his end more effectively if he incarnate personages of the middle order, and, consequently, paint traits common to that class. And not only middle-class traits, but middle-class adventures.

From this point of view, examine the three great romances of the Master from Rouen, and you will see that he has not lost sight of this first and greatest principle of his art, any more than he has of the second, which was that these documents should be drawn

up in prose of absolutely perfect technique. We know with what passionate care he worked at his phrases, and how indefatigably he changed them over and over again. Thus he satisfied that instinct of beauty which was born of his romantic soul, while he gratified the demand of truth which inhered from his scientific training by his minute and scrupulous exactness.

The theory of the mean of truth on one side, as the foundation of the subject, – "the humble truth," as he termed it at the beginning of "Une Vie," – and of the agonizing of beauty on the other side, in composition, determines the whole use that Maupassant made of his literary gifts. It helped to make more intense and more systematic that dainty yet dangerous pessimism which in him was innate. The middle-class personage, in wearisome society like ours, is always a caricature, and the happenings are nearly always vulgar. When one studies a great number of them, one finishes by looking at humanity from the angle of disgust and despair. The philosophy of the romances and novels of De Maupassant is so continuously and profoundly surprising that one becomes overwhelmed by it. It reaches limitation; it seems to deny that man is susceptible to grandeur, or that motives of a superior order can uplift and ennoble the soul, but it does so with a sorrow that is profound. All that portion of the sentimental and moral world which in itself is the highest remains closed to it.

In revenge, this philosophy finds itself in a relation cruelly exact with the half-civilization of our day. By that I mean the

poorly educated individual who has rubbed against knowledge enough to justify a certain egoism, but who is too poor in faculty to conceive an ideal, and whose native grossness is corrupted beyond redemption. Under his blouse, or under his coat – whether he calls himself Renardet, as does the foul assassin in "Petite Roque," or Duroy, as does the sly hero of "Bel-Ami," or Bretigny, as does the vile seducer of "Mont Oriol," or Cesaire, the son of Old Amable in the novel of that name, – this degraded type abounds in Maupassant's stories, evoked with a ferocity almost jovial where it meets the robustness of temperament which I have pointed out, a ferocity which gives them a reality more exact still because the half-civilized person is often impulsive and, in consequence, the physical easily predominates. There, as elsewhere, the degenerate is everywhere a degenerate who gives the impression of being an ordinary man.

There are quantities of men of this stamp in large cities. No writer has felt and expressed this complex temperament with more justice than De Maupassant, and, as he was an infinitely careful observer of milieu and landscape and all that constitutes a precise middle distance, his novels can be considered an irrefutable record of the social classes which he studied at a certain time and along certain lines. The Norman peasant and the Provencal peasant, for example; also the small officeholder, the gentleman of the provinces, the country squire, the clubman of Paris, the journalist of the boulevard, the doctor at the spa, the commercial artist, and, on the feminine side, the servant

girl, the working girl, the demigrisette, the street girl, rich or poor, the gallant lady of the city and of the provinces, and the society woman – these are some of the figures that he has painted at many sittings, and whom he used to such effect that the novels and romances in which they are painted have come to be history. Just as it is impossible to comprehend the Rome of the Caesars without the work of Petronius, so is it impossible to fully comprehend the France of 1850-90 without these stories of Maupassant. They are no more the whole image of the country than the "Satyricon" was the whole image of Rome, but what their author has wished to paint, he has painted to the life and with a brush that is graphic in the extreme.

If Maupassant had only painted, in general fashion, the characters and the phase of literature mentioned he would not be distinguished from other writers of the group called "naturalists." His true glory is in the extraordinary superiority of his art. He did not invent it, and his method is not alien to that of "Madame Bovary," but he knew how to give it a suppleness, a variety, and a freedom which were always wanting in Flaubert. The latter, in his best pages, is always strained. To use the expressive metaphor of the Greek athletes, he "smells of the oil." When one recalls that when attacked by hysteric epilepsy, Flaubert postponed the crisis of the terrible malady by means of sedatives, this strained atmosphere of labor – I was going to say of stupor – which pervades his work is explained. He is an athlete, a runner, but one who drags at his feet a terrible weight. He is in the race only

for the prize of effort, an effort of which every motion reveals the intensity.

Maupassant, on the other hand, if he suffered from a nervous lesion, gave no sign of it, except in his heart. His intelligence was bright and lively, and above all, his imagination, served by senses always on the alert, preserved for some years an astonishing freshness of direct vision. If his art was due to Flaubert, it is no more belittling to him than if one call Raphael an imitator of Perugini.

Like Flaubert, he excelled in composing a story, in distributing the facts with subtle gradation, in bringing in at the end of a familiar dialogue something startlingly dramatic; but such composition, with him, seems easy, and while the descriptions are marvelously well established in his stories, the reverse is true of Flaubert's, which always appear a little veneered. Maupassant's phrasing, however dramatic it may be, remains easy and flowing.

Maupassant always sought for large and harmonious rhythm in his deliberate choice of terms, always chose sound, wholesome language, with a constant care for technical beauty. Inheriting from his master an instrument already forged, he wielded it with a surer skill. In the quality of his style, at once so firm and clear, so gorgeous yet so sober, so supple and so firm, he equals the writers of the seventeenth century. His method, so deeply and simply French, succeeds in giving an indescribable "tang" to his descriptions. If observation from nature imprints upon his tales

the strong accent of reality, the prose in which they are shrined so conforms to the genius of the race as to smack of the soil.

It is enough that the critics of to-day place Guy de Maupassant among our classic writers. He has his place in the ranks of pure French genius, with the Regniers, the La Fontaines, the Molieres. And those signs of secret ill divined everywhere under this wholesome prose surround it for those who knew and loved him with a pathos that is inexpressible. {signature}

INTRODUCTION

BORN in the middle year of the nineteenth century, and fated unfortunately never to see its close, Guy de Maupassant was probably the most versatile and brilliant among the galaxy of novelists who enriched French literature between the years 1800 and 1900. Poetry, drama, prose of short and sustained effort, and volumes of travel and description, each sparkling with the same minuteness of detail and brilliancy of style, flowed from his pen during the twelve years of his literary life.

Although his genius asserted itself in youth, he had the patience of the true artist, spending his early manhood in cutting and polishing the facets of his genius under the stern though paternal mentorship of Gustave Flaubert. Not until he had attained the age of thirty did he venture on publication, challenging criticism for the first time with a volume of poems.

Many and various have been the judgments passed upon Maupassant's work. But now that the perspective of time is lengthening, enabling us to form a more deliberate, and therefore a juster, view of his complete achievement, we are driven irresistibly to the conclusion that the force that shaped and swayed Maupassant's prose writings was the conviction that in life there could be no phase so noble or so mean, so honorable or so contemptible, so lofty or so low as to be unworthy of chronicling, – no groove of human virtue or fault, success or

failure, wisdom or folly that did not possess its own peculiar psychological aspect and therefore demanded analysis.

To this analysis Maupassant brought a facile and dramatic pen, a penetration as searching as a probe, and a power of psychological vision that in its minute detail, now pathetic, now ironical, in its merciless revelation of the hidden springs of the human heart, whether of aristocrat, bourgeois, peasant, or priest, allow one to call him a Meissonier in words.

The school of romantic realism which was founded by Merimee and Balzac found its culmination in De Maupassant. He surpassed his mentor, Flaubert, in the breadth and vividness of his work, and one of the greatest of modern French critics has recorded the deliberate opinion, that of all Taine's pupils Maupassant had the greatest command of language and the most finished and incisive style. Robust in imagination and fired with natural passion, his psychological curiosity kept him true to human nature, while at the same time his mental eye, when fixed upon the most ordinary phases of human conduct, could see some new motive or aspect of things hitherto unnoticed by the careless crowd.

It has been said by casual critics that Maupassant lacked one quality indispensable to the production of truly artistic work, viz: an absolutely normal, that is, moral, point of view. The answer to this criticism is obvious. No dissector of the gamut of human passion and folly in all its tones could present aught that could be called new, if ungifted with a viewpoint totally

out of the ordinary plane. Cold and merciless in the use of this point de vue De Maupassant undoubtedly is, especially in such vivid depictions of love, both physical and maternal, as we find in "L'histoire d'une fille de ferme" and "La femme de Paul." But then the surgeon's scalpel never hesitates at giving pain, and pain is often the road to health and ease. Some of Maupassant's short stories are sermons more forcible than any moral dissertation could ever be.

Of De Maupassant's sustained efforts "Une Vie" may bear the palm. This romance has the distinction of having changed Tolstoi from an adverse critic into a warm admirer of the author. To quote the Russian moralist upon the book:

"'Une Vie' is a romance of the best type, and in my judgment the greatest that has been produced by any French writer since Victor Hugo penned 'Les Miserables.' Passing over the force and directness of the narrative, I am struck by the intensity, the grace, and the insight with which the writer treats the new aspects of human nature which he finds in the life he describes."

And as if gracefully to recall a former adverse criticism, Tolstoi adds:

"I find in the book, in almost equal strength, the three cardinal qualities essential to great work, viz: moral purpose, perfect style, and absolute sincerity… Maupassant is a man whose vision has penetrated the silent depths of human life, and from that vantage-ground interprets the struggle of humanity."

"Bel-Ami" appeared almost two years after "Une Vie," that

is to say, about 1885. Discussed and criticised as it has been, it is in reality a satire, an indignant outburst against the corruption of society which in the story enables an ex-soldier, devoid of conscience, honor, even of the commonest regard for others, to gain wealth and rank. The purport of the story is clear to those who recognize the ideas that governed Maupassant's work, and even the hasty reader or critic, on reading "Mont Oriol," which was published two years later and is based on a combination of the motifs which inspired "Une Vie" and "Bel-Ami," will reconsider former hasty judgments, and feel, too, that beneath the triumph of evil which calls forth Maupassant's satiric anger there lies the substratum on which all his work is founded, viz: the persistent, ceaseless questioning of a soul unable to reconcile or explain the contradiction between love in life and inevitable death. Who can read in "Bel-Ami" the terribly graphic description of the consumptive journalist's demise, his frantic clinging to life, and his refusal to credit the slow and merciless approach of death, without feeling that the question asked at Naishapur many centuries ago is still waiting for the solution that is always promised but never comes?

In the romances which followed, dating from 1888 to 1890, a sort of calm despair seems to have settled down upon De Maupassant's attitude toward life. Psychologically acute as ever, and as perfect in style and sincerity as before, we miss the note of anger. Fatality is the keynote, and yet, sounding low, we detect a genuine subtone of sorrow. Was it a prescience of 1893? So

much work to be done, so much work demanded of him, the world of Paris, in all its brilliant and attractive phases, at his feet, and yet – inevitable, ever advancing death, with the question of life still unanswered.

This may account for some of the strained situations we find in his later romances. Vigorous in frame and hearty as he was, the atmosphere of his mental processes must have been vitiated to produce the dainty but dangerous pessimism that pervades some of his later work. This was partly a consequence of his honesty and partly of mental despair. He never accepted other people's views on the questions of life. He looked into such problems for himself, arriving at the truth, as it appeared to him, by the logic of events, often finding evil where he wished to find good, but never hoodwinking himself or his readers by adapting or distorting the reality of things to suit a preconceived idea.

Maupassant was essentially a worshiper of the eternal feminine. He was persuaded that without the continual presence of the gentler sex man's existence would be an emotionally silent wilderness. No other French writer has described and analyzed so minutely and comprehensively the many and various motives and moods that shape the conduct of a woman in life. Take for instance the wonderfully subtle analysis of a woman's heart as wife and mother that we find in "Une Vie." Could aught be more delicately incisive? Sometimes in describing the apparently inexplicable conduct of a certain woman he leads his readers to a point where a false step would destroy the spell and bring

the reproach of banality and ridicule upon the tale. But the catastrophe never occurs. It was necessary to stand poised upon the brink of the precipice to realize the depth of the abyss and feel the terror of the fall.

Closely allied to this phase of Maupassant's nature was the peculiar feeling of loneliness that every now and then breaks irresistibly forth in the course of some short story. Of kindly soul and genial heart, he suffered not only from the oppression of spirit caused by the lack of humanity, kindliness, sanity, and harmony which he encountered daily in the world at large, but he had an ever abiding sense of the invincible, unbanishable solitariness of his own inmost self. I know of no more poignant expression of such a feeling than the cry of despair which rings out in the short story called "Solitude," in which he describes the insurmountable barrier which exists between man and man, or man and woman, however intimate the friendship between them. He could picture but one way of destroying this terrible loneliness, the attainment of a spiritual – a divine – state of love, a condition to which he would give no name utterable by human lips, lest it be profaned, but for which his whole being yearned. How acutely he felt his failure to attain his deliverance may be drawn from his wail that mankind has no UNIVERSAL measure of happiness.

"Each one of us," writes De Maupassant, "forms for himself an illusion through which he views the world, be it poetic, sentimental, joyous, melancholy, or dismal; an illusion of beauty,

which is a human convention; of ugliness, which is a matter of opinion; of truth, which, alas, is never immutable." And he concludes by asserting that the happiest artist is he who approaches most closely to the truth of things as he sees them through his own particular illusion.

Salient points in De Maupassant's genius were that he possessed the rare faculty of holding direct communion with his gifts, and of writing from their dictation as it was interpreted by his senses. He had no patience with writers who in striving to present life as a whole purposely omit episodes that reveal the influence of the senses. "As well," he says, "refrain from describing the effect of intoxicating perfumes upon man as omit the influence of beauty on the temperament of man."

De Maupassant's dramatic instinct was supremely powerful. He seems to select unerringly the one thing in which the soul of the scene is prisoned, and, making that his keynote, gives a picture in words which haunt the memory like a strain of music. The description of the ride of Madame Tellier and her companions in a country cart through a Norman landscape is an admirable example. You smell the masses of the colza in blossom, you see the yellow carpets of ripe corn spotted here and there by the blue coronets of the cornflower, and rapt by the red blaze of the poppy beds and bathed in the fresh greenery of the landscape, you share in the emotions felt by the happy party in the country cart. And yet with all his vividness of description, De Maupassant is always sober and brief. He had

the genius of condensation and the reserve which is innate in power, and to his reader could convey as much in a paragraph as could be expressed in a page by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Flaubert not excepted.

Apart from his novels, De Maupassant's tales may be arranged under three heads: Those that concern themselves with Norman peasant life; those that deal with Government employees (Maupassant himself had long been one) and the Paris middle classes, and those that represent the life of the fashionable world, as well as the weird and fantastic ideas of the later years of his career. Of these three groups the tales of the Norman peasantry perhaps rank highest. He depicts the Norman farmer in surprisingly free and bold strokes, revealing him in all his caution, astuteness, rough gaiety, and homely virtue.

The tragic stage of De Maupassant's life may, I think, be set down as beginning just before the drama of "Musotte" was issued, in conjunction with Jacques Normand, in 1891. He had almost given up the hope of interpreting his puzzles, and the struggle between the falsity of the life which surrounded him and the nobler visions which possessed him was wearing him out. Doubtless he resorted to unwise methods for the dispelling of physical lassitude or for surcease from troubling mental problems. To this period belong such weird and horrible fancies as are contained in the short stories known as "He" and "The Diary of a Madman." Here and there, we know, were rising in him inklings of a finer and less sordid attitude 'twixt man

and woman throughout the world and of a purer constitution of existing things which no exterior force should blemish or destroy. But with these yearningly prophetic gleams came a period of mental death. Then the physical veil was torn aside and for Guy de Maupassant the riddle of existence was answered. {signature}

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

The Major Graf[1] von Farlsberg, the Prussian commandant, was reading his newspaper, lying back in a great armchair, with his booted feet on the beautiful marble fireplace, where his spurs had made two holes, which grew deeper every day, during the three months that he had been in the chateau of Urville.

A cup of coffee was smoking on a small inlaid table, which was stained with liquors burnt by cigars, notched by the penknife of the victorious officer, who occasionally would stop while sharpening a pencil, to jot down figures, or to make a drawing on it, just as it took his fancy.

When he had read his letters and the German newspapers, which his baggage-master had brought him, he got up, and after throwing three or four enormous pieces of green wood on to the fire – for these gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park in order to keep themselves warm – he went to the window. The rain was descending in torrents, a regular Normandy rain, which looked as if it were being poured out by some furious hand, a slanting rain, which was as thick as a curtain, and which formed a kind of wall with oblique stripes, and which deluged everything, a regular rain, such as one frequently experiences in the neighborhood of Rouen, which is the watering-pot of France.

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[1] Count.

For a long time the officer looked at the sodden turf, and at the swollen Andelle beyond it, which was overflowing its banks, and he was drumming a waltz from the Rhine on the window-panes, with his fingers, when a noise made him turn round; it was his second in command, Captain Baron von Kelweinstein.

The major was a giant, with broad shoulders, and a long, fair beard, which hung like a cloth on to his chest. His whole, solemn person suggested the idea of a military peacock, a peacock who was carrying his tail spread out on to his breast. He had cold, gentle, blue eyes, and the scar from a sword-cut, which he had received in the war with Austria; he was said to be an honorable man, as well as a brave officer.

The captain, a short, red-faced man, who was tightly girthed in at the waist, had his red hair cropped quite close to his head, and in certain lights almost looked as if he had been rubbed over with phosphorus. He had lost two front teeth one night, though he could not quite remember how. This defect made him speak so that he could not always be understood, and he had a bald patch on the top of his head, which made him look rather like a monk, with a fringe of curly, bright, golden hair round the circle of bare skin.

The commandant shook hands with him, and drank his cup of coffee (the sixth that morning) at a draught, while he listened to his subordinate's report of what had occurred; and then they both went to the window, and declared that it was a very unpleasant outlook. The major, who was a quiet man, with a wife at home,

could accommodate himself to everything; but the captain, who was rather fast, being in the habit of frequenting low resorts, and much given to women, was mad at having been shut up for three months in the compulsory chastity of that wretched hole.

There was a knock at the door, and when the commandant said, "Come in," one of their automatic soldiers appeared, and by his mere presence announced that breakfast was ready. In the dining-room, they met three other officers of lower rank: a lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two sub-lieutenants, Fritz Scheunebarg, and Count von Eyrick a very short, fair-haired man, who was proud and brutal toward men, harsh toward prisoners, and very violent.

Since he had been in France, his comrades had called him nothing but "Mademoiselle Fifi." They had given him that nickname on account of his dandified style and small waist, which looked as if he wore stays, from his pale face, on which his budding mustache scarcely showed, and on account of the habit he had acquired of employing the French expression, fi, fi donc, which he pronounced with a slight whistle, when he wished to express his sovereign contempt for persons or things.

The dining-room of the chateau was a magnificent long room, whose fine old mirrors, now cracked by pistol bullets, and Flemish tapestry, now cut to ribbons and hanging in rags in places, from sword-cuts, told too well what Mademoiselle Fifi's occupation was during his spare time.

There were three family portraits on the walls; a steel-clad

knight, a cardinal, and a judge, who were all smoking long porcelain pipes, which had been inserted into holes in the canvas, while a lady in a long, pointed waist proudly exhibited an enormous pair of mustaches, drawn with a piece of charcoal.

The officers ate their breakfast almost in silence in that mutilated room, which looked dull in the rain, and melancholy under its vanquished appearance, although its old, oak floor had become as solid as the stone floor of a public-house.

When they had finished eating, and were smoking and drinking, they began, as usual, to talk about the dull life they were leading. The bottles of brandy and of liquors passed from hand to hand, and all sat back in their chairs, taking repeated sips from their glasses, and scarcely removing the long, bent stems, which terminated in china bowls painted in a manner to delight a Hottentot, from their mouths.

As soon as their glasses were empty, they filled them again, with a gesture of resigned weariness, but Mademoiselle Fifi emptied his every minute, and a soldier immediately gave him another. They were enveloped in a cloud of strong tobacco smoke; they seemed to be sunk in a state of drowsy, stupid intoxication, in that dull state of drunkenness of men who have nothing to do, when suddenly, the baron sat up, and said: "By heavens! This cannot go on; we must think of something to do." And on hearing this, Lieutenant Otto and Sub-lieutenant Fritz, who pre-eminently possessed the grave, heavy German countenance, said: "What, Captain?"

He thought for a few moments, and then replied "What? Well, we must get up some entertainment; if the commandant will allow us."

"What sort of an entertainment, captain?" the major asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"I will arrange all that, commandant," the baron said. "I will send Le Devoir to Rouen, who will bring us some ladies. I know where they can be found. We will have supper here, as all the materials are at hand, and, at least, we shall have a jolly evening."

Graf von Farlsberg shrugged his shoulders with a smile: "You must surely be mad, my friend."

But all the other officers got up, surrounded their chief, and said: "Let the captain have his own way, commandant; it is terribly dull here."

And the major ended by yielding. "Very well," he replied, and the baron immediately sent for Le Devoir.

The latter was an old corporal who had never been seen to smile, but who carried out all the orders of his superiors to the letter, no matter what they might be. He stood there, with an impassive face while he received the baron's instructions, and then went out; five minutes later a large wagon belonging to the military train, covered with a miller's tilt, galloped off as fast as four horses could take it, under the pouring rain, and the officers all seemed to awaken from their lethargy, their looks brightened, and they began to talk.

Although it was raining as hard as ever, the major declared

that it was not so dull, and Lieutenant von Grossling said with conviction, that the sky was clearing up, while Mademoiselle Fifi did not seem to be able to keep in his place. He got up, and sat down again, and his bright eyes seemed to be looking for something to destroy. Suddenly, looking at the lady with the mustaches, the young fellow pulled out his revolver, and said: "You shall not see it." And without leaving his seat he aimed, and with two successive bullets cut out both the eyes of the portrait.

"Let us make a mine!" he then exclaimed, and the conversation was suddenly interrupted, as if they had found some fresh and powerful subject of interest. The mine was his invention, his method of destruction, and his favorite amusement.

When he left the chateau, the lawful owner, Count Fernand d'Amoys d'Urville, had not had time to carry away or to hide anything, except the plate, which had been stowed away in a hole made in one of the walls, so that, as he was very rich and had good taste, the large drawing-room, which opened into the dining-room, had looked like the gallery in a museum, before his precipitate flight.

Expensive oil-paintings, water-colors, and drawings hung upon the walls, while on the tables, on the hanging shelves, and in elegant glass cupboards, there were a thousand knickknacks: small vases, statuettes, groups in Dresden china, grotesque Chinese figures, old ivory, and Venetian glass, which filled the large room with their precious and fantastical array.

Scarcely anything was left now; not that the things had been stolen, for the major would not have allowed that, but Mademoiselle Fifi WOULD HAVE A MINE, and on that occasion all the officers thoroughly enjoyed themselves for five minutes. The little marquis went into the drawing-room to get what he wanted, and he brought back a small, delicate china teapot, which he filled with gunpowder, and carefully introduced a piece of German tinder into it, through the spout. Then he lighted it, and took this infernal machine into the next room; but he came back immediately and shut the door. The Germans all stood expectantly, their faces full of childish, smiling curiosity, and as soon as the explosion had shaken the chateau, they all rushed in at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who got in first, clapped his hands in delight at the sight of a terra-cotta Venus, whose head had been blown off, and each picked up pieces of porcelain, and wondered at the strange shape of the fragments, while the major was looking with a paternal eye at the large drawing-room which had been wrecked in such a Neronic fashion, and which was strewn with the fragments of works of art. He went out first, and said, with a smile: "He managed that very well!"

But there was such a cloud of smoke in the dining-room, mingled with the tobacco smoke, that they could not breathe, so the commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had gone into the room for a glass of cognac, went up to it.

The moist air blew into the room, and brought a sort of spray

with it, which powdered their beards. They looked at the tall trees which were dripping with the rain, at the broad valley which was covered with mist, and at the church spire in the distance, which rose up like a gray point in the beating rain.

The bells had not rung since their arrival. That was the only resistance which the invaders had met with in the neighborhood. The parish priest had not refused to take in and to feed the Prussian soldiers; he had several times even drunk a bottle of beer or claret with the hostile commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary; but it was no use to ask him for a single stroke of the bells; he would sooner have allowed himself to be shot. That was his way of protesting against the invasion, a peaceful and silent protest, the only one, he said, which was suitable to a priest, who was a man of mildness, and not of blood; and everyone, for twenty-five miles round, praised Abbe Chantavoine's firmness and heroism, in venturing to proclaim the public mourning by the obstinate silence of his church bells.

The whole village grew enthusiastic over his resistance, and was ready to back up their pastor and to risk anything, as they looked upon that silent protest as the safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that thus they had deserved better of their country than Belfort and Strassburg, that they had set an equally valuable example, and that the name of their little village would become immortalized by that; but with that exception, they refused their Prussian conquerors nothing.

The commandant and his officers laughed among themselves

at that inoffensive courage, and as the people in the whole country round showed themselves obliging and compliant toward them, they willingly tolerated their silent patriotism. Only little Count Wilhelm would have liked to have forced them to ring the bells. He was very angry at his superior's politic compliance with the priest's scruples, and every day he begged the commandant to allow him to sound "ding-dong, ding-dong," just once, only just once, just by way of a joke. And he asked it like a wheedling woman, in the tender voice of some mistress who wishes to obtain something, but the commandant would not yield, and to console HERSELF, Mademoiselle Fifi made A MINE in the chateau.

The five men stood there together for some minutes, inhaling the moist air, and at last, Lieutenant Fritz said, with a laugh: "The ladies will certainly not have fine weather for their drive." Then they separated, each to his own duties, while the captain had plenty to do in seeing about the dinner.

When they met again, as it was growing dark, they began to laugh at seeing each other as dandified and smart as on the day of a grand review. The commandant's hair did not look as gray as it did in the morning, and the captain had shaved – had only kept his mustache on, which made him look as if he had a streak of fire under his nose.

In spite of the rain, they left the window open, and one of them went to listen from time to time. At a quarter past six the baron said he heard a rumbling in the distance. They all rushed down,

and soon the wagon drove up at a gallop with its four horses, splashed up to their backs, steaming and panting. Five women got out at the bottom of the steps, five handsome girls whom a comrade of the captain, to whom Le Dervoir had taken his card, had selected with care.

They had not required much pressing, as they were sure of being well treated, for they had got to know the Prussians in the three months during which they had had to do with them. So they resigned themselves to the men as they did to the state of affairs. "It is part of our business, so it must be done," they said as they drove along; no doubt to allay some slight, secret scruples of conscience.

They went into the dining-room immediately, which looked still more dismal in its dilapidated state, when it was lighted up; while the table covered with choice dishes, the beautiful china and glass, and the plate, which had been found in the hole in the wall where its owner had hidden it, gave to the place the look of a bandits' resort, where they were supping after committing a robbery. The captain was radiant; he took hold of the women as if he were familiar with them; appraising them, kissing them, valuing them for what they were worth as LADIES OF PLEASURE; and when the three young men wanted to appropriate one each, he opposed them authoritatively, reserving to himself the right to apportion them justly, according to their several ranks, so as not to wound the hierarchy. Therefore, so as to avoid all discussion, jarring, and suspicion of partiality, he

placed them all in a line according to height, and addressing the tallest, he said in a voice of command:

"What is your name?"

"Pamela," she replied, raising her voice.

Then he said: "Number One, called Pamela, is adjudged to the commandant."

Then, having kissed Blondina, the second, as a sign of proprietorship, he proffered stout Amanda to Lieutenant Otto! Eva, "the Tomato," to Sub-lieutenant Fritz, and Rachel, the shortest of them all, a very young, dark girl, with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, whose snub nose confirmed by exception the rule which allots hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, frail Count Wilhelm von Eyrick.

They were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive features, and all were very much alike in look and person, from their daily dissipation, and the life common to houses of public accommodation.

The three younger men wished to carry off their women immediately, under the pretext of finding them brushes and soap; but the captain wisely opposed this, for he said they were quite fit to sit down to dinner, and that those who went up would wish for a change when they came down, and so would disturb the other couples, and his experience in such matters carried the day. There were only many kisses; expectant kisses.

Suddenly Rachel choked, and began to cough until the tears came into her eyes, while smoke came through her nostrils.

Under pretense of kissing her, the count had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage, and did not say a word, but she looked at her possessor with latent hatred in her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The commandant seemed delighted; he made Pamela sit on his right, and Blondina on his left, and said, as he unfolded his table napkin: "That was a delightful idea of yours, captain."

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, who were as polite as if they had been with fashionable ladies, rather intimidated their neighbors, but Baron von Kelweinstein gave the reins to all his vicious propensities, beamed, made doubtful remarks, and seemed on fire with his crown of red hair. He paid them compliments in French from the other side of the Rhine, and sputtered out gallant remarks, only fit for a low pot-house, from between his two broken teeth.

They did not understand him, however, and their intelligence did not seem to be awakened until he uttered nasty words and broad expressions, which were mangled by his accent. Then all began to laugh at once, like mad women, and fell against each other, repeating the words, which the baron then began to say all wrong, in order that he might have the pleasure of hearing them say doubtful things. They gave him as much of that stuff as he wanted, for they were drunk after the first bottle of wine, and, becoming themselves once more, and opening the door to their usual habits, they kissed the mustaches on the right and

left of them, pinched their arms, uttered furious cries, drank out of every glass, and sang French couplets, and bits of German songs, which they had picked up in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves, intoxicated by that which was displayed to their sight and touch, grew very amorous, shouted and broke the plates and dishes, while the soldiers behind them waited on them stolidly. The commandant was the only one who put any restraint upon himself.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on to his knees, and, getting excited, at one moment kissed the little black curls on her neck, inhaling the pleasant warmth of her body, and all the savor of her person, through the slight space there was between her dress and her skin, and at another pinched her furiously through the material, and made her scream, for he was seized with a species of ferocity, and tormented by his desire to hurt her. He often held her close to him, as if to make her part of himself, and put his lips in a long kiss on the Jewess's rosy mouth, until she lost her breath; and at last he bit her until a stream of blood ran down her chin and on to her bodice.

For the second time, she looked him full in the face, and as she bathed the wound, she said: "You will have to pay for that!"

But he merely laughed a hard laugh, and said: "I will pay."

At dessert, champagne was served, and the commandant rose, and in the same voice in which he would have drunk to the health of the Empress Augusta, he drank: "To our ladies!" Then

a series of toasts began, toasts worthy of the lowest soldiers and of drunkards, mingled with filthy jokes, which were made still more brutal by their ignorance of the language. They got up, one after the other, trying to say something witty, forcing themselves to be funny, and the women, who were so drunk that they almost fell off their chairs, with vacant looks and clammy tongues, applauded madly each time.

The captain, who no doubt wished to impart an appearance of gallantry to the orgy, raised his glass again, and said: "To our victories over hearts!" Thereupon Lieutenant Otto, who was a species of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed and saturated with drink, and seized by an access of alcoholic patriotism, cried: "To our victories over France!"

Drunk as they were, the women were silent, and Rachel turned round with a shudder, and said: "Look here, I know some Frenchmen, in whose presence you would not dare to say that." But the little count, still holding her on his knees, began to laugh, for the wine had made him very merry, and said: "Ha! ha! ha! I have never met any of them, myself. As soon as we show ourselves, they run away!"

The girl, who was in a terrible rage, shouted into his face: "You are lying, you dirty scoundrel!"

For a moment, he looked at her steadily, with his bright eyes upon her, as he had looked at the portrait before he destroyed it with revolver bullets, and then he began to laugh: "Ah! yes, talk about them, my dear! Should we be here now, if they were

brave?" Then getting excited, he exclaimed: "We are the masters! France belongs to us!" She jumped off his knees with a bound, and threw herself into her chair, while he rose, held out his glass over the table, and repeated: "France and the French, the woods, the fields, and the houses of France belong to us!"

The others, who were quite drunk, and who were suddenly seized by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses, and shouting, "Long live Prussia!" emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, for they were reduced to silence, and were afraid. Even Rachel did not say a word, as she had no reply to make, and then the little count put his champagne glass, which had just been refilled, on to the head of the Jewess, and exclaimed: "All the women in France belong to us, also!"

At that she got up so quickly that the glass upset, spilling the amber colored wine on to her black hair as if to baptize her, and broke into a hundred fragments as it fell on to the floor. With trembling lips, she defied the looks of the officer, who was still laughing, and she stammered out, in a voice choked with rage: "That – that – that – is not true, – for you shall certainly not have any French women."

He sat down again, so as to laugh at his ease, and trying ineffectually to speak in the Parisian accent, he said: "That is good, very good! Then what did you come here for, my dear?"

She was thunderstruck, and made no reply for a moment, for in her agitation she did not understand him at first; but as

soon as she grasped his meaning, she said to him indignantly and vehemently: "I! I! I am not a woman; I am only a strumpet, and that is all that Prussians want."

Almost before she had finished, he slapped her full in her face; but as he was raising his hand again as if he would strike her, she, almost mad with passion, took up a small dessert knife from the table, and stabbed him right in the neck, just above the breastbone. Something that he was going to say, was cut short in his throat, and he sat there, with his mouth half open, and a terrible look in his eyes.

All the officers shouted in horror, and leaped up tumultuously; but throwing her chair between Lieutenant Otto's legs, who fell down at full length, she ran to the window, opened it before they could seize her, and jumped out into the night and pouring rain.

In two minutes, Mademoiselle Fifi was dead. Fritz and Otto drew their swords and wanted to kill the women, who threw themselves at their feet and clung to their knees. With some difficulty the major stopped the slaughter, and had the four terrified girls locked up in a room under the care of two soldiers. Then he organized the pursuit of the fugitive, as carefully as if he were about to engage in a skirmish, feeling quite sure that she would be caught.

The table, which had been cleared immediately, now served as a bed on which to lay Fifi out, and the four officers made for the window, rigid and sobered, with the stern faces of soldiers on duty, and tried to pierce through the darkness of the night, amid

the steady torrent of rain. Suddenly, a shot was heard, and then another, a long way off; and for four hours they heard, from time to time, near or distant reports and rallying cries, strange words uttered as a call, in guttural voices.

In the morning they all returned. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded by their comrades in the ardor of that chase, and in the confusion of such a nocturnal pursuit, but they had not caught Rachel.

Then the inhabitants of the district were terrorized, the houses were turned topsy-turvy, the country was scoured and beaten up, over and over again, but the Jewess did not seem to have left a single trace of her passage behind her.

When the general was told of it, he gave orders to hush up the affair, so as not to set a bad example to the army, but he severely censured the commandant, who in turn punished his inferiors. The general had said: "One does not go to war in order to amuse oneself, and to caress prostitutes." And Graf von Farlsberg, in his exasperation, made up his mind to have his revenge on the district, but as he required a pretext for showing severity, he sent for the priest and ordered him to have the bell tolled at the funeral of Count von Eyrick.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest showed himself humble and most respectful, and when Mademoiselle Fifi's body left the Chateau d'Urville on its way to the cemetery, carried by soldiers, preceded, surrounded, and followed by soldiers, who marched with loaded rifles, for the first time the bell sounded its funereal

knell in a lively manner, as if a friendly hand were caressing it. At night it sounded again, and the next day, and every day; it rang as much as anyone could desire. Sometimes even, it would start at night, and sound gently through the darkness, seized by strange joy, awakened, one could not tell why. All the peasants in the neighborhood declared that it was bewitched, and nobody, except the priest and the sacristan would now go near the church tower, and they went because a poor girl was living there in grief and solitude, secretly nourished by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed, and then one evening the priest borrowed the baker's cart, and himself drove his prisoner to Rouen. When they got there, he embraced her, and she quickly went back on foot to the establishment from which she had come, where the proprietress, who thought that she was dead, was very glad to see her.

A short time afterward, a patriot who had no prejudices, who liked her because of her bold deed, and who afterward loved her for herself, married her, and made a lady of her.

AN AFFAIR OF STATE

Paris had just heard of the disaster of Sedan. The Republic was proclaimed. All France was panting from a madness that lasted until the time of the Commonwealth. Everybody was playing at soldier from one end of the country to the other.

Capmakers became colonels, assuming the duties of generals; revolvers and daggers were displayed on large rotund bodies, enveloped in red sashes; common citizens turned warriors, commanding battalions of noisy volunteers, and swearing like troopers to emphasize their importance.

The very fact of bearing arms and handling guns with a system excited a people who hitherto had only handled scales and measures, and made them formidable to the first comer, without reason. They even executed a few innocent people to prove that they knew how to kill; and, in roaming through virgin fields still belonging to the Prussians, they shot stray dogs, cows chewing the cud in peace, or sick horses put out to pasture. Each believed himself called upon to play a great role in military affairs. The cafes of the smallest villages, full of tradesmen in uniform, resembled barracks or field hospitals.

Now, the town of Canneville did not yet know the exciting news of the army and the Capital. It had, however, been greatly agitated for a month over an encounter between the rival political parties. The mayor, Viscount de Varnetot, a small, thin man,

already old, remained true to the Empire, especially since he saw rising up against him a powerful adversary, in the great, sanguine form of Doctor Massarel, head of the Republican party in the district, venerable chief of the Masonic lodge, president of the Society of Agriculture and of the Fire Department, and organizer of the rural militia designed to save the country.

In two weeks he had induced sixty-three men to volunteer in defense of their country – married men, fathers of families, prudent farmers and merchants of the town. These he drilled every morning in front of the mayor's window.

Whenever the mayor happened to appear, Commander Massarel, covered with pistols, passing proudly up and down in front of his troops, would make them shout, "Long live our country!" And this, they noticed, disturbed the little viscount, who no doubt heard in it menace and defiance, and perhaps some odious recollection of the great Revolution.

On the morning of the fifth of September, in uniform, his revolver on the table, the doctor gave consultation to an old peasant couple. The husband had suffered with a varicose vein for seven years, but had waited until his wife had one too, so that they might go and hunt up a physician together, guided by the postman when he should come with the newspaper.

Dr. Massarel opened the door, grew pale, straightened himself abruptly and, raising his arms to heaven in a gesture of exaltation, cried out with all his might, in the face of the amazed rustics:

"Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic! Long live

the Republic!"

Then he dropped into his armchair weak with emotion.

When the peasant explained that this sickness commenced with a feeling as if ants were running up and down in his legs, the doctor exclaimed: "Hold your peace. I have spent too much time with you stupid people. The Republic is proclaimed! The Emperor is a prisoner! France is saved! Long live the Republic!" And, running to the door, he bellowed: "Celeste! Quick! Celeste!"

The frightened maid hastened in. He stuttered, so rapidly did he try to speak: "My boots, my saber – my cartridge box – and – the Spanish dagger, which is on my night table. Hurry now!"

The obstinate peasant, taking advantage of the moment's silence, began again: "This seemed like some cysts that hurt me when I walked."

The exasperated physician shouted: "Hold your peace! For Heaven's sake! If you had washed your feet oftener, it would not have happened." Then, seizing him by the neck, he hissed in his face: "Can you not comprehend that we are living in a Republic, stupid?"

But professional sentiment calmed him suddenly, and he let the astonished old couple out of the house, repeating all the time:

"Return to-morrow, return to-morrow, my friends; I have no more time to-day."

While equipping himself from head to foot, he gave another series of urgent orders to the maid:

"Run to Lieutenant Picard's and to Sub-lieutenant Pommel's and say to them that I want them here immediately. Send Torcheboeuf to me, too, with his drum. Quick, now! Quick!" And when Celeste was gone, he collected his thoughts and prepared to surmount the difficulties of the situation.

The three men arrived together. They were in their working clothes. The Commander, who had expected to see them in uniform, had a fit of surprise.

"You know nothing, then? The Emperor has been taken prisoner. A Republic is proclaimed. My position is delicate, not to say perilous."

He reflected for some minutes before the astonished faces of his subordinates and then continued:

"It is necessary to act, not to hesitate. Minutes now are worth hours at other times. Everything depends upon promptness of decision. You, Picard, go and find the curate and get him to ring the bell to bring the people together, while I get ahead of them. You, Torcheboeuf, beat the call to assemble the militia in arms, in the square, from even as far as the hamlets of Gerisaie and Salmare. You, Pommell put on your uniform at once, that is, the jacket and cap. We, together, are going to take possession of the mairie and summon M. de Varnetot to transfer his authority to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Act, then, and promptly. I will accompany you to your house, Pommel, since we are to work together."

Five minutes later, the Commander and his subaltern, armed to the teeth, appeared in the square, just at the moment when the little Viscount de Varnetot, with hunting gaiters on and his rifle on his shoulder, appeared by another street, walking rapidly and followed by three guards in green jackets, each carrying a knife at his side and a gun over his shoulder.

While the doctor stopped, half stupefied, the four men entered the mayor's house and the door closed behind them.

"We are forestalled," murmured the doctor; "it will be necessary now to wait for re-enforcements; nothing can be done for a quarter of an hour."

Here Lieutenant Picard appeared: "The curate refuses to obey," said he; "he has even shut himself up in the church with the beadle and the porter."

On the other side of the square, opposite the white, closed front of the mairie, the church, mute and black, showed its great oak door with the wrought-iron trimmings.

Then, as the puzzled inhabitants put their noses out of the windows, or came out upon the steps of their houses, the rolling of a drum was heard, and Torcheboeuf suddenly appeared, beating with fury the three quick strokes of the call to arms. He crossed the square with disciplined step, and then disappeared on a road leading to the country.

The Commander drew his sword, advanced alone to the middle distance between the two buildings where the enemy was barricaded and, waving his weapon above his head, roared at the

top of his lungs: "Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!" Then he fell back where his officers were. The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary, feeling a little uncertain, put up their shutters and closed their shops. The grocery alone remained open.

Meanwhile the men of the militia were arriving, little by little, variously clothed, but all wearing caps, the cap constituting the whole uniform of the corps. They were armed with their old, rusty guns, guns that had hung on chimney-pieces in kitchens for thirty years, and looked quite like a detachment of country soldiers.

When there were about thirty around him, the Commander explained in a few words, the state of affairs. Then, turning toward his major, he said: "Now, we must act."

While the inhabitants collected, talked over and discussed the matter, the doctor quickly formed his plan of campaign:

"Lieutenant Picard, you advance to the windows of the mayor's house and order M. de Varnetot to turn over the townhall to me, in the name of the Republic."

But the lieutenant was a master-mason and refused.

"You are a scamp, you are. Trying to make a target of me! Those fellows in there are good shots, you know that. No, thanks! Execute your commissions yourself!"

The Commander turned red: "I order you to go in the name of discipline," said he.

"I am not spoiling my features without knowing why," the lieutenant returned.

Men of influence, in a group near by, were heard laughing. One of them called out: "You are right, Picard, it is not the proper time." The doctor, under his breath, muttered: "Cowards!" And, placing his sword and his revolver in the hands of a soldier, he advanced with measured step, his eye fixed on the windows, as if he expected to see a gun or a cannon pointed at him.

When he was within a few steps of the building the doors at the two extremities, affording an entrance to two schools, opened, and a flood of little creatures, boys on one side, girls on the other, poured out and began playing in the open space, chattering around the doctor like a flock of birds. He scarcely knew what to make of it.

As soon as the last were out, the doors closed. The greater part of the little monkeys finally scattered and then the Commander called out in a loud voice,

"Monsieur de Varnetot?" A window in the first story opened and M. de Varnetot appeared.

The Commander began: "Monsieur, you are aware of the great events which have changed the system of Government. The party you represent no longer exists. The side I represent now comes into power. Under these sad, but decisive circumstances, I come to demand you, in the name of the Republic, to put in my hand the authority vested in you by the outgoing power."

M. de Varnetot replied: "Doctor Massarel, I am mayor of Canneville, so placed by the proper authorities, and mayor of Canneville I shall remain until the title is revoked and replaced

by an order from my superiors. As mayor, I am at home in the mairie, and there I shall stay. Furthermore, just try to put me out." And he closed the window.

The Commander returned to his troops. But, before explaining anything, measuring Lieutenant Picard from head to foot, he said:

"You are a numskull, you are, – a goose, the disgrace of the army. I shall degrade you."

The Lieutenant replied: "I'll attend to that myself." And he went over to a group of muttering civilians.

Then the doctor hesitated. What should he do? Make an assault? Would his men obey him? And then, was he surely in the right? An idea burst upon him. He ran to the telegraph office, on the other side of the square, and hurriedly sent three dispatches: "To the Members of the Republican Government, at Paris"; "To the New Republican Prefect of the Lower Seine, at Rouen"; "To the New Republican Sub-Prefect of Dieppe."

He exposed the situation fully; told of the danger run by the commonwealth from remaining in the hands of the monarchistic mayor, offered his devout services, asked for orders and signed his name, following it up with all his titles. Then he returned to his army corps and, drawing ten francs out of his pocket, said:

"Now, my friends, go and eat and drink a little something. Only leave here a detachment of ten men, so that no one leaves the mayor's house."

Ex-Lieutenant Picard chatting with the watch-maker,

overheard this. With a sneer he remarked:

"Pardon me, but if they go out, there will be an opportunity for you to go in. Otherwise, I can't see how you are to get in there!"

The doctor made no reply, but went away to luncheon. In the afternoon, he disposed of offices all about town, having the air of knowing of an impending surprise. Many times he passed before the doors of the mairie and of the church, without noticing anything suspicious; one could have believed the two buildings empty.

The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary re-opened their shops, and stood gossiping on the steps. If the Emperor had been taken prisoner, there must be a traitor somewhere. They did not feel sure of the revenue of a new Republic.

Night came on. Toward nine o'clock, the doctor returned quietly and alone to the mayor's residence, persuaded that his adversary had retired. And, as he was trying to force an entrance with a few blows of a pickaxe, the loud voice of a guard demanded suddenly: "Who goes there?" Monsieur Massarel beat a retreat at the top of his speed.

Another day dawned without any change in the situation. The militia in arms occupied the square. The inhabitants stood around awaiting the solution. People from neighboring villages came to look on. Finally, the doctor, realizing that his reputation was at stake, resolved to settle the thing in one way or another. He had just decided that it must be something energetic, when the door of the telegraph office opened and the little servant of the

directress appeared, holding in her hand two papers.

She went directly to the Commander and gave him one of the dispatches; then, crossing the square, intimidated by so many eyes fixed upon her, with lowered head and mincing steps, she rapped gently at the door of the barricaded house, as if ignorant that a part of the army was concealed there.

The door opened slightly; the hand of a man received the message, and the girl returned, blushing and ready to weep, from being stared at.

The doctor demanded, with stirring voice: "A little silence, if you please." And, after the populace became quiet, he continued proudly:

"Here is a communication which I have received from the Government." And raising the dispatch, he read:

> "Old mayor deposed. Advise us of what is most necessary,
> Instructions later.
> "For the Sub-Prefect,
> "SAPIN, Counselor."

He had triumphed. His heart was beating with joy. His hand trembled, when Picard, his old subaltern, cried out to him from a neighboring group: "That's all right; but if the others in there won't go out, your paper hasn't a leg to stand on." The doctor grew a little pale. If they would not go out – in fact, he must go ahead now. It was not only his right, but his duty. And he looked anxiously at the house of the mayoralty, hoping that he

might see the door open and his adversary show himself. But the door remained closed. What was to be done? The crowd was increasing, surrounding the militia. Some laughed.

One thought, especially, tortured the doctor. If he should make an assault, he must march at the head of his men; and as, with him dead, all contest would cease, it would be at him, and at him alone that M. de Varnetot and the three guards would aim. And their aim was good, very good! Picard had reminded him of that.

But an idea shone in upon him, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Go, quickly, and ask the apothecary to send me a napkin and a pole."

The Lieutenant hurried off. The doctor was going to make a political banner, a white one, that would perhaps, rejoice the heart of that old legitimist, the mayor.

Pommel returned with the required linen and a broom handle. With some pieces of string, they improvised a standard, which Massarel seized in both hands. Again, he advanced toward the house of mayoralty, bearing the standard before him. When in front of the door, he called out: "Monsieur de Varnetot!"

The door opened suddenly, and M. de Varnetot and the three guards appeared on the threshold. The doctor recoiled, instinctively. Then, he saluted his enemy courteously, and announced, almost strangled by emotion: "I have come, sir, to communicate to you the instructions I have just received."

That gentleman, without any salutation whatever, replied: "I

am going to withdraw, sir, but you must understand that it is not because of fear, or in obedience to an odious government that has usurped the power." And, biting off each word, he declared: "I do not wish to have the appearance of serving the Republic for a single day. That is all."

Massarel, amazed, made no reply; and M, de Varnetot, walking off at a rapid pace, disappeared around the corner, followed closely by his escort. Then the doctors slightly dismayed, returned to the crowd. When he was near enough to be heard, he cried: "Hurrah! Hurrah! The Republic triumphs all along the line!"

But no emotion was manifested. The doctor tried again. "The people are free! You are free and independent! Do you understand? Be proud of it!"

The listless villagers looked at him with eyes unlit by glory. In his turn, he looked at them, indignant at their indifference, seeking for some word that could make a grand impression, electrify this placid country and make good his mission. The inspiration come, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Lieutenant, go and get the bust of the ex-Emperor, which is in the Council Hall, and bring it to me with a chair."

And soon the man reappears, carrying on his right shoulder, Napoleon III. in plaster, and holding in his left hand a straw-bottomed chair.

Massarel met him, took the chair, placed it on the ground, put the white image upon it, fell back a few steps and called out, in

sonorous voice:

"Tyrant! Tyrant! Here do you fall! Fall in the dust and in the mire. An expiring country groans under your feet. Destiny has called you the Avenger. Defeat and shame cling to you. You fall conquered, a prisoner to the Prussians, and upon the ruins of the crumbling Empire the young and radiant Republic arises, picking up your broken sword."

He awaited applause. But there was no voice, no sound. The bewildered peasants remained silent. And the bust, with its pointed mustaches extending beyond the cheeks on each side, the bust, so motionless and well groomed as to be fit for a hairdressers sign, seemed to be looking at M. Massarel with a plaster smile, a smile ineffaceable and mocking.

They remained thus face to face, Napoleon on the chair, the doctor in front of him about three steps away. Suddenly the Commander grew angry. What was to be done? What was there that would move this people, and bring about a definite victory in opinion? His hand happened to rest on his hip and to come in contact there with the butt end of his revolver, under his red sash. No inspiration, no further word would come. But he drew his pistol, advanced two steps, and, taking aim, fired at the late monarch. The ball entered the forehead, leaving a little, black hole, like a spot, nothing more. There was no effect. Then he fired a second shot, which made a second hole, then, a third; and then, without stopping, he emptied his revolver. The brow of Napoleon disappeared in white powder, but the eyes, the nose,

and the fine points of the mustaches remained intact. Then, exasperated, the doctor overturned the chair with a blow of his fist and, resting a foot on the remainder of the bust in a position of triumph, he shouted: "So let all tyrants perish!"

Still no enthusiasm was manifest, and as the spectators seemed to be in a kind of stupor from astonishment, the Commander called to the militiamen: "You may now go to your homes." And he went toward his own house with great strides, as if he were pursued.

His maid, when he appeared, told him that some patients had been waiting in his office for three hours. He hastened in. There were the two varicose-vein patients, who had returned at daybreak, obstinate but patient.

The old man immediately began his explanation: "This began by a feeling like ants running up and down the legs."

THE ARTIST

"Bah! Monsieur," the old mountebank said to me; "it is a matter of exercise and habit, that is all! Of course, one requires to be a little gifted that way and not to be butter-fingered, but what is chiefly necessary is patience and daily practice for long, long years."

His modesty surprised me all the more, because of all performers who are generally infatuated with their own skill, he was the most wonderfully clever one I had met. Certainly I had frequently seen him, for everybody had seen him in some circus or other, or even in traveling shows, performing the trick that consists of putting a man or woman with extended arms against a wooden target, and in throwing knives between their fingers and round their heads, from a distance. There is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all, when one knows THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE, and that the knives are not the least sharp, and stick into the wood at some distance from the flesh. It is the rapidity of the throws, the glitter of the blades, and the curve which the handles make toward their living object, which give an air of danger to an exhibition that has become commonplace, and only requires very middling skill.

But here there was no trick and no deception, and no dust thrown into the eyes. It was done in good earnest and in all sincerity. The knives were as sharp as razors, and the old

mountebank planted them close to the flesh, exactly in the angle between the fingers. He surrounded the head with a perfect halo of knives, and the neck with a collar from which nobody could have extricated himself without cutting his carotid artery, while, to increase the difficulty, the old fellow went through the performance without seeing, his whole face being covered with a close mask of thick oilcloth.

Naturally, like other great artists, he was not understood by the crowd, who confounded him with vulgar tricksters, and his mask only appeared to them a trick the more, and a very common trick into the bargain.

"He must think us very stupid," they said. "How could he possibly aim without having his eyes open?"

And they thought there must be imperceptible holes in the oilcloth, a sort of latticework concealed in the material. It was useless for him to allow the public to examine the mask for themselves before the exhibition began. It was all very well that they could not discover any trick, but they were only all the more convinced that they were being tricked. Did not the people know that they ought to be tricked?

I had recognized a great artist in the old mountebank, and I was quite sure that he was altogether incapable of any trickery. I told him so, while expressing my admiration to him; and he had been touched by my open admiration and above all by the justice I had done him. Thus we became good friends, and he explained to me, very modestly, the real trick which the crowd do

not understand, the eternal trick contained in these simple words: "To be gifted by nature and to practice every day for long, long years."

He had been especially struck by the certainty which I expressed that any trickery must become impossible to him. "Yes," he said to me; "quite impossible! Impossible to a degree which you cannot imagine. If I were to tell you! But where would be the use?"

His face clouded over, and his eyes filled with tears. I did not venture to force myself into his confidence. My looks, however, were not so discreet as my silence, and begged him to speak; so he responded to their mute appeal.

"After all," he said; "why should I not tell you about it? You will understand me." And he added, with a look of sudden ferocity: "She understood it, at any rate!"

"Who?" I asked.

"My strumpet of a wife," he replied. "Ah! Monsieur, what an abominable creature she was – if you only knew! Yes, she understood it too well, too well, and that is why I hate her so; even more on that account, than for having deceived me. For that is a natural fault, is it not, and may be pardoned? But the other thing was a crime, a horrible crime."

The woman, who stood against the wooden target every night with her arms stretched out and her finger extended, and whom the old mountebank fitted with gloves and with a halo formed of his knives, which were as sharp as razors and which he planted

close to her, was his wife. She might have been a woman of forty, and must have been fairly pretty, but with a perverse prettiness; she had an impudent mouth, a mouth that was at the same time sensual and bad, with the lower lip too thick for the thin, dry upper lip.

I had several times noticed that every time he planted a knife in the board, she uttered a laugh, so low as scarcely to be heard, but which was very significant when one heard it, for it was a hard and very mocking laugh. I had always attributed that sort of reply to an artifice which the occasion required. It was intended, I thought, to accentuate the danger she incurred and the contempt that she felt for it, thanks to the sureness of the thrower's hands, and so I was very much surprised when the mountebank said to me:

"Have you observed her laugh, I say? Her evil laugh which makes fun of me, and her cowardly laugh which defies me? Yes, cowardly, because she knows that nothing can happen to her, nothing, in spite of all she deserves, in spite of all that I ought to do to her, in spite of all that I WANT to do to her."

"What do you want to do?"

"Confound it! Cannot you guess? I want to kill her."

"To kill her, because she has – "

"Because she has deceived me? No, no, not that, I tell you again. I have forgiven her for that a long time ago, and I am too much accustomed to it! But the worst of it is that the first time I forgave her, when I told her that all the same I might some

day have my revenge by cutting her throat, if I chose, without seeming to do it on purpose, as if it were an accident, mere awkwardness – "

"Oh! So you said that to her?"

"Of course I did, and I meant it. I thought I might be able to do it, for you see I had the perfect right to do so. It was so simple, so easy, so tempting! Just think! A mistake of less than half an inch, and her skin would be cut at the neck where the jugular vein is, and the jugular would be severed. My knives cut very well! And when once the jugular is cut – good-bye. The blood would spurt out, and one, two, three red jets, and all would be over; she would be dead, and I should have had my revenge!"

"That is true, certainly, horribly true!"

"And without any risk to me, eh? An accident, that is all; bad luck, one of those mistakes which happen every day in our business. What could they accuse me of? Whoever would think of accusing me, even? Homicide through imprudence, that would be all! They would even pity me, rather than accuse me. 'My wife! My poor wife!' I should say, sobbing. 'My wife, who is so necessary to me, who is half the breadwinner, who takes part in my performance!' You must acknowledge that I should be pitied!"

"Certainly; there is not the least doubt about that."

"And you must allow that such a revenge would he a very nice revenge, the best possible revenge which I could have with assured impunity."

"Evidently that is so."

"Very well! But when I told her so, as I have told you, and more forcibly still; threatening her as I was mad with rage and ready to do the deed that I had dreamed of on the spot, what do you think she said?"

"That you were a good fellow, and would certainly not have the atrocious courage to – "

"Tut! tut! tut! I am not such a good fellow as you think. I am not frightened of blood, and that I have proved already, though it would be useless to tell you how and where. But I had no necessity to prove it to her, for she knows that I am capable of a good many things; even of crime; especially of one crime."

"And she was not frightened?"

"No. She merely replied that I could not do what I said; you understand. That I could not do it!"

"Why not?"

"Ah! Monsieur, so you do not understand? Why do you not? I have I not explained to you by what constant, long, daily practice I have learned to plant my knives without seeing what I am doing?"

"Yes, well, what then?"

"Well! Cannot you understand what she has understood with such terrible results, that now my hand would no longer obey me if I wished to make a mistake as I threw?"

"Is it possible?"

"Nothing is truer, I am sorry to say. For I really have wished to have the revenge which I have dreamed of, and which I

thought so easy. Exasperated by that bad woman's insolence and confidence in her own safety, I have several times made up my mind to kill her, and have exerted all my energy and all my skill to make my knives fly aside when I threw them to make a border round her neck. I have tried with all my might to make them deviate half an inch, just enough to cut her throat. I wanted to, and I have never succeeded, never. And always the slut's horrible laugh makes fun of me, always, always."

And with a deluge of tears, with something like a roar of unsatiated and muzzled rage, he ground his teeth as he wound up: "She knows me, the jade; she is in the secret of my work, of my patience, of my trick, routine, whatever you may call it! She lives in my innermost being, and sees into it more closely than you do, or than I do myself. She knows what a faultless machine I have become, the machine of which she makes fun, the machine which is too well wound up, the machine which cannot get out of order – and she knows that I CANNOT make a mistake."

THE HORLA

MAY 8. What a lovely day! I have spent all the morning lying on the grass in front of my house, under the enormous plantain tree which covers and shades and shelters the whole of it. I like this part of the country; I am fond of living here because I am attached to it by deep roots, the profound and delicate roots which attach a man to the soil on which his ancestors were born and died, to their traditions, their usages, their food, the local expressions, the peculiar language of the peasants, the smell of the soil, the hamlets, and to the atmosphere itself.

I love the house in which I grew up. From my windows I can see the Seine, which flows by the side of my garden, on the other side of the road, almost through my grounds, the great and wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and which is covered with boats passing to and fro.

On the left, down yonder, lies Rouen, populous Rouen with its blue roofs massing under pointed, Gothic towers. Innumerable are they, delicate or broad, dominated by the spire of the cathedral, full of bells which sound through the blue air on fine mornings, sending their sweet and distant iron clang to me, their metallic sounds, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is strong or light.

What a delicious morning it was! About eleven o'clock, a long line of boats drawn by a steam-tug, as big a fly, and which

scarcely puffed while emitting its thick smoke, passed my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flags fluttered toward the sky, there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master; it was perfectly white and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly know why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

May 12. I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence? One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Forces, whose mysterious presence we have to endure. I wake up in the best of spirits, with an inclination to sing in my heart. Why? I go down by the side of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as if some misfortune were awaiting me there. Why? Is it a cold shiver which, passing over my skin, has upset my nerves and given me a fit of low spirits? Is it the form of the clouds, or the tints of the sky, or the colors of the surrounding objects which are so change-able, which have troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes? Who can tell? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see without looking at it, everything that we touch without knowing it, everything that we handle without feeling it, everything that we meet without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprising, and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our organs, and through them on our ideas and on our being

itself.

How profound that mystery of the Invisible is! We cannot fathom it with our miserable senses: our eyes are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to or too far from us; we can see neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water; our ears deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes. Our senses are fairies who work the miracle of changing that movement into noise, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the mute agitation of nature a harmony. So with our sense of smell, which is weaker than that of a dog, and so with our sense of taste, which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which could work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

May 16. I am ill, decidedly! I was so well last month! I am feverish, horribly feverish, or rather I am in a state of feverish enervation, which makes my mind suffer as much as my body. I have without ceasing the horrible sensation of some danger threatening me, the apprehension of some coming misfortune or of approaching death, a presentiment which is no doubt, an attack of some illness still unnamed, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

May 18. I have just come from consulting my medical man, for I can no longer get any sleep. He found that my pulse was high, my eyes dilated, my nerves highly strung, but no alarming

symptoms. I must have a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

May 25. No change! My state is really very peculiar. As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some terrible menace toward me. I dine quickly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters. Then I walk up and down my drawing-room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear, a fear of sleep and a fear of my bed.

About ten o'clock I go up to my room. As soon as I have entered I lock and bolt the door. I am frightened – of what? Up till the present time I have been frightened of nothing. I open my cupboards, and look under my bed; I listen – I listen – to what? How strange it is that a simple feeling of discomfort, of impeded or heightened circulation, perhaps the irritation of a nervous center, a slight congestion, a small disturbance in the imperfect and delicate functions of our living machinery, can turn the most light-hearted of men into a melancholy one, and make a coward of the bravest? Then, I go to bed, and I wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until the moment when I suddenly fall asleep, as a man throws himself into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown. I do not feel this perfidious sleep coming over me as I used to, but a sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to

close my eyes and annihilate me.

I sleep – a long time – two or three hours perhaps – then a dream – no – a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep – I feel it and I know it – and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his hands and squeezing it – squeezing it with all his might in order to strangle me.

I struggle, bound by that terrible powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out – but I cannot; I want to move – I cannot; I try, with the most violent efforts and out of breath, to turn over and throw off this being which is crushing and suffocating me – I cannot!

And then suddenly I wake up, shaken and bathed in perspiration; I light a candle and find that I am alone, and after that crisis, which occurs every night, I at length fall asleep and slumber tranquilly till morning.

June 2. My state has grown worse. What is the matter with me? The bromide does me no good, and the shower-baths have no effect whatever. Sometimes, in order to tire myself out, though I am fatigued enough already, I go for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I used to think at first that the fresh light and soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, would instill new life into my veins and impart fresh energy to my heart. One day I turned into a broad ride in the wood, and then I diverged toward La Bouille, through a narrow path, between two rows of

exceedingly tall trees, which placed a thick, green, almost black roof between the sky and me.

A sudden shiver ran through me, not a cold shiver, but a shiver of agony, and so I hastened my steps, uneasy at being alone in the wood, frightened stupidly and without reason, at the profound solitude. Suddenly it seemed as if I were being followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, close, quite close to me, near enough to touch me.

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad ride, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; on the other side also it extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same – terrible.

I closed my eyes. Why? And then I began to turn round on one heel very quickly, just like a top. I nearly fell down, and opened my eyes; the trees were dancing round me and the earth heaved; I was obliged to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer remembered how I had come! What a strange idea! What a strange, strange idea! I did not the least know. I started off to the right, and got back into the avenue which had led me into the middle of the forest.

June 3. I have had a terrible night. I shall go away for a few weeks, for no doubt a journey will set me up again.

July 2. I have come back, quite cured, and have had a most delightful trip into the bargain. I have been to Mont Saint-Michel, which I had not seen before.

What a sight, when one arrives as I did, at Avranches toward the end of the day! The town stands on a hill, and I was taken

into the public garden at the extremity of the town. I uttered a cry of astonishment. An extraordinarily large bay lay extended before me, as far as my eyes could reach, between two hills which were lost to sight in the mist; and in the middle of this immense yellow bay, under a clear, golden sky, a peculiar hill rose up, somber and pointed in the midst of the sand. The sun had just disappeared, and under the still flaming sky stood out the outline of that fantastic rock which bears on its summit a picturesque monument.

At daybreak I went to it. The tide was low, as it had been the night before, and I saw that wonderful abbey rise up before me as I approached it. After several hours' walking, I reached the enormous mass of rock which supports the little town, dominated by the great church. Having climbed the steep and narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic building that has ever been erected to God on earth, large as a town, and full of low rooms which seem buried beneath vaulted roofs, and of lofty galleries supported by delicate columns.

I entered this gigantic granite jewel, which is as light in its effect as a bit of lace and is covered with towers, with slender belfries to which spiral staircases ascend. The flying buttresses raise strange heads that bristle with chimeras, with devils, with fantastic ani-mals, with monstrous flowers, are joined together by finely carved arches, to the blue sky by day, and to the black sky by night.

When I had reached the summit. I said to the monk who

accompanied me: "Father, how happy you must be here!" And he replied: "It is very windy, Monsieur"; and so we began to talk while watching the rising tide, which ran over the sand and covered it with a steel cuirass.

And then the monk told me stories, all the old stories belonging to the place – legends, nothing but legends.

One of them struck me forcibly. The country people, those belonging to the Mornet, declare that at night one can hear talking going on in the sand, and also that two goats bleat, one with a strong, the other with a weak voice. Incredulous people declare that it is nothing but the screaming of the sea birds, which occasionally resembles bleatings, and occasionally human lamentations; but belated fishermen swear that they have met an old shepherd, whose cloak covered head they can never see, wandering on the sand, between two tides, round the little town placed so far out of the world. They declare he is guiding and walking before a he-goat with a man's face and a she-goat with a woman's face, both with white hair, who talk incessantly, quarreling in a strange language, and then suddenly cease talking in order to bleat with all their might.

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk. "I scarcely know," he replied; and I continued: "If there are other beings besides ourselves on this earth, how comes it that we have not known it for so long a time, or why have you not seen them? How is it that I have not seen them?"

He replied: "Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what

exists? Look here; there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature. It knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on to the breakers; it kills, it whistles, it sighs, it roars. But have you ever seen it, and can you see it? Yet it exists for all that."

I was silent before this simple reasoning. That man was a philosopher, or perhaps a fool; I could not say which exactly, so I held my tongue. What he had said had often been in my own thoughts.

July 3. I have slept badly; certainly there is some feverish influence here, for my coachman is suffering in the same way as I am. When I went back home yesterday, I noticed his singular paleness, and I asked him: "What is the matter with you, Jean?"

"The matter is that I never get any rest, and my nights devour my days. Since your departure, Monsieur, there has been a spell over me."

However, the other servants are all well, but I am very frightened of having another attack, myself.

July 4. I am decidedly taken again; for my old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt somebody leaning on me who was sucking my life from between my lips with his mouth. Yes, he was sucking it out of my neck like a leech would have done. Then he got up, satiated, and I woke up, so beaten, crushed, and annihilated that I could not move. If this continues for a few days, I shall certainly go away again.

July 5. Have I lost my reason? What has happened? What I saw last night is so strange that my head wanders when I think of it!

As I do now every evening, I had locked my door; then, being thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and I accidentally noticed that the water-bottle was full up to the cut-glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my terrible sleeps, from which I was aroused in about two hours by a still more terrible shock.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered, who wakes up with a knife in his chest, a gurgling in his throat, is covered with blood, can no longer breathe, is going to die and does not understand anything at all about it – there you have it.

Having recovered my senses, I was thirsty again, so I lighted a candle and went to the table on which my water-bottle was. I lifted it up and tilted it over my glass, but nothing came out. It was empty! It was completely empty! At first I could not understand it at all; then suddenly I was seized by such a terrible feeling that I had to sit down, or rather fall into a chair! Then I sprang up with a bound to look about me; then I sat down again, overcome by astonishment and fear, in front of the transparent crystal bottle! I looked at it with fixed eyes, trying to solve the puzzle, and my hands trembled! Some body had drunk the water, but who? I? I without any doubt. It could surely only be I? In that case I was a somnambulist – was living, without knowing it, that double, mysterious life which makes us doubt whether there are not two

beings in us – whether a strange, unknowable, and invisible being does not, during our moments of mental and physical torpor, animate the inert body, forcing it to a more willing obedience than it yields to ourselves.

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man sound in mind, wide-awake, full of sense, who looks in horror at the disappearance of a little water while he was asleep, through the glass of a water-bottle! And I remained sitting until it was daylight, without venturing to go to bed again.

July 6. I am going mad. Again all the contents of my water-bottle have been drunk during the night; or rather I have drunk it!

But is it I? Is it I? Who could it be? Who? Oh! God! Am I going mad? Who will save me?

July 10. I have just been through some surprising ordeals. Undoubtedly I must be mad! And yet!

On July 6, before going to bed, I put some wine, milk, water, bread, and strawberries on my table. Somebody drank – I drank – all the water and a little of the milk, but neither the wine, nor the bread, nor the strawberries were touched.

On the seventh of July I renewed the same experiment, with the same results, and on July 8 I left out the water and the milk and nothing was touched.

Lastly, on July 9 I put only water and milk on my table, taking care to wrap up the bottles in white muslin and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, my beard, and my hands with

pencil lead, and went to bed.

Deep slumber seized me, soon followed by a terrible awakening. I had not moved, and my sheets were not marked. I rushed to the table. The muslin round the bottles remained intact; I undid the string, trembling with fear. All the water had been drunk, and so had the milk! Ah! Great God! I must start for Paris immediately.

July 12. Paris. I must have lost my head during the last few days! I must be the plaything of my enervated imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist, or I have been brought under the power of one of those influences – hypnotic suggestion, for example – which are known to exist, but have hitherto been inexplicable. In any case, my mental state bordered on madness, and twenty-four hours of Paris sufficed to restore me to my equilibrium.

Yesterday after doing some business and paying some visits, which instilled fresh and invigorating mental air into me, I wound up my evening at the Theatre Francais. A drama by Alexander Dumas the Younger was being acted, and his brilliant and powerful play completed my cure. Certainly solitude is dangerous for active minds. We need men who can think and can talk, around us. When we are alone for a long time, we people space with phantoms.

I returned along the boulevards to my hotel in excellent spirits. Amid the jostling of the crowd I thought, not without irony, of my terrors and surmises of the previous week, because I believed,

yes, I believed, that an invisible being lived beneath my roof. How weak our mind is; how quickly it is terrified and unbalanced as soon as we are confronted with a small, incomprehensible fact. Instead of dismissing the problem with: "We do not understand because we cannot find the cause," we immediately imagine terrible mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 14. Fete of the Republic. I walked through the streets, and the crackers and flags amused me like a child. Still, it is very foolish to make merry on a set date, by Government decree. People are like a flock of sheep, now steadily patient, now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: "Amuse yourself," and it amuses itself. Say to it: "Go and fight with your neighbor," and it goes and fights. Say to it: "Vote for the Emperor," and it votes for the Emperor; then say to it: "Vote for the Republic," and it votes for the Republic.

Those who direct it are stupid, too; but instead of obeying men they obey principles, a course which can only be foolish, ineffective, and false, for the very reason that principles are ideas which are considered as certain and unchangeable, whereas in this world one is certain of nothing, since light is an illusion and noise is deception.

July 16. I saw some things yesterday that troubled me very much. I was dining at my cousin's, Madame Sable, whose husband is colonel of the Seventy-sixth Chasseurs at Limoges. There were two young women there, one of whom had married a medical man, Dr. Parent, who devotes himself a great deal to

nervous diseases and to the extraordinary manifestations which just now experiments in hypnotism and suggestion are producing.

He related to us at some length the enormous results obtained by English scientists and the doctors of the medical school at Nancy, and the facts which he adduced appeared to me so strange, that I declared that I was altogether incredulous.

"We are," he declared, "on the point of discovering one of the most important secrets of nature, I mean to say, one of its most important secrets on this earth, for assuredly there are some up in the stars, yonder, of a different kind of importance. Ever since man has thought, since he has been able to express and write down his thoughts, he has felt himself close to a mystery which is impenetrable to his coarse and imperfect senses, and he endeavors to supplement the feeble penetration of his organs by the efforts of his intellect. As long as that intellect remained in its elementary stage, this intercourse with invisible spirits assumed forms which were commonplace though terrifying. Thence sprang the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of wandering spirits, of fairies, of gnomes, of ghosts, I might even say the conception of God, for our ideas of the Workman-Creator, from whatever religion they may have come down to us, are certainly the most mediocre, the stupidest, and the most unacceptable inventions that ever sprang from the frightened brain of any human creature. Nothing is truer than what Voltaire says: 'If God made man in His own image, man has certainly paid Him back again.'

"But for rather more than a century, men seem to have had a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others have put us on an unexpected track, and within the last two or three years especially, we have arrived at results really surprising."

My cousin, who is also very incredulous, smiled, and Dr. Parent said to her: "Would you like me to try and send you to sleep, Madame?"

"Yes, certainly."

She sat down in an easy-chair, and he began to look at her fixedly, as if to fascinate her. I suddenly felt myself somewhat discomposed; my heart beat rapidly and I had a choking feeling in my throat. I saw that Madame Sable's eyes were growing heavy, her mouth twitched, and her bosom heaved, and at the end of ten minutes she was asleep.

"Go behind her," the doctor said to me; so I took a seat behind her. He put a visiting-card into her hands, and said to her: "This is a looking-glass; what do you see in it?"

She replied: "I see my cousin."

"What is he doing?"

"He is twisting his mustache."

"And now?"

"He is taking a photograph out of his pocket."

"Whose photograph is it?"

"His own."

That was true, for the photograph had been given me that same evening at the hotel.

"What is his attitude in this portrait?"

"He is standing up with his hat in his hand."

She saw these things in that card, in that piece of white pasteboard, as if she had seen them in a looking-glass.

The young women were frightened, and exclaimed: "That is quite enough! Quite, quite enough!"

But the doctor said to her authoritatively: "You will get up at eight o'clock to-morrow morning; then you will go and call on your cousin at his hotel and ask him to lend you the five thousand francs which your husband asks of you, and which he will ask for when he sets out on his coming journey."

Then he woke her up.

On returning to my hotel, I thought over this curious seance and I was assailed by doubts, not as to my cousin's absolute and undoubted good faith, for I had known her as well as if she had been my own sister ever since she was a child, but as to a possible trick on the doctor's part. Had not he, perhaps, kept a glass hidden in his hand, which he showed to the young woman in her sleep at the same time as he did the card? Professional conjurers do things which are just as singular.

However, I went to bed, and this morning, at about half past eight, I was awakened by my footman, who said to me: "Madame Sable has asked to see you immediately, Monsieur." I dressed hastily and went to her.

She sat down in some agitation, with her eyes on the floor, and without raising her veil said to me: "My dear cousin, I am

going to ask a great favor of you."

"What is it, cousin?"

"I do not like to tell you, and yet I must. I am in absolute want of five thousand francs."

"What, you?"

"Yes, I, or rather my husband, who has asked me to procure them for him."

I was so stupefied that I hesitated to answer. I asked myself whether she had not really been making fun of me with Dr. Parent, if it were not merely a very well-acted farce which had been got up beforehand. On looking at her attentively, however, my doubts disappeared. She was trembling with grief, so painful was this step to her, and I was sure that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich and so I continued: "What! Has not your husband five thousand francs at his disposal? Come, think. Are you sure that he commissioned you to ask me for them?"

She hesitated for a few seconds, as if she were making a great effort to search her memory, and then she replied: "Yes – yes, I am quite sure of it."

"He has written to you?"

She hesitated again and reflected, and I guessed the torture of her thoughts. She did not know. She only knew that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she told a lie.

"Yes, he has written to me."

"When, pray? You did not mention it to me yesterday."

"I received his letter this morning."

"Can you show it to me?"

"No; no – no – it contained private matters, things too personal to ourselves. I burned it."

"So your husband runs into debt?"

She hesitated again, and then murmured: "I do not know."

Thereupon I said bluntly: "I have not five thousand francs at my disposal at this moment, my dear cousin."

She uttered a cry, as if she were in pair; and said: "Oh! oh! I beseech you, I beseech you to get them for me."

She got excited and clasped her hands as if she were praying to me! I heard her voice change its tone; she wept and sobbed, harassed and dominated by the irresistible order that she had received.

"Oh! oh! I beg you to – if you knew what I am suffering – I want them to-day."

I had pity on her: "You shall have them by and by, I swear to you."

"Oh! thank you! thank you! How kind you are."

I continued: "Do you remember what took place at your house last night?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember that Dr. Parent sent you to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Very well then; he ordered you to come to me this

morning to borrow five thousand francs, and at this moment you are obeying that suggestion."

She considered for a few moments, and then replied: "But as it is my husband who wants them – "

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but could not succeed, and when she had gone I went to the doctor. He was just going out, and he listened to me with a smile, and said: "Do you believe now?"

"Yes, I cannot help it."

"Let us go to your cousin's."

She was already resting on a couch, overcome with fatigue. The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her for some time with one hand raised toward her eyes, which she closed by degrees under the irresistible power of this magnetic influence. When she was asleep, he said:

"Your husband does not require the five thousand francs any longer! You must, therefore, forget that you asked your cousin to lend them to you, and, if he speaks to you about it, you will not understand him."

Then he woke her up, and I took out a pocket-book and said: "Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin." But she was so surprised, that I did not venture to persist; nevertheless, I tried to recall the circumstance to her, but she denied it vigorously, thought that I was making fun of her, and in the end, very nearly lost her temper.

There! I have just come back, and I have not been able to eat

any lunch, for this experiment has altogether upset me.

July 19. Many people to whom I have told the adventure have laughed at me. I no longer know what to think. The wise man says: Perhaps?

July 21. I dined at Bougival, and then I spent the evening at a boatmen's ball. Decidedly everything depends on place and surroundings. It would be the height of folly to believe in the supernatural on the Ile de la Grenouilliere.[2] But on the top of Mont Saint-Michel or in India, we are terribly under the influence of our surroundings. I shall return home next week.

July 30. I came back to my own house yesterday. Everything is going on well.

August 2. Nothing fresh; it is splendid weather, and I spend my days in watching the Seine flow past.

August 4. Quarrels among my servants. They declare that the glasses are broken in the cupboards at night. The footman accuses the cook, she accuses the needlewoman, and the latter accuses the other two. Who is the culprit? It would take a clever person to tell.

August 6. This time, I am not mad. I have seen – I have seen – I have seen! – I can doubt no longer – I have seen it!

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[2] Frog-island.

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