

The Illustrious Gaudissart eBook

The Illustrious Gaudissart by Honoré de Balzac

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CHAPTER I

The commercial traveller, a personage unknown to antiquity, is one of the striking figures created by the manners and customs of our present epoch. May he not, in some conceivable order of things, be destined to mark for coming philosophers the great transition which welds a period of material enterprise to the period of intellectual strength? Our century will bind the realm of isolated power, abounding as it does in creative genius, to the realm of universal but levelling might; equalizing all products, spreading them broadcast among the masses, and being itself controlled by the principle of unity,—the final expression of all societies. Do we not find the dead level of barbarism succeeding the saturnalia of popular thought and the last struggles of those civilizations which accumulated the treasures of the world in one direction?

The commercial traveller! Is he not to the realm of ideas what our stage-coaches are to men and things? He is their vehicle; he sets them going, carries them along, rubs them up with one another. He takes from the luminous centre a handful of light, and scatters it broadcast among the drowsy populations of the duller regions. This human pyrotechnic is a scholar without learning, a juggler hoaxed by himself, an unbelieving priest of mysteries and dogmas, which he expounds all the better for his want of faith. Curious being! He has seen everything, known everything, and is up in all the ways of the world. Soaked in the vices of Paris, he affects to be the fellow-well-met of the provinces. He is the link which connects the village with the capital; though essentially he is neither Parisian nor provincial,—he is a traveller. He sees nothing to the core: men and places he knows by their names; as for things, he looks merely at their surface, and he has his own little tape-line with which to measure them. His glance shoots over all things and penetrates none. He occupies himself with a great deal, yet nothing occupies him.

Jester and jolly fellow, he keeps on good terms with all political opinions, and is patriotic to the bottom of his soul. A capital mimic, he knows how to put on, turn and turn about, the smiles of persuasion, satisfaction, and good-nature, or drop them for the normal expression of his natural man. He is compelled to be an observer of a certain sort in the interests of his trade. He must probe men with a glance and guess their habits, wants, and above all their solvency. To economize time he must come to quick decisions as to his chances of success,—a practice that makes him more or less a man of judgment; on the strength of which he sets up as a judge of theatres, and discourses about those of Paris and the provinces.



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He knows all the good and bad haunts in France, “de actu et visu.” He can pilot you, on occasion, to vice or virtue with equal assurance. Blest with the eloquence of a hot-water spigot turned on at will, he can check or let run, without floundering, the collection of phrases which he keeps on tap, and which produce upon his victims the effect of a moral shower-bath. Loquacious as a cricket, he smokes, drinks, wears a profusion of trinkets, overawes the common people, passes for a lord in the villages, and never permits himself to be “stumped,”—a slang expression all his own. He knows how to slap his pockets at the right time, and make his money jingle if he thinks the servants of the second-class houses which he wants to enter (always eminently suspicious) are likely to take him for a thief. Activity is not the least surprising quality of this human machine. Not the hawk swooping upon its prey, not the stag doubling before the huntsman and the hounds, nor the hounds themselves catching scent of the game, can be compared with him for the rapidity of his dart when he spies a “commission,” for the agility with which he trips up a rival and gets ahead of him, for the keenness of his scent as he noses a customer and discovers the sport where he can get off his wares.

How many great qualities must such a man possess! You will find in all countries many such diplomats of low degree; consummate negotiators arguing in the interests of calico, jewels, frippery, wines; and often displaying more true diplomacy than ambassadors themselves, who, for the most part, know only the forms of it. No one in France can doubt the powers of the commercial traveller; that intrepid soul who dares all, and boldly brings the genius of civilization and the modern inventions of Paris into a struggle with the plain commonsense of remote villages, and the ignorant and boorish treadmill of provincial ways. Can we ever forget the skilful manoeuvres by which he worms himself into the minds of the populace, bringing a volume of words to bear upon the refractory, reminding us of the indefatigable worker in marbles whose file eats slowly into a block of porphyry? Would you seek to know the utmost power of language, or the strongest pressure that a phrase can bring to bear against rebellious lucre, against the miserly proprietor squatting in the recesses of his country lair? —listen to one of these great ambassadors of Parisian industry as he revolves and works and sucks like an intelligent piston of the steam-engine called Speculation.

“Monsieur,” said a wise political economist, the director-cashier-manager and secretary-general of a celebrated fire-insurance company, “out of every five hundred thousand francs of policies to be renewed in the provinces, not more than fifty thousand are paid up voluntarily. The other four hundred and fifty thousand are got in by the activity of our agents, who go about among those who are in arrears and worry them with stories of horrible incendiaries until they are driven to sign the new policies. Thus you see that eloquence, the labial flux, is nine tenths of the ways and means of our business.”

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To talk, to make people listen to you,—that is seduction in itself. A nation that has two Chambers, a woman who lends both ears, are soon lost. Eve and her serpent are the everlasting myth of an hourly fact which began, and may end, with the world itself.

“A conversation of two hours ought to capture your man,” said a retired lawyer.

Let us walk round the commercial traveller, and look at him well. Don't forget his overcoat, olive green, nor his cloak with its morocco collar, nor the striped blue cotton shirt. In this queer figure—so original that we cannot rub it out—how many divers personalities we come across! In the first place, what an acrobat, what a circus, what a battery, all in one, is the man himself, his vocation, and his tongue! Intrepid mariner, he plunges in, armed with a few phrases, to catch five or six thousand francs in the frozen seas, in the domain of the red Indians who inhabit the interior of France. The provincial fish will not rise to harpoons and torches; it can only be taken with seines and nets and gentlest persuasions. The traveller's business is to extract the gold in country caches by a purely intellectual operation, and to extract it pleasantly and without pain. Can you think without a shudder of the flood of phrases which, day by day, renewed each dawn, leaps in cascades the length and breadth of sunny France?

You know the species; let us now take a look at the individual.

There lives in Paris an incomparable commercial traveller, the paragon of his race, a man who possesses in the highest degree all the qualifications necessary to the nature of his success. His speech is vitriol and likewise glue,—glue to catch and entangle his victim and make him sticky and easy to grip; vitriol to dissolve hard heads, close fists, and closer calculations. His line was once the *hat*; but his talents and the art with which he snared the wariest provincial had brought him such commercial celebrity that all vendors of the “article Paris”[*] paid court to him, and humbly begged that he would deign to take their commissions.

[*] “Article Paris” means anything—especially articles of wearing apparel—which originates or is made in Paris. The name is supposed to give to the thing a special value in the provinces.

Thus, when he returned to Paris in the intervals of his triumphant progress through France, he lived a life of perpetual festivity in the shape of weddings and suppers. When he was in the provinces, the correspondents in the smaller towns made much of him; in Paris, the great houses feted and caressed him. Welcomed, flattered, and fed wherever he went, it came to pass that to breakfast or to dine alone was a novelty, an event. He lived the life of a sovereign, or, better still, of a journalist; in fact, he was the perambulating “feuilleton” of Parisian commerce.



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His name was Gaudissart; and his renown, his vogue, the flatteries showered upon him, were such as to win for him the surname of Illustrious. Wherever the fellow went,—behind a counter or before a bar, into a salon or to the top of a stage-coach, up to a garret or to dine with a banker,—every one said, the moment they saw him, “Ah! here comes the illustrious Gaudissart!”[*] No name was ever so in keeping with the style, the manners, the countenance, the voice, the language, of any man. All things smiled upon our traveller, and the traveller smiled back in return. “*Similia similibus*,”—he believed in homoeopathy. Puns, horse-laugh, monkish face, skin of a friar, true Rabelaisian exterior, clothing, body, mind, and features, all pulled together to put a devil-may-care jollity into every inch of his person. Free-handed and easy-going, he might be recognized at once as the favorite of grisettes, the man who jumps lightly to the top of a stage-coach, gives a hand to the timid lady who fears to step down, jokes with the postillion about his neckerchief and contrives to sell him a cap, smiles at the maid and catches her round the waist or by the heart; gurgles at dinner like a bottle of wine and pretends to draw the cork by sounding a filip on his distended cheek; plays a tune with his knife on the champagne glasses without breaking them, and says to the company, “Let me see you do *that*”; chaffs the timid traveller, contradicts the knowing one, lords it over a dinner-table and manages to get the titbits for himself. A strong fellow, nevertheless, he can throw aside all this nonsense and mean business when he flings away the stump of his cigar and says, with a glance at some town, “I’ll go and see what those people have got in their stomachs.”

[*] “*Se gaudir*,” to enjoy, to make fun. “*Gaudriole*,” gay discourse, rather free.—Littre.

When buckled down to his work he became the slyest and cleverest of diplomats. All things to all men, he knew how to accost a banker like a capitalist, a magistrate like a functionary, a royalist with pious and monarchical sentiments, a bourgeois as one of themselves. In short, wherever he was he was just what he ought to be; he left Gaudissart at the door when he went in, and picked him up when he came out.

Until 1830 the illustrious Gaudissart was faithful to the article Paris. In his close relation to the caprices of humanity, the varied paths of commerce had enabled him to observe the windings of the heart of man. He had learned the secret of persuasive eloquence, the knack of loosening the tightest purse-strings, the art of rousing desire in the souls of husbands, wives, children, and servants; and what is more, he knew how to satisfy it. No one had greater faculty than he for inveigling a merchant by the charms of a bargain, and disappearing at the instant when desire had reached its crisis. Full of gratitude to the hat-making trade, he always declared that it was his efforts in behalf of the exterior of the human head which had enabled him to understand its interior: he had capped and crowned so many people, he was always flinging himself at their heads, *etc.* His jokes about hats and heads were irrepressible, though perhaps not dazzling.

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Nevertheless, after August and October, 1830, he abandoned the hat trade and the article Paris, and tore himself from things mechanical and visible to mount into the higher spheres of Parisian speculation. “He forsook,” to use his own words, “matter for mind; manufactured products for the infinitely purer elaborations of human intelligence.” This requires some explanation.

The general upset of 1830 brought to birth, as everybody knows, a number of old ideas which clever speculators tried to pass off in new bodies. After 1830 ideas became property. A writer, too wise to publish his writings, once remarked that “more ideas are stolen than pocket-handkerchiefs.” Perhaps in course of time we may have an Exchange for thought; in fact, even now ideas, good or bad, have their consols, are bought up, imported, exported, sold, and quoted like stocks. If ideas are not on hand ready for sale, speculators try to pass off words in their stead, and actually live upon them as a bird lives on the seeds of his millet. Pray do not laugh; a word is worth quite as much as an idea in a land where the ticket on a sack is of more importance than the contents. Have we not seen libraries working off the word “picturesque” when literature would have cut the throat of the word “fantastic”? Fiscal genius has guessed the proper tax on intellect; it has accurately estimated the profits of advertising; it has registered a prospectus of the quantity and exact value of the property, weighing its thought at the intellectual Stamp Office in the Rue de la Paix.

Having become an article of commerce, intellect and all its products must naturally obey the laws which bind other manufacturing interests. Thus it often happens that ideas, conceived in their cups by certain apparently idle Parisians,—who nevertheless fight many a moral battle over their champagne and their pheasants,—are handed down at their birth from the brain to the commercial travellers who are employed to spread them discreetly, “urbi et orbi,” through Paris and the provinces, seasoned with the fried pork of advertisement and prospectus, by means of which they catch in their rat-trap the departmental rodent commonly called subscriber, sometimes stockholder, occasionally corresponding member or patron, but invariably fool.

“I am a fool!” many a poor country proprietor has said when, caught by the prospect of being the first to launch a new idea, he finds that he has, in point of fact, launched his thousand or twelve hundred francs into a gulf.

“Subscribers are fools who never can be brought to understand that to go ahead in the intellectual world they must start with more money than they need for the tour of Europe,” say the speculators.

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Consequently there is endless warfare between the recalcitrant public which refuses to pay the Parisian imposts and the tax-gatherer who, living by his receipt of custom, lards the public with new ideas, turns it on the spit of lively projects, roasts it with prospectuses (basting all the while with flattery), and finally gobbles it up with some toothsome sauce in which it is caught and intoxicated like a fly with a black-lead. Moreover, since 1830 what honors and emoluments have been scattered throughout France to stimulate the zeal and self-love of the "progressive and intelligent masses"! Titles, medals, diplomas, a sort of legion of honor invented for the army of martyrs, have followed each other with marvellous rapidity. Speculators in the manufactured products of the intellect have developed a spice, a ginger, all their own. From this have come premiums, forestalled dividends, and that conscription of noted names which is levied without the knowledge of the unfortunate writers who bear them, and who thus find themselves actual co-operators in more enterprises than there are days in the year; for the law, we may remark, takes no account of the theft of a patronymic. Worse than all is the rape of ideas which these caterers for the public mind, like the slave-merchants of Asia, tear from the paternal brain before they are well matured, and drag half-clothed before the eyes of their blockhead of a sultan, their Shahabaham, their terrible public, which, if they don't amuse it, will cut off their heads by curtailing the ingots and emptying their pockets.

This madness of our epoch reacted upon the illustrious Gaudissart, and here follows the history of how it happened. A life-insurance company having been told of his irresistible eloquence offered him an unheard-of commission, which he graciously accepted. The bargain concluded and the treaty signed, our traveller was put in training, or we might say weaned, by the secretary-general of the enterprise, who freed his mind of its swaddling-clothes, showed him the dark holes of the business, taught him its dialect, took the mechanism apart bit by bit, dissected for his instruction the particular public he was expected to gull, crammed him with phrases, fed him with impromptu replies, provisioned him with unanswerable arguments, and, so to speak, sharpened the file of the tongue which was about to operate upon the life of France.

The puppet amply rewarded the pains bestowed upon him. The heads of the company boasted of the illustrious Gaudissart, showed him such attention and proclaimed the great talents of this perambulating prospectus so loudly in the sphere of exalted banking and commercial diplomacy, that the financial managers of two newspapers (celebrated at that time but since defunct) were seized with the idea of employing him to get subscribers. The proprietors of the "Globe," an organ of Saint-Simonism, and the "Movement," a republican journal, each invited the illustrious

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Gaudissart to a conference, and proposed to give him ten francs a head for every subscriber, provided he brought in a thousand, but only five francs if he got no more than five hundred. The cause of political journalism not interfering with the pre-accepted cause of life insurance, the bargain was struck; although Gaudissart demanded an indemnity from the Saint-Simonians for the eight days he was forced to spend in studying the doctrines of their apostle, asserting that a prodigious effort of memory and intellect was necessary to get to the bottom of that “article” and to reason upon it suitably. He asked nothing, however, from the republicans. In the first place, he inclined in republican ideas,—the only ones, according to Gaudissardian philosophy, which could bring about a rational equality. Besides which he had already dipped into the conspiracies of the French “carbonari”; he had been arrested, and released for want of proof; and finally, as he called the newspaper proprietors to observe, he had lately grown a mustache, and needed only a hat of certain shape and a pair of spurs to represent, with due propriety, the Republic.

CHAPTER II

For one whole week this commanding genius went every morning to be Saint-Simonized at the office of the “Globe,” and every afternoon he betook himself to the life-insurance company, where he learned the intricacies of financial diplomacy. His aptitude and his memory were prodigious; so that he was able to start on his peregrinations by the 15th of April, the date at which he usually opened the spring campaign. Two large commercial houses, alarmed at the decline of business, implored the ambitious Gaudissart not to desert the article Paris, and seduced him, it was said, with large offers, to take their commissions once more. The king of travellers was amenable to the claims of his old friends, enforced as they were by the enormous premiums offered to him.

* * * * *

“Listen, my little Jenny,” he said in a hackney-coach to a pretty florist.

All truly great men delight in allowing themselves to be tyrannized over by a feeble being, and Gaudissart had found his tyrant in Jenny. He was bringing her home at eleven o’clock from the Gymnase, whither he had taken her, in full dress, to a proscenium box on the first tier.

“On my return, Jenny, I shall refurnish your room in superior style. That big Matilda, who pesters you with comparisons and her real India shawls imported by the suite of the Russian ambassador, and her silver plate and her Russian prince,—who to my mind



is nothing but a humbug, —won't have a word to say *then*. I consecrate to the adornment of your room all the 'Children' I shall get in the provinces."

"Well, that's a pretty thing to say!" cried the florist. "Monster of a man! Do you dare to talk to me of your children? Do you suppose I am going to stand that sort of thing?"



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“Oh, what a goose you are, my Jenny! That’s only a figure of speech in our business.”

“A fine business, then!”

“Well, but listen; if you talk all the time you’ll always be in the right.”

“I mean to be. Upon my word, you take things easy!”

“You don’t let me finish. I have taken under my protection a superlative idea,—a journal, a newspaper, written for children. In our profession, when travellers have caught, let us suppose, ten subscribers to the ‘Children’s Journal,’ they say, ‘I’ve got ten Children,’ just as I say when I get ten subscriptions to a newspaper called the ‘Movement,’ ‘I’ve got ten Movements.’ Now don’t you see?”

“That’s all right. Are you going into politics? If you do you’ll get into Saint-Pelagie, and I shall have to trot down there after you. Oh! if one only knew what one puts one’s foot into when we love a man, on my word of honor we would let you alone to take care of yourselves, you men! However, if you are going away to-morrow we won’t talk of disagreeable things,—that would be silly.”

The coach stopped before a pretty house, newly built in the Rue d’Artois, where Gaudissart and Jenny climbed to the fourth story. This was the abode of Mademoiselle Jenny Courand, commonly reported to be privately married to the illustrious Gaudissart, a rumor which that individual did not deny. To maintain her supremacy, Jenny kept him to the performance of innumerable small attentions, and threatened continually to turn him off if he omitted the least of them. She now ordered him to write to her from every town, and render a minute account of all his proceedings.

“How many ‘Children’ will it take to furnish my chamber?” she asked, throwing off her shawl and sitting down by a good fire.

“I get five sous for each subscriber.”

“Delightful! And is it with five sous that you expect to make me rich? Perhaps you are like the Wandering Jew with your pockets full of money.”

“But, Jenny, I shall get a thousand ‘Children.’ Just reflect that children have never had a newspaper to themselves before. But what a fool I am to try to explain matters to you, —you can’t understand such things.”

“Can’t I? Then tell me,—tell me, Gaudissart, if I’m such a goose why do you love me?”

“Just because you are a goose,—a sublime goose! Listen, Jenny. See here, I am going to undertake the ‘Globe,’ the ‘Movement,’ the ‘Children,’ the insurance business,



and some of my old articles Paris; instead of earning a miserable eight thousand a year, I'll bring back twenty thousand at least from each trip."

"Unlace me, Gaudissart, and do it right; don't tighten me."

"Yes, truly," said the traveller, complacently; "I shall become a shareholder in the newspapers, like Finot, one of my friends, the son of a hatter, who now has thirty thousand francs income, and is going to make himself a peer of France. When one thinks of that little Popinot,—ah, mon Dieu! I forgot to tell you that Monsieur Popinot was named minister of commerce yesterday. Why shouldn't I be ambitious too? Ha! ha! I could easily pick up the jargon of those fellows who talk in the chamber, and bluster with the rest of them. Now, listen to me:—

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“Gentlemen,” he said, standing behind a chair, “the Press is neither a tool nor an article of barter: it is, viewed under its political aspects, an institution. We are bound, in virtue of our position as legislators, to consider all things politically, and therefore” (here he stopped to get breath)—“and therefore we must examine the Press and ask ourselves if it is useful or noxious, if it should be encouraged or put down, taxed or free. These are serious questions. I feel that I do not waste the time, always precious, of this Chamber by examining this article—the Press—and explaining to you its qualities. We are on the verge of an abyss. Undoubtedly the laws have not the nap which they ought to have—Hein?” he said, looking at Jenny. “All orators put France on the verge of an abyss. They either say that or they talk about the chariot of state, or convulsions, or political horizons. Don’t I know their dodges? I’m up to all the tricks of all the trades. Do you know why? Because I was born with a caul; my mother has got it, but I’ll give it to you. You’ll see! I shall soon be in the government.”

“You!”

“Why shouldn’t I be the Baron Gaudissart, peer of France? Haven’t they twice elected Monsieur Popinot as deputy from the fourth arrondissement? He dines with Louis Phillippe. There’s Finot; he is going to be, they say, a member of the Council. Suppose they send me as ambassador to London? I tell you I’d nonplus those English! No man ever got the better of Gaudissart, the illustrious Gaudissart, and nobody ever will. Yes, I say it! no one ever outwitted me, and no one can—in any walk of life, politics or impolitics, here or elsewhere. But, for the time being, I must give myself wholly to the capitalists; to the ‘Globe,’ the ‘Movement,’ the ‘Children,’ and my article Paris.”

“You will be brought up with a round turn, you and your newspapers. I’ll bet you won’t get further than Poitiers before the police will nab you.”

“What will you bet?”

“A shawl.”

“Done! If I lose that shawl I’ll go back to the article Paris and the hat business. But as for getting the better of Gaudissart—never! never!”

And the illustrious traveller threw himself into position before Jenny, looked at her proudly, one hand in his waistcoat, his head at three-quarter profile,—an attitude truly Napoleonic.

“Oh, how funny you are! what have you been eating to-night?”

Gaudissart was thirty-eight years of age, of medium height, stout and fat like men who roll about continually in stage-coaches, with a face as round as a pumpkin, ruddy cheeks, and regular features of the type which sculptors of all lands adopt as a model

for statues of Abundance, Law, Force, Commerce, and the like. His protuberant stomach swelled forth in the shape of a pear; his legs were small, but active and vigorous. He caught Jenny up in his arms like a baby and kissed her.



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“Hold your tongue, young woman!” he said. “What do you know about Saint-Simonism, antagonism, Fourierism, criticism, heroic enterprise, or woman’s freedom? I’ll tell you what they are,—ten francs for each subscription, Madame Gaudissart.”

“On my word of honor, you are going crazy, Gaudissart.”

“More and more crazy about *you*,” he replied, flinging his hat upon the sofa.

The next morning Gaudissart, having breakfasted gloriously with Jenny, departed on horseback to work up the chief towns of the district to which he was assigned by the various enterprises in whose interests he was now about to exercise his great talents. After spending forty-five days in beating up the country between Paris and Blois, he remained two weeks at the latter place to write up his correspondence and make short visits to the various market towns of the department. The night before he left Blois for Tours he indited a letter to Mademoiselle Jenny Courand. As the conciseness and charm of this epistle cannot be equalled by any narration of ours, and as, moreover, it proves the legitimacy of the tie which united these two individuals, we produce it here:

“My dear Jenny,—You will lose your wager. Like Napoleon, Gaudissart the illustrious has his star, but *not* his Waterloo. I triumph everywhere. Life insurance has done well. Between Paris and Blois I lodged two millions. But as I get to the centre of France heads become infinitely harder and millions correspondingly scarce. The article Paris keeps up its own little jog-trot. It is a ring on the finger. With all my well-known cunning I spit these shop-keepers like larks. I got off one hundred and sixty-two Ternaux shawls at Orleans. I am sure I don’t know what they will do with them, unless they return them to the backs of the sheep.“As to the article journal—the devil! that’s a horse of another color. Holy saints! how one has to warble before you can teach these bumpkins a new tune. I have only made sixty-two ‘Movements’: exactly a hundred less for the whole trip than the shawls in one town. Those republican rogues! they won’t subscribe. They talk, they talk; they share your opinions, and presently you are all agreed that every existing thing must be overturned. You feel sure your man is going to subscribe. Not a bit of it! If he owns three feet of ground, enough to grow ten cabbages, or a few trees to slice into toothpicks, the fellow begins to talk of consolidated property, taxes, revenues, indemnities,—a whole lot of stuff, and I have wasted my time and breath on patriotism. It’s a bad business! Candidly, the ‘Movement’ does not move. I have written to the directors and told them so. I am sorry for it—on account of my political opinions.“As for the ‘Globe,’ that’s another breed altogether. Just set to work and talk new doctrines to people you fancy are fools enough to believe such lies,—why,



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they think you want to burn their houses down! It is vain for me to tell them that I speak for futurity, for posterity, for self-interest properly understood; for enterprise where nothing can be lost; that man has preyed upon man long enough; that woman is a slave; that the great providential thought should be made to triumph; that a way must be found to arrive at a rational co-ordination of the social fabric, —in short, the whole reverberation of my sentences. Well, what do you think? when I open upon them with such ideas these provincials lock their cupboards as if I wanted to steal their spoons and beg me to go away! Are not they fools? geese? The 'Globe' is smashed. I said to the proprietors, 'You are too advanced, you go ahead too fast: you ought to get a few results; the provinces like results.' However, I have made a hundred 'Globes,' and I must say, considering the thick-headedness of these clodhoppers, it is a miracle. But to do it I had to make them such a lot of promises that I am sure I don't know how the globites, globists, globules, or whatever they call themselves, will ever get out of them. But they always tell me they can make the world a great deal better than it is, so I go ahead and prophesy to the value of ten francs for each subscription. There was one farmer who thought the paper was agricultural because of its name. I Globed *him*. Bah! he gave in at once; he had a projecting forehead; all men with projecting foreheads are ideologists. "But the 'Children'; oh! ah! as to the 'Children'! I got two thousand between Paris and Blois. Jolly business! but there is not much to say. You just show a little vignette to the mother, pretending to hide it from the child: naturally the child wants to see, and pulls mamma's gown and cries for its newspaper, because 'Papa has *dot* his.' Mamma can't let her brat tear the gown; the gown costs thirty francs, the subscription six—economy; result, subscription. It is an excellent thing, meets an actual want; it holds a place between dolls and sugar-plums, the two eternal necessities of childhood." I have had a quarrel here at the table d'hote about the newspapers and my opinions. I was unsuspectingly eating my dinner next to a man with a gray hat who was reading the 'Debats.' I said to myself, 'Now for my rostrum eloquence. He is tied to the dynasty; I'll cook him; this triumph will be capital practice for my ministerial talents.' So I went to work and praised his 'Debats.' Hein! if I didn't lead him along! Thread by thread, I began to net my man. I launched my four-horse phrases, and the F-sharp arguments, and all the rest of the cursed stuff. Everybody listened; and I saw a man who had July as plain as day on his mustache, just ready to nibble at a 'Movement.' Well, I don't know how it was, but I unluckily let fall the word 'blockhead.' Thunder! you should have seen my gray hat, my dynastic hat (shocking bad hat, anyhow), who got the bit in his



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teeth and was furiously angry. I put on my grand air—you know—and said to him: 'Ah, ca! Monsieur, you are remarkably aggressive; if you are not content, I am ready to give you satisfaction; I fought in July.' 'Though the father of a family,' he replied, 'I am ready —' 'Father of a family!' I exclaimed; 'my dear sir, have you any children?' 'Yes.' 'Twelve years old?' 'Just about.' 'Well, then, the "Children's Journal" is the very thing for you; six francs a year, one number a month, double columns, edited by great literary lights, well got up, good paper, engravings from charming sketches by our best artists, actual colored drawings of the Indies—will not fade.' I fired my broadside 'feelings of a father, *etc., etc.,*'—in short, a subscription instead of a quarrel. 'There's nobody but Gaudissart who can get out of things like that,' said that little cricket Lamard to the big Bulot at the cafe, when he told him the story. 'I leave to-morrow for Amboise. I shall do up Amboise in two days, and I will write next from Tours, where I shall measure swords with the inhabitants of that colorless region; colorless, I mean, from the intellectual and speculative point of view. But, on the word of a Gaudissart, they shall be toppled over, toppled down —flooded, I say.

"Adieu, my kitten. Love me always; be faithful; fidelity through thick and thin is one of the attributes of the Free Woman. Who is kissing you on the eyelids?

"Thy Felix Forever."

CHAPTER III

Five days later Gaudissart started from the Hotel des Faisans, at which he had put up in Tours, and went to Vouvray, a rich and populous district where the public mind seemed to him susceptible of cultivation. Mounted upon his horse, he trotted along the embankment thinking no more of his phrases than an actor thinks of his part which he has played for a hundred times. It was thus that the illustrious Gaudissart went his cheerful way, admiring the landscape, and little dreaming that in the happy valleys of Vouvray his commercial infallibility was about to perish.

Here a few remarks upon the public mind of Touraine are essential to our story. The subtle, satirical, epigrammatic tale-telling spirit stamped on every page of Rabelais is the faithful expression of the Tourangian mind,—a mind polished and refined as it should be in a land where the kings of France long held their court; ardent, artistic, poetic, voluptuous, yet whose first impulses subside quickly. The softness of the atmosphere, the beauty of the climate, a certain ease of life and joviality of manners, smother before long the sentiment of art, narrow the widest heart, and enervate the strongest will. Transplant the Tourangian, and his fine qualities develop and lead to great results, as we may see in many spheres of action: look at Rabelais and Semblancay, Plantin the printer and Descartes, Boucicault, the Napoleon



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of his day, and Pinaigrier, who painted most of the colored glass in our cathedrals; also Verville and Courier. But the Tourangian, distinguished though he may be in other regions, sits in his own home like an Indian on his mat or a Turk on his divan. He employs his wit in laughing at his neighbor and in making merry all his days; and when at last he reaches the end of his life, he is still a happy man. Touraine is like the Abbaye of Theleme, so vaunted in the history of Gargantua. There we may find the complying sisterhoods of that famous tale, and there the good cheer celebrated by Rabelais reigns in glory.

As to the do-nothingness of that blessed land it is sublime and well expressed in a certain popular legend: "Tourangian, are you hungry, do you want some soup?" "Yes." "Bring your porringer." "Then I am not hungry." Is it to the joys of the vineyard and the harmonious loveliness of this garden land of France, is it to the peace and tranquillity of a region where the step of an invader has never trodden, that we owe the soft compliance of these unconstrained and easy manners? To such questions no answer. Enter this Turkey of sunny France, and you will stay there,—lazy, idle, happy. You may be as ambitious as Napoleon, as poetic as Lord Byron, and yet a power unknown, invisible, will compel you to bury your poetry within your soul and turn your projects into dreams.

The illustrious Gaudissart was fated to encounter here in Vouvray one of those indigenous jesters whose jests are not intolerable solely because they have reached the perfection of the mocking art. Right or wrong, the Tourangians are fond of inheriting from their parents. Consequently the doctrines of Saint-Simon were especially hated and villified among them. In Touraine hatred and villification take the form of superb disdain and witty maliciousness worthy of the land of good stories and practical jokes,—a spirit which, alas! is yielding, day by day, to that other spirit which Lord Byron has characterized as "English cant."

For his sins, after getting down at the Soleil d'Or, an inn kept by a former grenadier of the imperial guard named Mitouflet, married to a rich widow, the illustrious traveller, after a brief consultation with the landlord, betook himself to the knave of Vouvray, the jovial merry-maker, the comic man of the neighborhood, compelled by fame and nature to supply the town with merriment. This country Figaro was once a dyer, and now possessed about seven or eight thousand francs a year, a pretty house on the slope of the hill, a plump little wife, and robust health. For ten years he had had nothing to do but take care of his wife and his garden, marry his daughter, play whist in the evenings, keep the run of all the gossip in the neighborhood, meddle with the elections, squabble with the large proprietors, and order good dinners; or else trot along the embankment to find out what was going on in Tours, torment the cure, and finally,



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by way of dramatic entertainment, assist at the sale of lands in the neighborhood of his vineyards. In short, he led the true Tourangian life,—the life of a little country-townsman. He was, moreover, an important member of the bourgeoisie,—a leader among the small proprietors, all of them envious, jealous, delighted to catch up and retail gossip and calumnies against the aristocracy; dragging things down to their own level; and at war with all kinds of superiority, which they deposited with the fine composure of ignorance. Monsieur Vernier—such was the name of this great little man—was just finishing his breakfast, with his wife and daughter on either side of him, when Gaudissart entered the room through a window that looked out on the Loire and the Cher, and lighted one of the gayest dining-rooms of that gay land.

“Is this Monsieur Vernier himself?” said the traveller, bending his vertebral column with such grace that it seemed to be elastic.

“Yes, Monsieur,” said the mischievous ex-dyer, with a scrutinizing look which took in the style of man he had to deal with.

“I come, Monsieur,” resumed Gaudissart, “to solicit the aid of your knowledge and insight to guide my efforts in this district, where Mitouflet tells me you have the greatest influence. Monsieur, I am sent into the provinces on an enterprise of the utmost importance, undertaken by bankers who—”

“Who mean to win our tricks,” said Vernier, long used to the ways of commercial travellers and to their periodical visits.

“Precisely,” replied Gaudissart, with native impudence. “But with your fine tact, Monsieur, you must be aware that we can’t win tricks from people unless it is their interest to play at cards. I beg you not to confound me with the vulgar herd of travellers who succeed by humbug or importunity. I am no longer a commercial traveller. I was one, and I glory in it; but to-day my mission is of higher importance, and should place me, in the minds of superior people, among those who devote themselves to the enlightenment of their country. The most distinguished bankers in Paris take part in this affair; not fictitiously, as in some shameful speculations which I call rat-traps. No, no, nothing of the kind! I should never condescend—never!—to hawk about such *catch-fools*. No, Monsieur; the most respectable houses in Paris are concerned in this enterprise; and their interests guarantee—”

Hereupon Gaudissart drew forth his whole string of phrases, and Monsieur Vernier let him go the length of his tether, listening with apparent interest which completely deceived him. But after the word “guarantee” Vernier paid no further attention to our traveller’s rhetoric, and turned over in his mind how to play him some malicious trick and

deliver a land, justly considered half-savage by speculators unable to get a bite of it, from the inroads of these Parisian caterpillars.



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At the head of an enchanting valley, called the Valley Coquette because of its windings and the curves which return upon each other at every step, and seem more and more lovely as we advance, whether we ascend or descend them, there lived, in a little house surrounded by vineyards, a half-insane man named Margaritis. He was of Italian origin, married, but childless; and his wife took care of him with a courage fully appreciated by the neighborhood. Madame Margaritis was undoubtedly in real danger from a man who, among other fancies, persisted in carrying about with him two long-bladed knives with which he sometimes threatened her. Who has not seen the wonderful self-devotion shown by provincials who consecrate their lives to the care of sufferers, possibly because of the disgrace heaped upon a bourgeoisie if she allows her husband or children to be taken to a public hospital? Moreover, who does not know the repugnance which these people feel to the payment of the two or three thousand francs required at Charenton or in the private lunatic asylums? If any one had spoken to Madame Margaritis of Doctors Dubuisson, Esquirol, Blanche, and others, she would have preferred, with noble indignation, to keep her thousands and take care of the "good-man" at home.

As the incomprehensible whims of this lunatic are connected with the current of our story, we are compelled to exhibit the most striking of them. Margaritis went out as soon as it rained, and walked about bare-headed in his vineyard. At home he made incessant inquiries for newspapers; to satisfy him his wife and the maid-servant used to give him an old journal called the "Indre-et-Loire," and for seven years he had never yet perceived that he was reading the same number over and over again. Perhaps a doctor would have observed with interest the connection that evidently existed between the recurring and spasmodic demands for the newspaper and the atmospheric variations of the weather.

Usually when his wife had company, which happened nearly every evening, for the neighbors, pitying her situation, would frequently come to play at boston in her salon, Margaritis remained silent in a corner and never stirred. But the moment ten o'clock began to strike on a clock which he kept shut up in a large oblong closet, he rose at the stroke with the mechanical precision of the figures which are made to move by springs in the German toys. He would then advance slowly towards the players, give them a glance like the automatic gaze of the Greeks and Turks exhibited on the Boulevard du Temple, and say sternly, "Go away!" There were days when he had lucid intervals and could give his wife excellent advice as to the sale of their wines; but at such times he became extremely annoying, and would ransack her closets and steal her delicacies, which he devoured in secret. Occasionally, when the usual visitors made their appearance he would treat them with civility; but as a general thing his remarks and replies were



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incoherent. For instance, a lady once asked him, "How do you feel to-day, Monsieur Margaritis?" "I have grown a beard," he replied, "have you?" "Are you better?" asked another. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" was the answer. But the greater part of the time he gazed stolidly at his guests without uttering a word; and then his wife would say, "The good-man does not hear anything to-day."

On two or three occasions in the course of five years, and usually about the time of the equinox, this remark had driven him to frenzy; he flourished his knives and shouted, "That joke dishonors me!"

As for his daily life, he ate, drank, and walked about like other men in sound health; and so it happened that he was treated with about the same respect and attention that we give to a heavy piece of furniture. Among his many absurdities was one of which no man had as yet discovered the object, although by long practice the wiseheads of the community had learned to unravel the meaning of most of his vagaries. He insisted on keeping a sack of flour and two puncheons of wine in the cellar of his house, and he would allow no one to lay hands on them. But then the month of June came round he grew uneasy with the restless anxiety of a madman about the sale of the sack and the puncheons. Madame Margaritis could nearly always persuade him that the wine had been sold at an enormous price, which she paid over to him, and which he hid so cautiously that neither his wife nor the servant who watched him had ever been able to discover its hiding-place.

The evening before Gaudissart reached Vouvray Madame Margaritis had had more difficulty than usual in deceiving her husband, whose mind happened to be uncommonly lucid.

"I really don't know how I shall get through to-morrow," she had said to Madame Vernier. "Would you believe it, the good-man insists on watching his two casks of wine. He has worried me so this whole day, that I had to show him two full puncheons. Our neighbor, Pierre Champlain, fortunately had two which he had not sold. I asked him to kindly let me have them rolled into our cellar; and oh, dear! now that the good-man has seen them he insists on bottling them off himself!"

Madame Vernier had related the poor woman's trouble to her husband just before the entrance of Gaudissart, and at the first words of the famous traveller Vernier determined that he should be made to grapple with Margaritis.

"Monsieur," said the ex-dyer, as soon as the illustrious Gaudissart had fired his first broadside, "I will not hide from you the great difficulties which my native place offers to your enterprise. This part of the country goes along, as it were, in the rough,—'suo modo.' It is a country where new ideas don't take hold. We live as our fathers lived, we

amuse ourselves with four meals a day, and we cultivate our vineyards and sell our wines to the best advantage. Our business principle is to sell things for more than they cost



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us; we shall stick in that rut, and neither God nor the devil can get us out of it. I will, however, give you some advice, and good advice is an egg in the hand. There is in this town a retired banker in whose wisdom I have—I, particularly—the greatest confidence. If you can obtain his support, I will add mine. If your proposals have real merit, if we are convinced of the advantage of your enterprise, the approval of Monsieur Margaritis (which carries with it mine) will open to you at least twenty rich houses in Vouvray who will be glad to try your specifics.”

When Madame Vernier heard the name of the lunatic she raised her head and looked at her husband.

“Ah, precisely; my wife intends to call on Madame Margaritis with one of our neighbors. Wait a moment, and you can accompany these ladies —You can pick up Madame Fontanieu on your way,” said the wily dyer, winking at his wife.

To pick out the greatest gossip, the sharpest tongue, the most inveterate cackler of the neighborhood! It meant that Madame Vernier was to take a witness to the scene between the traveller and the lunatic which should keep the town in laughter for a month. Monsieur and Madame Vernier played their part so well that Gaudissart had no suspicions, and straightway fell into the trap. He gallantly offered his arm to Madame Vernier, and believed that he made, as they went along, the conquest of both ladies, for those benefit he sparkled with wit and humor and undetected puns.

The house of the pretended banker stood at the entrance to the Valley Coquette. The place, called La Fuye, had nothing remarkable about it. On the ground floor was a large wainscoted salon, on either side of which opened the bedroom of the good-man and that of his wife. The salon was entered from an ante-chamber, which served as the dining-room and communicated with the kitchen. This lower door, which was wholly without the external charm usually seen even in the humblest dwellings in Touraine, was covered by a mansard story, reached by a stairway built on the outside of the house against the gable end and protected by a shed-roof. A little garden, full of marigolds, syringas, and elder-bushes, separated the house from the fields; and all around the courtyard were detached buildings which were used in the vintage season for the various processes of making wine.

CHAPTER IV

Margaritis was seated in an arm-chair covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, near the window of the salon, and he did not stir as the two ladies entered with Gaudissart. His thoughts were running on the casks of wine. He was a spare man, and his bald head, garnished with a few spare locks at the back of it, was pear-shaped in conformation.



His sunken eyes, overtopped by heavy black brows and surrounded by discolored circles, his nose, thin and sharp like the blade of a knife, the strongly marked jawbone, the hollow cheeks, and the oblong tendency of all these lines, together with his unnaturally long and flat chin, contributed to give a peculiar expression to his countenance,—something between that of a retired professor of rhetoric and a rag-picker.



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“Monsieur Margaritis,” cried Madame Vernier, addressing him, “come, stir about! Here is a gentleman whom my husband sends to you, and you must listen to him with great attention. Put away your mathematics and talk to him.”

On hearing these words the lunatic rose, looked at Gaudissart, made him a sign to sit down, and said, “Let us converse, Monsieur.”

The two women went into Madame Margaritis’ bedroom, leaving the door open so as to hear the conversation, and interpose if it became necessary. They were hardly installed before Monsieur Vernier crept softly up through the field and, opening a window, got into the bedroom without noise.

“Monsieur has doubtless been in business—?” began Gaudissart.

“Public business,” answered Margaritis, interrupting him. “I pacificated Calabria under the reign of King Murat.”

“Bless me! if he hasn’t gone to Calabria!” whispered Monsieur Vernier.

“In that case,” said Gaudissart, “we shall quickly understand each other.”

“I am listening,” said Margaritis, striking the attitude taken by a man when he poses to a portrait-painter.

“Monsieur,” said Gaudissart, who chanced to be turning his watch-key with a rotatory and periodical click which caught the attention of the lunatic and contributed no doubt to keep him quiet. “Monsieur, if you were not a man of superior intelligence” (the fool bowed), “I should content myself with merely laying before you the material advantages of this enterprise, whose psychological aspects it would be a waste of time to explain to you. Listen! Of all kinds of social wealth, is not time the most precious? To economize time is, consequently, to become wealthy. Now, is there anything that consumes so much time as those anxieties which I call ‘pot-boiling’?—a vulgar expression, but it puts the whole question in a nutshell. For instance, what can eat up more time than the inability to give proper security to persons from whom you seek to borrow money when, poor at the moment, you are nevertheless rich in hope?”

“Money,—yes, that’s right,” said Margaritis.

“Well, Monsieur, I am sent into the departments by a company of bankers and capitalists, who have apprehended the enormous waste which rising men of talent are thus making of time, and, consequently, of intelligence and productive ability. We have seized the idea of capitalizing for such men their future prospects, and cashing their talents by discounting—what? *time*; securing the value of it to their survivors. I may say that it is no longer a question of economizing time, but of giving it a price, a quotation; of representing in a pecuniary sense those products developed by time which presumably



you possess in the region of your intellect; of representing also the moral qualities with which you are endowed, and which are, Monsieur, living forces,—as living as a cataract, as a steam-engine of three, ten, twenty, fifty horse-power.

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Ha! this is progress! the movement onward to a better state of things; a movement born of the spirit of our epoch; a movement essentially progressive, as I shall prove to you when we come to consider the principles involved in the logical co-ordination of the social fabric. I will now explain my meaning by literal examples, leaving aside all purely abstract reasoning, which I call the mathematics of thought. Instead of being, as you are, a proprietor living upon your income, let us suppose that you are painter, a musician, an artist, or a poet—”

“I am a painter,” said the lunatic.

“Well, so be it. I see you take my metaphor. You are a painter; you have a glorious future, a rich future before you. But I go still farther—”

At these words the madman looked anxiously at Gaudissart, thinking he meant to go away; but was reassured when he saw that he kept his seat.

“You may even be nothing at all,” said Gaudissart, going on with his phrases, “but you are conscious of yourself; you feel yourself—”

“I feel myself,” said the lunatic.

“—you feel yourself a great man; you say to yourself, ‘I will be a minister of state.’ Well, then, you—painter, artist, man of letters, statesman of the future—you reckon upon your talents, you estimate their value, you rate them, let us say, at a hundred thousand crowns—”

“Do you give me a hundred thousand crowns?”

“Yes, Monsieur, as you will see. Either your heirs and assigns will receive them if you die, for the company contemplates that event, or you will receive them in the long run through your works of art, your writings, or your fortunate speculations during your lifetime. But, as I have already had the honor to tell you, when you have once fixed upon the value of your intellectual capital,—for it is intellectual capital,—seize that idea firmly,—intellectual—”

“I understand,” said the fool.

“You sign a policy of insurance with a company which recognizes in you a value of a hundred thousand crowns; in you, poet—”

“I am a painter,” said the lunatic.



“Yes,” resumed Gaudissart,—“painter, poet, musician, statesman—and binds itself to pay them over to your family, your heirs, if, by reason of your death, the hopes founded on your intellectual capital should be overthrown for you personally. The payment of the premium is all that is required to protect—”

“The money-box,” said the lunatic, sharply interrupting him.

“Ah! naturally; yes. I see that Monsieur understands business.”

“Yes,” said the madman. “I established the Territorial Bank in the Rue des Fosses-Montmartre at Paris in 1798.”

“For,” resumed Gaudissart, going back to his premium, “in order to meet the payments on the intellectual capital which each man recognizes and esteems in himself, it is of course necessary that each should pay a certain premium, three per cent; an annual due of three per cent. Thus, by the payment of this trifling sum, a mere nothing, you protect your family from disastrous results at your death—”



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“But I live,” said the fool.

“Ah! yes; you mean if you should live long? That is the usual objection,—a vulgar prejudice. I fully agree that if we had not foreseen and demolished it we might feel we were unworthy of being —what? What are we, after all? Book-keepers in the great Bureau of Intellect. Monsieur, I don’t apply these remarks to you, but I meet on all sides men who make it a business to teach new ideas and disclose chains of reasoning to people who turn pale at the first word. On my word of honor, it is pitiable! But that’s the way of the world, and I don’t pretend to reform it. Your objection, Monsieur, is really sheer nonsense.”

“Why?” asked the lunatic.

“Why?—this is why: because, if you live and possess the qualities which are estimated in your policy against the chances of death,—now, attend to this—”

“I am attending.”

“Well, then, you have succeeded in life; and you have succeeded because of the said insurance. You doubled your chances of success by getting rid of the anxieties you were dragging about with you in the shape of wife and children who might otherwise be left destitute at your death. If you attain this certainty, you have touched the value of your intellectual capital, on which the cost of insurance is but a trifle,—a mere trifle, a bagatelle.”

“That’s a fine idea!”

“Ah! is it not, Monsieur?” cried Gaudissart. “I call this enterprise the exchequer of beneficence; a mutual insurance against poverty; or, if you like it better, the discounting, the cashing, of talent. For talent, Monsieur, is a bill of exchange which Nature gives to the man of genius, and which often has a long time to run before it falls due.”

“That is usury!” cried Margaritis.

“The devil! he’s keen, the old fellow! I’ve made a mistake,” thought Gaudissart, “I must catch him with other chaff. I’ll try humbug No. 1. Not at all,” he said aloud, “for you who —”

“Will you take a glass of wine?” asked Margaritis.

“With pleasure,” replied Gaudissart.

“Wife, give us a bottle of the wine that is in the puncheons. You are here at the very head of Vouvray,” he continued, with a gesture of the hand, “the vineyard of Margaritis.”



The maid-servant brought glasses and a bottle of wine of the vintage of 1819. The good-man filled a glass with circumspection and offered it to Gaudissart, who drank it up.

“Ah, you are joking, Monsieur!” exclaimed the commercial traveller. “Surely this is Madeira, true Madeira?”

“So you think,” said the fool. “The trouble with our Vouvray wine is that it is neither a common wine, nor a wine that can be drunk with the entremets. It is too generous, too strong. It is often sold in Paris adulterated with brandy and called Madeira. The wine-merchants buy it up, when our vintage has not been good enough for the Dutch and Belgian markets, to mix it with wines grown



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in the neighborhood of Paris, and call it Bordeaux. But what you are drinking just now, my good Monsieur, is a wine for kings, the pure Head of Vouvray,—that's its name. I have two puncheons, only two puncheons of it left. People who like fine wines, high-class wines, who furnish their table with qualities that can't be bought in the regular trade,—and there are many persons in Paris who have that vanity,—well, such people send direct to us for this wine. Do you know any one who—?”

“Let us go on with what we were saying,” interposed Gaudissart.

“We are going on,” said the fool. “My wine is capital; you are capital, capitalist, intellectual capital, capital wine,—all the same etymology, don't you see? hein? Capital, 'caput,' head, Head of Vouvray, that's my wine,—it's all one thing.”

“So that you have realized your intellectual capital through your wines? Ah, I see!” said Gaudissart.

“I have realized,” said the lunatic. “Would you like to buy my puncheons? you shall have them on good terms.”

“No, I was merely speaking,” said the illustrious Gaudissart, “of the results of insurance and the employment of intellectual capital. I will resume my argument.”

The lunatic calmed down, and fell once more into position.

“I remarked, Monsieur, that if you die the capital will be paid to your family without discussion.”

“Without discussion?”

“Yes, unless there were suicide.”

“That's quibbling.”

“No, Monsieur; you are aware that suicide is one of those acts which are easy to prove —”

“In France,” said the fool; “but—”

“But in other countries?” said Gaudissart. “Well, Monsieur, to cut short discussion on this point, I will say, once for all, that death in foreign countries or on the field of battle is outside of our—”



“Then what are you insuring? Nothing at all!” cried Margaritis. “My bank, my Territorial Bank, rested upon—”

“Nothing at all?” exclaimed Gaudissart, interrupting the good-man. “Nothing at all? What do you call sickness, and afflictions, and poverty, and passions? Don’t go off on exceptional points.”

“No, no! no points,” said the lunatic.

“Now, what’s the result of all this?” cried Gaudissart. “To you, a banker, I can sum up the profits in a few words. Listen. A man lives; he has a future; he appears well; he lives, let us say, by his art; he wants money; he tries to get it,—he fails. Civilization withholds cash from this man whose thought could master civilization, and ought to master it, and will master it some day with a brush, a chisel, with words, ideas, theories, systems. Civilization is atrocious! It denies bread to the men who give it luxury. It starves them on sneers and curses, the beggarly rascal! My words may be strong, but I shall not retract them. Well, this great but neglected man comes to us; we recognize his greatness; we salute him with respect; we listen to him. He says to us: ‘Gentlemen, my life and talents are worth so much; on my productions I will pay you such or such percentage.’ Very good; what do we do? Instantly, without reserve or hesitation, we admit him to the great festivals of civilization as an honored guest—”



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“You need wine for that,” interposed the madman.

“—as an honored guest. He signs the insurance policy; he takes our bits of paper,—scraps, rags, miserable rags!—which, nevertheless, have more power in the world than his unaided genius. Then, if he wants money, every one will lend it to him on those rags. At the Bourse, among bankers, wherever he goes, even at the usurers, he will find money because he can give security. Well, Monsieur, is not that a great gulf to bridge over in our social system? But that is only one aspect of our work. We insure debtors by another scheme of policies and premiums. We offer annuities at rates graduated according to ages, on a sliding-scale infinitely more advantageous than what are called tontines, which are based on tables of mortality that are notoriously false. Our company deals with large masses of men; consequently the annuitants are secure from those distressing fears which sadden old age,—too sad already!—fears which pursue those who receive annuities from private sources. You see, Monsieur, that we have estimated life under all its aspects.”

“Sucked it at both ends,” said the lunatic. “Take another glass of wine. You’ve earned it. You must line your inside with velvet if you are going to pump at it like that every day. Monsieur, the wine of Vouvray, if well kept, is downright velvet.”

“Now, what do you think of it all?” said Gaudissart, emptying his glass.

“It is very fine, very new, very useful; but I like the discounts I get at my Territorial Bank, Rue des Fosses-Montmartre.”

“You are quite right, Monsieur,” answered Gaudissart; “but that sort of thing is taken and retaken, made and remade, every day. You have also hypothecating banks which lend upon landed property and redeem it on a large scale. But that is a narrow idea compared to our system of consolidating hopes,—consolidating hopes! coagulating, so to speak, the aspirations born in every soul, and insuring the realization of our dreams. It needed our epoch, Monsieur, the epoch of transition —transition and progress—”

“Yes, progress,” muttered the lunatic, with his glass at his lips. “I like progress. That is what I’ve told them many times—”

“The ‘Times’!” cried Gaudissart, who did not catch the whole sentence. “The ‘Times’ is a bad newspaper. If you read that, I am sorry for you.”

“The newspaper!” cried Margaritis. “Of course! Wife! wife! where is the newspaper?” he cried, going towards the next room.

“If you are interested in newspapers,” said Gaudissart, changing his attack, “we are sure to understand each other.”

“Yes; but before we say anything about that, tell me what you think of this wine.”



“Delicious!”

“Then let us finish the bottle.” The lunatic poured out a thimbleful for himself and filled Gaudissart’s glass. “Well, Monsieur, I have two puncheons left of the same wine; if you find it good we can come to terms.”

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“Exactly,” said Gaudissart. “The fathers of the Saint-Simonian faith have authorized me to send them all the commodities I—But allow me to tell you about their noble newspaper. You, who have understood the whole question of insurance so thoroughly, and who are willing to assist my work in this district—”

“Yes,” said Margaritis, “if—”

“If I take your wine; I understand perfectly. Your wine is very good, Monsieur; it puts the stomach in a glow.”

“They make champagne out of it; there is a man from Paris who comes here and makes it in Tours.”

“I have no doubt of it, Monsieur. The ‘Globe,’ of which we were speaking—”

“Yes, I’ve gone over it,” said Margaritis.

“I was sure of it!” exclaimed Gaudissart. “Monsieur, you have a fine frontal development; a pate—excuse the word—which our gentlemen call ‘horse-head.’ There’s a horse element in the head of every great man. Genius will make itself known; but sometimes it happens that great men, in spite of their gifts, remain obscure. Such was very nearly the case with Saint-Simon; also with Monsieur Vico,—a strong man just beginning to shoot up; I am proud of Vico. Now, here we enter upon the new theory and formula of humanity. Attention, if you please.”

“Attention!” said the fool, falling into position.

“Man’s spoliation of man—by which I mean bodies of men living upon the labor of other men—ought to have ceased with the coming of Christ, I say *Christ*, who was sent to proclaim the equality of man in the sight of God. But what is the fact? Equality up to our day has been an ‘ignus fatuus,’ a chimera. Saint-Simon has arisen as the complement of Christ; as the modern exponent of the doctrine of equality, or rather of its practice, for theory has served its time—”

“Is he liberated?” asked the lunatic.

“Like liberalism, it has had its day. There is a nobler future before us: a new faith, free labor, free growth, free production, individual progress, a social co-ordination in which each man shall receive the full worth of his individual labor, in which no man shall be preyed upon by other men who, without capacity of their own, compel *all* to work for the profit of *one*. From this comes the doctrine of—”

“How about servants?” demanded the lunatic.

“They will remain servants if they have no capacity beyond it.”



“Then what’s the good of your doctrine?”

“To judge of this doctrine, Monsieur, you must consider it from a higher point of view: you must take a general survey of humanity. Here we come to the theories of Ballance: do you know his Palingenesis?”

“I am fond of them,” said the fool, who thought he said “ices.”

“Good!” returned Gaudissart. “Well, then, if the palingenistic aspects of the successive transformations of the spiritualized globe have struck, stirred, roused you, then, my dear sir, the ‘Globe’ newspaper, —noble name which proclaims its mission,—the ‘Globe’ is an organ, a guide, who will explain to you with the coming of each day the conditions under which this vast political and moral change will be effected. The gentlemen who—”



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“Do they drink wine?”

“Yes, Monsieur; their houses are kept up in the highest style; I may say, in prophetic style. Superb salons, large receptions, the apex of social life—”

“Well,” remarked the lunatic, “the workmen who pull things down want wine as much as those who put things up.”

“True,” said the illustrious Gaudissart, “and all the more, Monsieur, when they pull down with one hand and build up with the other, like the apostles of the ‘Globe.’”

“They want good wine; Head of Vouvray, two puncheons, three hundred bottles, only one hundred francs,—a trifle.”

“How much is that a bottle?” said Gaudissart, calculating. “Let me see; there’s the freight and the duty,—it will come to about seven sous. Why, it wouldn’t be a bad thing: they give more for worse wines —(Good! I’ve got him!” thought Gaudissart, “he wants to sell me wine which I want; I’ll master him)—Well, Monsieur,” he continued, “those who argue usually come to an agreement. Let us be frank with each other. You have great influence in this district—”

“I should think so!” said the madman; “I am the Head of Vouvray!”

“Well, I see that you thoroughly comprehend the insurance of intellectual capital—”

“Thoroughly.”

“—and that you have measured the full importance of the ‘Globe’—”

“Twice; on foot.”

Gaudissart was listening to himself and not to the replies of his hearer.

“Therefore, in view of your circumstances and of your age, I quite understand that you have no need of insurance for yourself; but, Monsieur, you might induce others to insure, either because of their inherent qualities which need development, or for the protection of their families against a precarious future. Now, if you will subscribe to the ‘Globe,’ and give me your personal assistance in this district on behalf of insurance, especially life-annuity,—for the provinces are much attached to annuities—Well, if you will do this, then we can come to an understanding about the wine. Will you take the ‘Globe’?”

“I stand on the globe.”

“Will you advance its interests in this district?”



“I advance.”

“And?”

“And—”

“And I—but you do subscribe, don’t you, to the ‘Globe’?”

“The globe, good thing, for life,” said the lunatic.

“For life, Monsieur?—ah, I see! yes, you are right: it is full of life, vigor, intellect, science,—absolutely crammed with science, —well printed, clear type, well set up; what I call ‘good nap.’ None of your botched stuff, cotton and wool, trumpery; flimsy rubbish that rips if you look at it. It is deep; it states questions on which you can meditate at your leisure; it is the very thing to make time pass agreeably in the country.”

“That suits me,” said the lunatic.

“It only costs a trifle,—eighty francs.”

“That won’t suit me,” said the lunatic.



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“Monsieur!” cried Gaudissart, “of course you have got grandchildren? There’s the ‘Children’s Journal’; that only costs seven francs a year.”

“Very good; take my wine, and I will subscribe to the children. That suits me very well: a fine idea! intellectual product, child. That’s man living upon man, hein?”

“You’ve hit it, Monsieur,” said Gaudissart.

“I’ve hit it!”

“You consent to push me in the district?”

“In the district.”

“I have your approbation?”

“You have it.”

“Well, then, Monsieur, I take your wine at a hundred francs—”

“No, no! hundred and ten—”

“Monsieur! A hundred and ten for the company, but a hundred to me. I enable you to make a sale; you owe me a commission.”

“Charge ’em a hundred and twenty,”—“cent vingt” (“sans vin,” without wine).

“Capital pun that!”

“No, puncheons. About that wine—”

“Better and better! why, you are a wit.”

“Yes, I’m that,” said the fool. “Come out and see my vineyards.”

“Willingly, the wine is getting into my head,” said the illustrious Gaudissart, following Monsieur Margaritis, who marched him from row to row and hillock to hillock among the vines. The three ladies and Monsieur Vernier, left to themselves, went off into fits of laughter as they watched the traveller and the lunatic discussing, gesticulating, stopping short, resuming their walk, and talking vehemently.

“I wish the good-man hadn’t carried him off,” said Vernier.

Finally the pair returned, walking with the eager step of men who were in haste to finish up a matter of business.



“He has got the better of the Parisian, damn him!” cried Vernier.

And so it was. To the huge delight of the lunatic our illustrious Gaudissart sat down at a card-table and wrote an order for the delivery of the two casks of wine. Margaritis, having carefully read it over, counted out seven francs for his subscription to the “Children’s Journal” and gave them to the traveller.

“Adieu until to-morrow, Monsieur,” said Gaudissart, twisting his watch-key. “I shall have the honor to call for you to-morrow. Meantime, send the wine at once to Paris to the address I have given you, and the price will be remitted immediately.”

Gaudissart, however, was a Norman, and he had no idea of making any agreement which was not reciprocal. He therefore required his promised supporter to sign a bond (which the lunatic carefully read over) to deliver two puncheons of the wine called “Head of Vouvray,” vineyard of Margaritis.

This done, the illustrious Gaudissart departed in high feather, humming, as he skipped along,—

“The King of the South,
He burned his mouth,” *etc.*

CHAPTER V

The illustrious Gaudissart returned to the Soleil d’Or, where he naturally conversed with the landlord while waiting for dinner. Mitouflet was an old soldier, guilelessly crafty, like the peasantry of the Loire; he never laughed at a jest, but took it with the gravity of a man accustomed to the roar of cannon and to make his own jokes under arms.



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“You have some very strong-minded people here,” said Gaudissart, leaning against the door-post and lighting his cigar at Mitouflet’s pipe.

“How do you mean?” asked Mitouflet.

“I mean people who are rough-shod on political and financial ideas.”

“Whom have you seen? if I may ask without indiscretion,” said the landlord innocently, expectorating after the adroit and periodical fashion of smokers.

“A fine, energetic fellow named Margaritis.”

Mitouflet cast two glances in succession at his guest which were expressive of chilling irony.

“May be; the good-man knows a deal. He knows too much for other folks, who can’t always understand him.”

“I can believe it, for he thoroughly comprehends the abstruse principles of finance.”

“Yes,” said the innkeeper, “and for my part, I am sorry he is a lunatic.”

“A lunatic! What do you mean?”

“Well, crazy,—cracked, as people are when they are insane,” answered Mitouflet. “But he is not dangerous; his wife takes care of him. Have you been arguing with him?” added the pitiless landlord; “that must have been funny!”

“Funny!” cried Gaudissart. “Funny! Then your Monsieur Vernier has been making fun of me!”

“Did he send you there?”

“Yes.”

“Wife! wife! come here and listen. If Monsieur Vernier didn’t take it into his head to send this gentleman to talk to Margaritis!”

“What in the world did you say to each other, my dear, good Monsieur?” said the wife.

“Why, he’s crazy!”

“He sold me two casks of wine.”

“Did you buy them?”

“Yes.”



“But that is his delusion; he thinks he sells his wine, and he hasn’t any.”

“Ha!” snorted the traveller, “then I’ll go straight to Monsieur Vernier and thank him.”

And Gaudissart departed, boiling over with rage, to shake the ex-dyer, whom he found in his salon, laughing with a company of friends to whom he had already recounted the tale.

“Monsieur,” said the prince of travellers, darting a savage glance at his enemy, “you are a scoundrel and a blackguard; and under pain of being thought a turn-key,—a species of being far below a galley-slave,—you will give me satisfaction for the insult you dared to offer me in sending me to a man whom you knew to be a lunatic! Do you hear me, Monsieur Vernier, dyer?”

Such was the harangue which Gaudissart prepared as he went along, as a tragedian makes ready for his entrance on the scene.

“What!” cried Vernier, delighted at the presence of an audience, “do you think we have no right to make fun of a man who comes here, bag and baggage, and demands that we hand over our property because, forsooth, he is pleased to call us great men, painters, artists, poets,—mixing us up gratuitously with a set of fools who have neither house nor home, nor sous nor sense? Why should



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we put up with a rascal who comes here and wants us to feather his nest by subscribing to a newspaper which preaches a new religion whose first doctrine is, if you please, that we are not to inherit from our fathers and mothers? On my sacred word of honor, Pere Margaritis said things a great deal more sensible. And now, what are you complaining about? You and Margaritis seemed to understand each other. The gentlemen here present can testify that if you had talked to the whole canton you couldn't have been as well understood."

"That's all very well for you to say; but I have been insulted, Monsieur, and I demand satisfaction!"

"Very good, Monsieur! consider yourself insulted, if you like. I shall not give you satisfaction, because there is neither rhyme nor reason nor satisfaction to be found in the whole business. What an absurd fool he is, to be sure!"

At these words Gaudissart flew at the dyer to give him a slap on the face, but the listening crowd rushed between them, so that the illustrious traveller only contrived to knock off the wig of his enemy, which fell on the head of Mademoiselle Clara Vernier.

"If you are not satisfied, Monsieur," he said, "I shall be at the Soleil d'Or until to-morrow morning, and you will find me ready to show you what it means to give satisfaction. I fought in July, Monsieur."

"And you shall fight in Vouvray," answered the dyer; "and what is more, you shall stay here longer than you imagine."

Gaudissart marched off, turning over in his mind this prophetic remark, which seemed to him full of sinister portent. For the first time in his life the prince of travellers did not dine jovially. The whole town of Vouvray was put in a ferment about the "affair" between Monsieur Vernier and the apostle of Saint-Simonism. Never before had the tragic event of a duel been so much as heard of in that benign and happy valley.

"Monsieur Mitouflet, I am to fight to-morrow with Monsieur Vernier," said Gaudissart to his landlord. "I know no one here: will you be my second?"

"Willingly," said the host.

Gaudissart had scarcely finished his dinner before Madame Fontanieu and the assistant-mayor of Vouvray came to the Soleil d'Or and took Mitouflet aside. They told him it would be a painful and injurious thing to the whole canton if a violent death were the result of this affair; they represented the pitiable distress of Madame Vernier, and conjured him to find some way to arrange matters and save the credit of the district.



“I take it all upon myself,” said the sagacious landlord.

In the evening he went up to the traveller’s room carrying pens, ink, and paper.

“What have you got there?” asked Gaudissart.

“If you are going to fight to-morrow,” answered Mitouflet, “you had better make some settlement of your affairs; and perhaps you have letters to write,—we all have beings who are dear to us. Writing doesn’t kill, you know. Are you a good swordsman? Would you like to get your hand in? I have some foils.”



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“Yes, gladly.”

Mitouflet returned with foils and masks.

“Now, then, let us see what you can do.”

The pair put themselves on guard. Mitouflet, with his former prowess as grenadier of the guard, made sixty-two passes at Gaudissart, pushed him about right and left, and finally pinned him up against the wall.

“The deuce! you are strong,” said Gaudissart, out of breath.

“Monsieur Vernier is stronger than I am.”

“The devil! Damn it, I shall fight with pistols.”

“I advise you to do so; because, if you take large holster pistols and load them up to their muzzles, you can't risk anything. They are *sure* to fire wide of the mark, and both parties can retire from the field with honor. Let me manage all that. Hein! ‘sapristi,’ two brave men would be arrant fools to kill each other for a joke.”

“Are you sure the pistols will carry *wide enough*? I should be sorry to kill the man, after all,” said Gaudissart.

“Sleep in peace,” answered Mitouflet, departing.

The next morning the two adversaries, more or less pale, met beside the bridge of La Cise. The brave Vernier came near shooting a cow which was peaceably feeding by the roadside.

“Ah, you fired in the air!” cried Gaudissart.

At these words the enemies embraced.

“Monsieur,” said the traveller, “your joke was rather rough, but it was a good one for all that. I am sorry I apostrophized you: I was excited. I regard you as a man of honor.”

“Monsieur, we take twenty subscriptions to the ‘Children’s Journal,’” replied the dyer, still pale.

“That being so,” said Gaudissart, “why shouldn’t we all breakfast together? Men who fight are always the ones to come to a good understanding.”

“Monsieur Mitouflet,” said Gaudissart on his return to the inn, “of course you have got a sheriff’s officer here?”



“What for?”

“I want to send a summons to my good friend Margaritis to deliver the two casks of wine.”

“But he has not got them,” said Vernier.

“No matter for that; the affair can be arranged by the payment of an indemnity. I won't have it said that Vouvray outwitted the illustrious Gaudissart.”

Madame Margaritis, alarmed at the prospect of a suit in which the plaintiff would certainly win his case, brought thirty francs to the placable traveller, who thereupon considered himself quits with the happiest region of sunny France,—a region which is also, we must add, the most recalcitrant to new and progressive ideas.

On returning from his trip through the southern departments, the illustrious Gaudissart occupied the coupe of a diligence, where he met a young man to whom, as they journeyed between Angouleme and Paris, he deigned to explain the enigmas of life, taking him, apparently, for an infant.

As they passed Vouvray the young man exclaimed, “What a fine site!”

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“Yes, Monsieur,” said Gaudissart, “but not habitable on account of the people. You get into duels every day. Why, it is not three months since I fought one just there,” pointing to the bridge of La Cise, “with a damned dyer; but I made an end of him,—he bit the dust!”

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Finot, Andoche

Cesar Birotteau

A Bachelor’s Establishment

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life

The Government Clerks

A Start in Life

The Firm of Nucingen

Gaudissart, Felix

Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life

Cousin Pons

Cesar Birotteau

Honorine

Popinot, Anselme

Cesar Birotteau

Cousin Pons

Cousin Betty