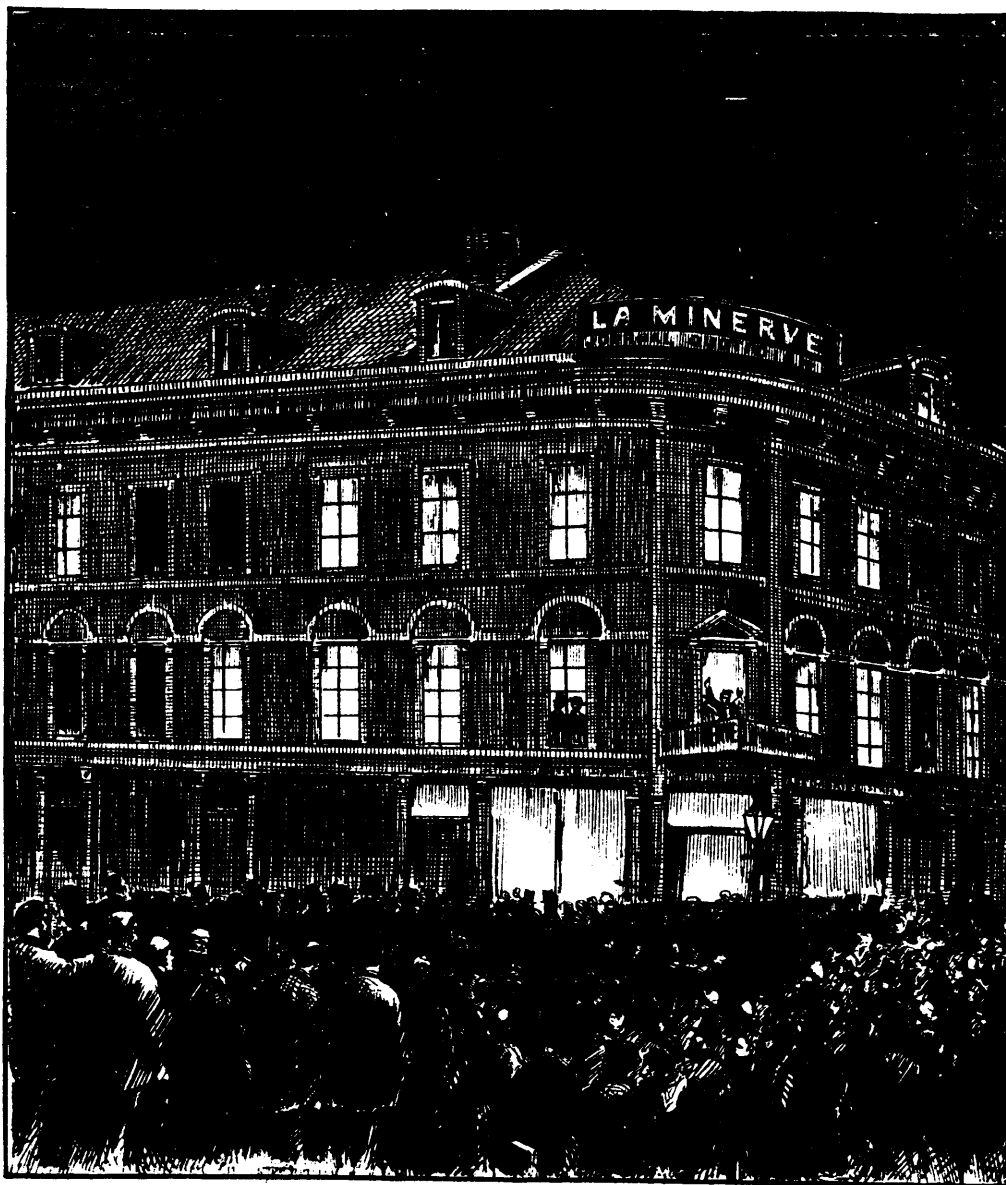


THE HABIT OF READING.

A man who has the habit of reading will not refuse a tract. There are often very good stories in tracts—in the first page and a half, that is to say—the honey-smeared lips of the cup which is sometimes full of wormwood. You get from tracts an insight into the habits of costermongers, and the incidents which diversify the life of cabmen (a very convertible class). You are put on the track of unexpected analogies, between the daguerreotype and conscience, for example, or some information about the art and mystery of rope-making goes before remarks (which may be skipped) about the bondage of bad habits. A man with the habit of reading has a Mahomedan respect for all printed paper. He finds things he is glad to know about in the scraps inserted in the binding of old books. Important facts meet him in the greasy country newspapers which lie on the tables of rural inns. He cannot take up a mouldy octavo on a stall but he learns something from the researches of a forgotten pedant. It is true that the confirmed reader may be missing something else that is worth looking at in human life, while he pores over the productions of the feeble or the mighty minds of old. On the other hand, he has so far the advantage over the mentally dissipated mechanic, that in everything he reads he finds grist for the mill that works up the solid literary vestments of old times into the marketable shoddy which is the raiment of the modern spirit. He is working at his trade, not neglecting it, unless he is one of those misers of reading who keep all they find to themselves. There is not much to be said for the habit of reading when it merely ministers to a man's contempt for people who live their lives in the sun and the wind and are careless of books.

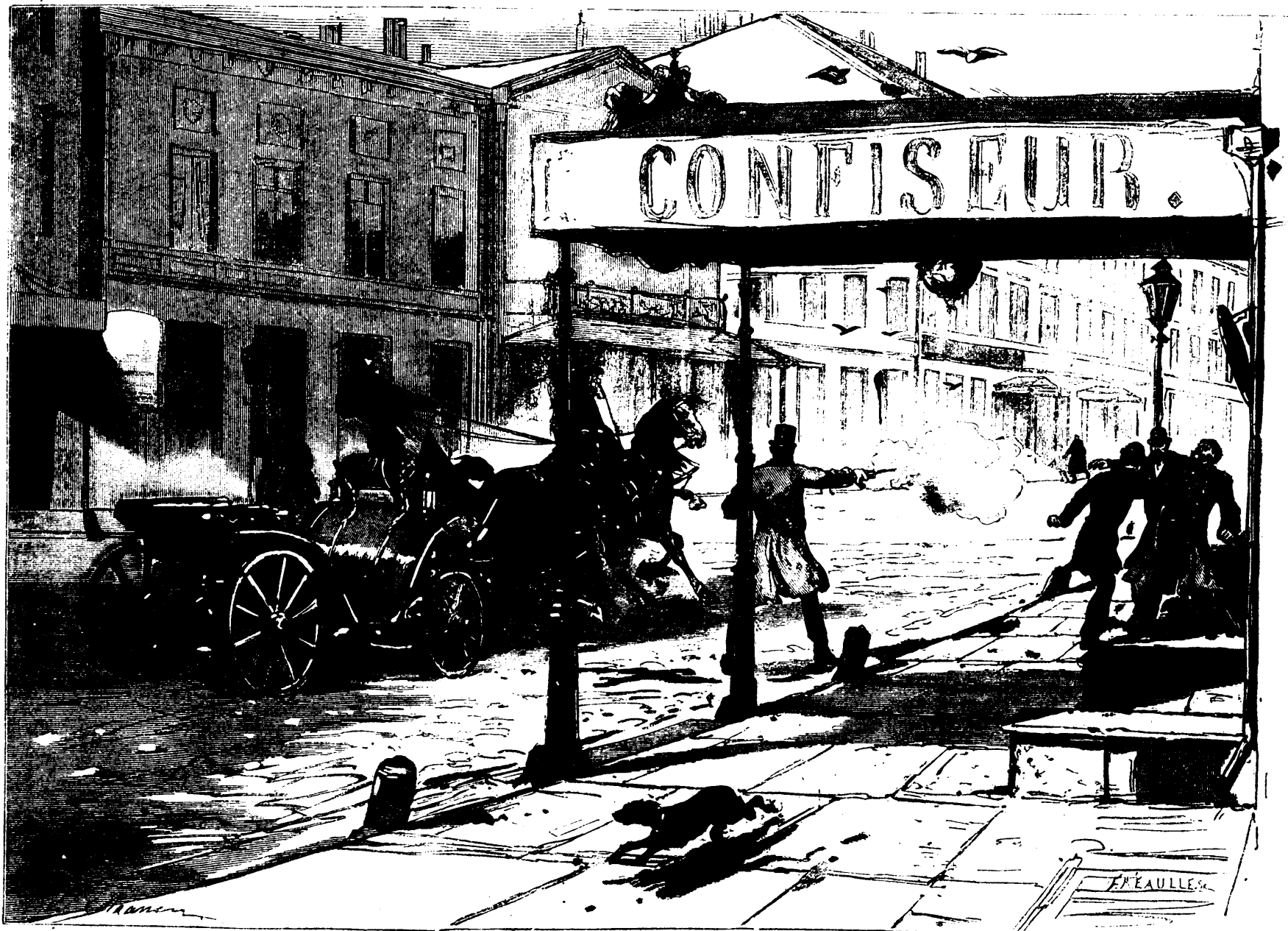
There is this to be said for the habit of reading, that it fills up waste hours as nothing else does, except, perhaps, the refreshment of smoking. A man who can find amusement in any printed trash suffers less than others from long periods of waiting at railway stations. He exhausts the advertisements, and it is strange if he does not find on the



MONTREAL.—CELEBRATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE VICTORY ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 17.

bookstall some sixpenny volume which makes him laugh or wonder. The very cheapest and most trivial literature introduces you to an undreamed of world of readers and writers, about whose intellectual tastes and habits there is no other way of getting information. Who, for example, would know the whole truth about the mental vacuity of people of fashion if he did not, in some forlorn hour and place, read the literature which they love and help to construct? Who could fathom the depths of popular politics and political economy without aid from the journals of the uninstructed? Their novels are equally strange, and equally reward research. The habit of reading is invaluable, too, when a man is waiting at a dentist's or a doctor's. No hours of waiting for a verdict can be more dreary; and he is blessed who can bury himself in old numbers of *Punch*, in the paper of yesterday, and in goody-goody books about cruelty to animals.

It is a mistake to suppose that all bookworms are people who have no interest in practical life, and no power of dealing with men and with circumstances. There never was a more confirmed bookworm than Napoleon, who for all that was, it will be allowed, "a man of that war." In all his campaigns he carried a travelling library of novels. He had an official in Paris to look after his literary *en cas*. Just as the life of a servant was devoted to keeping a roast fowl always ready to be eaten, so this literary taster had to supply Napoleon with novels eternally fresh. From Moscow, from Madrid, he kept writing for new novels. He often complained that they were really too bad. He would read a few pages in his travelling carriage, and then throw the dull volume out of the window, and turn, voracious, to a fresh packet. He projected a miniature travelling edition of all readable French literature, but the publication in the desired form proved too expensive, even for an Emperor. This taste for trashy novels was not peculiar to Napoleon. Many men of active minds, even when refined taste is combined with activity, many judges, barristers, scholars, find rest and solace in the very poorest novels. As long as there is a plot, and a narrative, and a mystery, they are content.



ASSASSINATION OF THE RUSSIAN GENERAL MENTSEFF AT ST. PETERSBURGH.