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CHAPTER VI.—THE JOURNAL.

It is an author's privilege to penetrate into the most secret thoughts of his hero. Let us avail ourselves of it to cast a curious glance at the journal of Alfred Servais.

Whence comes this unconquerable desire of confession, which compels me to confide to these pages that which must remain forever buried in the inmost recesses of my heart? An irresistible force, an unknown power, impels me to write words which I would rather die than utter. Of frightful secret! it weighs upon my soul, it crushes my heart, it appears to devour my very life. To conceal it from the world, I have sacrificed all that my heart esteemed most precious—honor—conscience—friendship. The debasing influence of crime does not destroy the sense of justice in the human heart, since, low as I have fallen, I yet feel the necessity of confessing my crime. Upon these pages, therefore, I will trace the history of that sad night; a history which, if known, would bring me to the scaffold, and forever consign my memory to infamy. I must obey this impulse which urges me to unburden my heart. Alas! there was a time when I had aught but innocent secrets to disclose, and when I could rely upon two faithful friends, ever ready to listen to them. Those friends—what have I done with them? In the silent hours of the night I seem to hear that terrible voice which resounded in the ears of the first assassin. *Cain! what hast thou done with thy brother?* Where can I fly to escape this terrible voice? To eternity? God and my friend—the avenger and the victim—await me. To some distant land? Ah, where could I fly to escape the image of Rudolphe?

My God, how could I commit such a crime? I remember a time when the tumult of passion never troubled my soul. I remember it—yes, as our first parents were wont to remember the departed joys of Paradise. That time is far, far distant, and the avenging angel forbids me to approach it. But, again, how could I forget myself so far? I loved my friends tenderly as I was loved in return, but other sentiments found place in my heart. Ambition, then envy, then a passion for gambling, then a terrible love for gold. One day—it was the most fatal day of my life—I made the acquaintance of a man, who, ere long, discovered himself to be a gambler. He manifested a lively interest in me, revealed to me the secrets of his profession, and depicted, in glowing colors, the fortune which would be made if I would listen to his advice.

I entered with fear upon this way of iniquity, and at first I was careful to risk only inconsiderable sums; but they doubled, and even trebled in a short time, and this success excited my thirst for gain, and completed my infatuation. My perfidious friend, profiting by my excitement, easily persuaded me to risk the last of my resources in that abyss of misery—the gambling house. I was apparently calm, cold and grave for my age, and while they cited me as a model of reserve and wisdom, the fire of avarice was raging in my heart, and I became a gambler in the most frightful acceptance of the term.

Those who have never indulged in playing to excess can conceive no idea of the fury, the frenzy which animate the gambler. May they ever ignore the silent anguish, the fleeting hopes, the fitful gleams of joy, the frightful dreams, the more frightful awakenings which torture the life of him whose idol is gold. The most noble sentiments are extinguished, the most tender affections are forgotten. A sudden blow could awake a heart, delivered to the passion of play. My God! you have struck this terrible blow.—Ere long, I became embarrassed to a considerable amount. My fortune, which was not large, was almost entirely dissipated. Under the appearance of gravity, I concealed from the eyes of all, the ravages of that reptile which devoured me inwardly; my operations were conducted in the most secret manner. As I was well aware that Charles Dars possessed a large fortune, I imparted to him in the most strict confidence, the history of my folly. I wished him to become my company in the fatal course I pursued—but he refused. First with his usual indifference, then, as I persisted, notwithstanding the wildness of his disposition, he repeated his refusal with a firmness of which I did not believe him capable. Meanwhile my situation became more and more embarrassing. I foresaw the moment when my ruin would be made public, and my fortune blighted forever. A single resource remained—to tempt fortune by a final effort, in which all would be gained or all lost. But I required money. Unwilling to meet with a second refusal from Charles, I determined to visit a relation who lived in the greatest affluence, a short distance from Paris, and to solicit a loan from him. My entreaties, however, could obtain

nothing from him. Thinking to triumph over his avarice, I prolonged my stay, but in vain.—Meanwhile, the decisive moment approached;—there remained but one resource for me. I left the house of my relation. It was evening, and though the sky gave tokens of an approaching storm, I hastened towards the city. My head was burning, and my hurried walk seemed to increase my bewildered condition. I reached the boarding-house of Charles Dars at the moment he was ascending the steps which led to it.

Charles, too, appeared to be irritated. I renewed my request for a loan in an impatient manner: I was determined not to leave him until he had given me the money, or an order for it upon his banker. He refused me; I persisted with a pertinacity which wounded him. He became angry, and we began to dispute, with bitter words on both sides.

My God! what evil demon took possession of me? In that fatal hour I outraged, I insulted my friend. Transported with anger, he exclaimed, 'Leave my room,' and he opened the door with a gesture which I interpreted as a threat.

I went out; I dared not trust myself to remain. I had proceeded but a short distance when I heard behind me a rapid footstep, and the hurried breathing of some person. By a gleam of lightning I recognised Charles. He glared at me, and I believed he had come to insult me. I watched his came from him, and struck that fatal blow. He fell, saying in a voice which will vibrate in my ears till my dying day, 'Alfred, I came to seek a reconciliation with you.' Those were his last words—he turned his face towards the earth. I raised his head and looked into his ghastly countenance, revealed to me by the fitful flashes of lightning, which from time to time played about the heavens. It was pale, the eyes fixed, the mouth open. Terrible vision! Charles was dead, and I was his murderer. I let the body fall, and fled—miserable coward, I could not support the sight of my victim.

Unconsciously I removed my steps, and arrived at the house of my relation. I entered it, as I had left it, unseen by any person; and yet I hastened, impelled by a feeling of shame and fear, to conceal myself in a corner of my room. I remained there for some time, in a state of inconceivable anguish, in a state bordering on madness. Two ideas presented themselves to my mind—I have murdered. Whom? Charles? After I had answered, I again asked the question, crouching in the floor in agony.

When the bright beams of the rising sun penetrated my window, and the world awoke to joy, to sorrow, to hope, or to dark despair, an absorbing desire of self-preservation took possession of me, the very blood in my veins appeared to be frozen with the cowardly terror which paralyzed every faculty of my being. My crime was almost forgotten, or rather it served to create a terrible vision of the judge, the court-room, the execution and the scaffold. Yet why should I desire to live? I, who felt such an intense longing for silence—oblivion—death. Ah! because death is not annihilation; during that night of anguish I recognised this truth, and far more powerful than the fear of human justice was the dread of that avenging Judge, who awaited me in eternity. Yes—I wished to live.

I took my seat at the breakfast table, and exchanged the usual salutations with a tranquil countenance. Ere long the fatal news arrived at the chateau; I acted my part well. Surprise, grief, despair—all were counterfeited with consummate skill, and those who surrounded me, thought only of consoling so touching a sorrow; but when towards the evening the report of Rudolphe's arrest began to be noised abroad, then, at least the frightful agitation I manifested was not feigned. My God! can one support such torments, and not cease to live. My brow, my heart must have been made of iron.

I returned to the city. I heard of the examination which my poor Rudolphe had undergone, of the torture he had suffered when they showed him the disfigured remains of the friend whom he would have defended even at the price of his own life. I heard of every circumstance which tended to prove the guilt of Rudolphe, and yet I hesitated to give myself up. To my first crime I added another, ten thousand times more odious. I had sacrificed Charles to my fury—I had immolated Rudolphe to my cowardice. They accused my friend—I was silent. They dragged him to the criminal's bench—I was silent. I deprived him of his character, of his life, perhaps, by that silence, and yet I did not speak. Rudolphe, suspecting nothing, begged me to undertake his defence. I complied with a feeling of joy, for I hoped to save his honor and his life, and to present him to the world, as my heart knew him to be, an innocent man, but Heaven did not permit me to enjoy such a consolation. Notwithstanding my efforts, my friend was condemned to hard labor.

I listened to the sentence, and remained silent. O, despicable love of life!—you were more powerful than the remorse which tortured my miserable heart, urging me to throw myself at the feet of the judges and confess my crime.

A long illness rendered me for a while almost insensible to my sorrow, yet even during the height of my delirium, I made the most superhuman exertions to conceal the secret which oppressed me. Unfortunately (as I then thought) I recovered, they gave me a little packet from Rudolphe; it contained his watch and a note, in which I read:

'Alfred, I am convinced that I have discovered the real criminal but never will I betray him. Let him live, and remember that Rudolphe has forgiven him.'

These mysterious words will never be effaced from my memory; amid the turmoil of business they are ever present to my eyes. The dying words of Charles—the glance of Rudolphe as he was conducted to prison—that voice which exclaimed 'I came to seek a reconciliation with you'—that glance, which made a final appeal to my conscience, as it seemed to say, 'Will you not save me?' Behold the instruments of the terrible punishment to which I am condemned. The worm which never dies, the fire which forever burns, I carry with me wherever I go, and yet I am still silent.

And the world honors me. I live amid the testimonials of respect, which render me more despicable in my own eyes. Every mark of esteem which they manifest towards me, makes me feel more culpable in my own eyes. My conscience reproaches me for accepting those honors, of which I am so unworthy, and all that the mistaken world accords me adds to the weight which oppresses my heart. I am very guilty, but I am very miserable also. Not to speak of enjoyments, I have not even an hour of repose. My profession, which I formerly loved, has become hateful to me. It recalls to my mind the trial of Rudolphe. The pleasures of the world no longer exist for me.

Friendship! O, what have I done with my friends, my brothers, whose incomparable affections pardoned my unexampled crimes. I dare not recall the past. The present is a torture—the future, I cannot think of it. What will it be? Will I live? Will I die in this state of mind? Will I at last summon sufficient courage to deliver myself to the law? Never! This position—I hate it—it degrades me—and yet I could not live without the public esteem. Strange inconsistency of the human mind. I despise myself, and I cannot bear that the world should despise me. I live alone, and often impose upon myself some mortification in my table, very trifling when I think of the sufferings of Rudolphe. But what if I would practice all the austerities of the early hermits? I would effect nothing. Naught but an atonement, a public atonement of my crime will serve to expiate it.

The riches with which Heaven has endowed me, I give in charity, and I experience at the same time a sentiment of shame and pleasure when some unhappy mendicant calls down a blessing upon me. I, who am so unworthy of being blessed. Ah, if they knew the crimes that sully the hand which assisted them, would they not repulse it with horror? Some of these trifling charities betrayed by the grateful recipients, have been the cause of considerable remark. One benevolent society wished to make me its president, another its treasurer. With what painful confusion I listened to such evidences of respect, I blushed, I refused. Then they extolled my modesty, and public opinion, more and more mistaken, will overwhelm me with honor.

The mother of Rudolphe has written to me: she begs me to visit her at her cottage in the country to which she has retired. I am unwilling to go, but I dare not refuse her pressing invitation. I obey.

Oh! what a day I have passed. Upon arriving at the humble cottage of Madame Dellaunoy, I was told that she had been suffering for some time from a severe illness, and it was feared that she could not survive many weeks.—They went to inform her of my arrival, and in the meanwhile I waited in a gloomy little garden, where some sunflowers lifted their heads among the rows of cabbages and sorrel. The ruinous condition of this old establishment, the neglected garden, the melancholy aspect of every thing that surrounded me, added a more sombre tint to the habitual sadness of my thoughts. Rudolphe was the hope of his family. The profits of his labor would have soothed the declining years of his aged mother, would have assured for his sister a happy fortune. Now his mother is lonely and poor, his sister is far away from home. Among strange faces she toils to gain that daily bread, which no doubt is moistened with burning tears. This family was happy and honored, and I have covered it with infamy.

Such were my thoughts when they came to conduct me to the bedside of Rudolphe's mother.

With trembling limbs I obeyed the summons.

The traces of my agitation were visible upon my countenance, and, as usual, they were interpreted in my favor. The poor mother extended to me her emaciated hand, and said in a voice so faint, that it appeared to me like a whisper—'My good Alfred—how delighted I am to behold you—how deeply I am affected by this proof of your faithful friendship. I could not reply; I lowered my head upon her hand, which feebly endeavored to press my own.—I wished to see you,' she continued, 'to speak to you of our Rudolphe. You loved him so dearly—you love him still I am sure—you, his defender, his friend—you, to whom he gave the tender name of brother—no you have not forgotten him?—'Never,' I cried. 'Ah,' she proceeded, with awakening energy—'Do not forget him—he is so unhappy, he feels so keenly the least evidence of neglect. I beg you to visit me once more, that I may recommend to you my innocent my beloved son. You see that my end is fast approaching; the disgrace of my poor child has sunk too deeply into my heart, but ere my spirit bids adieu to this world, I wish to confide him to a faithful friend—to you, my good Alfred.' She ceased from exhaustion, cast a sorrowful and loving glance towards the crucifix, and after a moment of silence, resumed: 'You will protect him—will you not? You are loved, honored and esteemed—who knows? perhaps you could obtain his release. O, Alfred, you will at least try, will you not?' I could not answer; my voice was stifled by remorse and sorrow. She raised herself up, and seizing my hand, exclaimed, 'You believe him innocent, do you not?'—'Yes, I swear it.' 'Ah, may God bless you for those words. Yes, he is innocent. What he murdered his friend—his Charles! He, so good, so affectionate. Though all the courts of the earth would be united against him, I would still cry out that he is innocent. None but the mother knows her child; I know Rudolphe, and I know that he suffers for the guilt of another.—Ah, God is just, and one day the true culprit will be discovered, and will be overwhelmed with shame. Already, without doubt, his remorse is his own punishment.' And your revenge, said I, in a low tone. 'I seek no revenge,' said Madame Dellaunoy, 'when about to close our eyes forever upon the vanities of this world, we view such things in a far different light. I have made a sacrifice to God in forgiving him whose silence has doomed my only son to drag out a miserable existence, and I pray God to excite his heart to repentance.' At the last word 'repentance,' I felt as if my heart would break with its heavy load of guilt. A voice in the inmost depths of my heart cried out, 'Assure the happiness of this dying mother; tell her that her son shall be set at liberty.' And yet I was silent.

Madame Dellaunoy appeared to be quite exhausted; our conversation had proved too much for her. Her eyes became dim and wandering; her trembling hand sought mine, and I dared to press my lips upon it, and to moisten it with the tears I could no longer repress. 'You weep,' said she, 'you weep for Rudolphe. O, my dear Alfred, you will not abandon him; you will assist him, will you not?' 'I will try,' I replied in a low voice. Madame Dellaunoy then took a letter from under her pillow, and gave it to me. I opened it, and recognized that well known writing, which so often had caused me the purest joy. Now, alas! it was dim with a mother's bitter tears. I read the following lines:

'Beloved Mother,—
You render yourself too unhappy, and your grief adds a new poignancy to that which I already suffer. Be assured, however, that I am well situated here. I am treated with more lenity than the other prisoners, and during the day I am delivered from the chains, and from the society of the criminal with whom I am coupled; it is only the night that I am placed in the midst of my companions. . . . O! long and weary nights! . . . But the sweet remembrance of your affection, beloved mother, sustains me, and the thought that God knows my innocence, comes to strengthen my sinking spirits. During my sleepless nights and my days of anguish, I learned to know and to love that all-powerful Being who extends His paternal arms towards His weary and unhappy children.—Though my fate appears frightful to human eyes, there are moments when I bless my heavy chains in thinking that while suffering under their weight I learned to love and serve my God. Cherished mother, this life and its miseries ere long will pass away. Ere many years, perhaps ere many months, we shall be for ever re-united, and before the tribunal of the God of justice you will see that your son is not an assessor; but your heart has always known mine, dearest mother.—Let us pray for him, who, more miserable than I, has murdered Charles, and destroyed the reputation of Rudolphe. . . . Farewell, my cherished mother. I kiss your venerated

hands, and implore you to unite with me in saying 'Thy will, O God, be done.' May our sweet Mother, in Heaven, watch and guard you forever.

RUDOLPHE.

The virtue of Rudolphe overpowered me. At last I raised my eyes towards the mother of my friend. She had her crucifix in her hand;—her glance was directed to it, and her lips moved in prayer. I perceived the tokens of her approaching agony. She turned her eyes towards me, and with a mighty effort said, in a low and inarticulate voice, 'You have read it? Alfred, you will go to see him. You will carry to my child the farewell and blessing of a dying mother. But first, dearest friend of my poor child, receive mine. The blessing of your brother's early friend, dear Alfred! At these terrible words, I arose and fell upon my knees by the bedside, covering my face with my trembling hands. The dying woman extended her hand, and murmured; 'I wish to bless you, to embrace you, to expire in your arms. You will recall to my mind my precious child.' This was too much. I instinctively recoiled; I repulsed those trembling hands, and exclaimed—'Do not bless me!—Curse me rather; I—I murdered Charles—I consigned your son to prison! Did she understand me? I believe so, for her dying countenance assumed an expression of intense horror; her hands fell powerless, she endeavored to speak, but no sound issued from those pale lips. . . . I saw no more. A terror seized me, and I fell upon the floor.

How long I remained there, I know not. I was aroused by the servants, who said: 'Alas, the poor lady is dead! God has at last released her from her misery. May He receive her pure spirit in Paradise.'

I caused a Requiem Mass to be celebrated this morning for Madame Dellaunoy. It appeared to me that this sacrifice, so prized by Christians, would appease her anger and do honor to her memory. For the first time during many years, I prayed upon my knees alone, in the vast cathedral. I prayed to God—I confessed my crime to Him; from Him I solicited light, strength, generosity; for the first time in six years—I dared to hope—what? I know not. Pardon—peace, no doubt; but I can only obtain those gifts by repairing the frightful misery I have caused. If my sentiments remain the same, it appears to me that I may obtain strength to do it.

Death is a sleep; but there is an awakening also. What an awakening for the sinner! Face to face with his God. An eternity of punishment! An eternity of horrors!

Those whose faith is sincere, hope also. To-day I read with deep emotion the history of the repentant thief, who had the happiness of receiving the sweet assurance of his pardon. 'To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.' His crimes forgiven. Happy soul! but did he murder his brother? No matter, I must examine this religion which has power to console the dying moments of an abandoned criminal. I pass some hours every day in praying, that is to say, in crying to God, 'I am a wretch; have mercy on me.' I read those books which can instruct me in the Catholic religion; the further I read, the clearer I perceive that its origin is divine.—Yes, God has given to the ministers of that Church the power to loosen and to bind, to pardon and to forgive. There is then a minister of God upon this earth who, in His holy name, could absolve me from my crimes. But the dreadful necessity of confession? Well, if I were reconciled with God, would I not find in my recovered innocence a strength before unknown, to suffer and to die? When a crime has been committed, what does God require—what does His Church require—what, but an humble confession of sin. Cain refused to acknowledge his guilt, and he became a wanderer upon the face of the earth. The high priest, in the name of the twelve tribes, confessed the preparations of his people, and after offering a sacrifice of expiation, they entered purified and forgiven into that Holy of Holies.

The new law imposes upon every man the confession of his faults to another man, who is bound to the most inviolable secrecy. There is the divine remedy applied to the woes of humanity. It is the last hope which remains to unhappy sinners. 'Thou shalt not kill'—'Thou shalt not bear false witness,' says the law of God but for those who have violated the Divine command, a blessed hope remains. 'Whose sins you forgive shall be forgiven; whose sins you shall retain shall be retained.' Those sacred words I adore; they elevate my heart; they cast a gleam of light among the sombre shades which my double crime has cast upon my soul.—'Glory be to God.'

CHAPTER VII.—TOULON.

The sombre shades of evening fell around. In one of the most retired chapels of the church of —, a priest was engaged in bearing the confessions of some poor women who, after the