

## BOOK SEVENTH.--PATRON MINETTE

### CHAPTER I--MINES AND MINERS

Human societies all have what is called in theatrical parlance, a third lower floor. The social soil is everywhere undermined, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. These works are superposed one upon the other. There are superior mines and inferior mines. There is a top and a bottom in this obscure sub-soil, which sometimes gives way beneath civilization, and which our indifference and heedlessness trample under foot. The Encyclopedia, in the last century, was a mine that was almost open to the sky. The shades, those sombre hatchers of primitive Christianity, only awaited an opportunity to bring about an explosion under the Caesars and to inundate the human race with light. For in the sacred shadows there lies latent light. Volcanoes are full of a shadow that is capable of flashing forth. Every form begins by being night. The catacombs, in which the first mass was said, were not alone the cellar of Rome, they were the vaults of the world.

Beneath the social construction, that complicated marvel of a structure, there are excavations of all sorts. There is the religious mine, the philosophical mine, the economic mine, the revolutionary mine. Such and such a pick-axe with the idea, such a pick with ciphers. Such another

with wrath. People hail and answer each other from one catacomb to another. Utopias travel about underground, in the pipes. There they branch out in every direction. They sometimes meet, and fraternize there. Jean-Jacques lends his pick to Diogenes, who lends him his lantern. Sometimes they enter into combat there. Calvin seizes Socinius by the hair. But nothing arrests nor interrupts the tension of all these energies toward the goal, and the vast, simultaneous activity, which goes and comes, mounts, descends, and mounts again in these obscurities, and which immense unknown swarming slowly transforms the top and the bottom and the inside and the outside. Society hardly even suspects this digging which leaves its surface intact and changes its bowels. There are as many different subterranean stages as there are varying works, as there are extractions. What emerges from these deep excavations? The future.

The deeper one goes, the more mysterious are the toilers. The work is good, up to a degree which the social philosophies are able to recognize; beyond that degree it is doubtful and mixed; lower down, it becomes terrible. At a certain depth, the excavations are no longer penetrable by the spirit of civilization, the limit breathable by man has been passed; a beginning of monsters is possible.

The descending scale is a strange one; and each one of the rungs of this ladder corresponds to a stage where philosophy can find foothold, and where one encounters one of these workmen, sometimes divine, sometimes misshapen. Below John Huss, there is Luther; below Luther, there is

Descartes; below Descartes, there is Voltaire; below Voltaire, there is Condorcet; below Condorcet, there is Robespierre; below Robespierre, there is Marat; below Marat there is Babeuf. And so it goes on. Lower down, confusedly, at the limit which separates the indistinct from the invisible, one perceives other gloomy men, who perhaps do not exist as yet. The men of yesterday are spectres; those of to-morrow are forms. The eye of the spirit distinguishes them but obscurely. The embryonic work of the future is one of the visions of philosophy.

A world in limbo, in the state of foetus, what an unheard-of spectre!

Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, are there also, in lateral galleries.

Surely, although a divine and invisible chain unknown to themselves, binds together all these subterranean pioneers who, almost always, think themselves isolated, and who are not so, their works vary greatly, and the light of some contrasts with the blaze of others. The first are paradisiacal, the last are tragic. Nevertheless, whatever may be the contrast, all these toilers, from the highest to the most nocturnal, from the wisest to the most foolish, possess one likeness, and this is it: disinterestedness. Marat forgets himself like Jesus. They throw themselves on one side, they omit themselves, they think not of themselves. They have a glance, and that glance seeks the absolute. The first has the whole heavens in his eyes; the last, enigmatical though he may be, has still, beneath his eyelids, the pale beam of the infinite. Venerate the man, whoever he may be, who has this sign--the starry eye.

The shadowy eye is the other sign.

With it, evil commences. Reflect and tremble in the presence of any one who has no glance at all. The social order has its black miners.

There is a point where depth is tantamount to burial, and where light becomes extinct.

Below all these mines which we have just mentioned, below all these galleries, below this whole immense, subterranean, venous system of progress and utopia, much further on in the earth, much lower than Marat, lower than Babeuf, lower, much lower, and without any connection with the upper levels, there lies the last mine. A formidable spot. This is what we have designated as the le troisieme dessous. It is the grave of shadows. It is the cellar of the blind. Inferi.

This communicates with the abyss.

## CHAPTER II--THE LOWEST DEPTHS

There disinterestedness vanishes. The demon is vaguely outlined; each one is for himself. The I in the eyes howls, seeks, fumbles, and gnaws. The social Ugolino is in this gulf.

The wild spectres who roam in this grave, almost beasts, almost phantoms, are not occupied with universal progress; they are ignorant both of the idea and of the word; they take no thought for anything but the satisfaction of their individual desires. They are almost unconscious, and there exists within them a sort of terrible obliteration. They have two mothers, both step-mothers, ignorance and misery. They have a guide, necessity; and for all forms of satisfaction, appetite. They are brutally voracious, that is to say, ferocious, not after the fashion of the tyrant, but after the fashion of the tiger. From suffering these spectres pass to crime; fatal affiliation, dizzy creation, logic of darkness. That which crawls in the social third lower level is no longer complaint stifled by the absolute; it is the protest of matter. Man there becomes a dragon. To be hungry, to be thirsty--that is the point of departure; to be Satan--that is the point reached. From that vault Lacenaire emerges.

We have just seen, in Book Fourth, one of the compartments of the upper mine, of the great political, revolutionary, and philosophical excavation. There, as we have just said, all is pure, noble, dignified, honest. There, assuredly, one might be misled; but error is worthy of

eneration there, so thoroughly does it imply heroism. The work there effected, taken as a whole has a name: Progress.

The moment has now come when we must take a look at other depths, hideous depths. There exists beneath society, we insist upon this point, and there will exist, until that day when ignorance shall be dissipated, the great cavern of evil.

This cavern is below all, and is the foe of all. It is hatred, without exception. This cavern knows no philosophers; its dagger has never cut a pen. Its blackness has no connection with the sublime blackness of the inkstand. Never have the fingers of night which contract beneath this stifling ceiling, turned the leaves of a book nor unfolded a newspaper. Babeuf is a speculator to Cartouche; Marat is an aristocrat to Schinderhannes. This cavern has for its object the destruction of everything.

Of everything. Including the upper superior mines, which it execrates. It not only undermines, in its hideous swarming, the actual social order; it undermines philosophy, it undermines human thought, it undermines civilization, it undermines revolution, it undermines progress. Its name is simply theft, prostitution, murder, assassination. It is darkness, and it desires chaos. Its vault is formed of ignorance.

All the others, those above it, have but one object--to suppress it. It is to this point that philosophy and progress tend, with all their

organs simultaneously, by their amelioration of the real, as well as by their contemplation of the absolute. Destroy the cavern Ignorance and you destroy the lair Crime.

Let us condense, in a few words, a part of what we have just written. The only social peril is darkness.

Humanity is identity. All men are made of the same clay. There is no difference, here below, at least, in predestination. The same shadow in front, the same flesh in the present, the same ashes afterwards. But ignorance, mingled with the human paste, blackens it. This incurable blackness takes possession of the interior of a man and is there converted into evil.

### CHAPTER III--BABET, GUEULEMER, CLAQUESOUS, AND MONTPARNASSE

A quartette of ruffians, Claquesous, Gueulemer, Babet, and Montparnasse governed the third lower floor of Paris, from 1830 to 1835.

Gueulemer was a Hercules of no defined position. For his lair he had the sewer of the Arche-Marion. He was six feet high, his pectoral muscles were of marble, his biceps of brass, his breath was that of a cavern, his torso that of a colossus, his head that of a bird. One thought one beheld the Farnese Hercules clad in duck trousers and a cotton velvet waistcoat. Gueulemer, built after this sculptural fashion, might have subdued monsters; he had found it more expeditious to be one. A low brow, large temples, less than forty years of age, but with crow's-feet, harsh, short hair, cheeks like a brush, a beard like that of a wild boar; the reader can see the man before him. His muscles called for work, his stupidity would have none of it. He was a great, idle force. He was an assassin through coolness. He was thought to be a creole. He had, probably, somewhat to do with Marshal Brune, having been a porter at Avignon in 1815. After this stage, he had turned ruffian.

The diaphaneity of Babet contrasted with the grossness of Gueulemer. Babet was thin and learned. He was transparent but impenetrable. Daylight was visible through his bones, but nothing through his eyes. He declared that he was a chemist. He had been a jack of all trades. He had played in vaudeville at Saint-Mihiel. He was a man of purpose, a fine talker, who underlined his smiles and accentuated his gestures. His

occupation consisted in selling, in the open air, plaster busts and portraits of "the head of the State." In addition to this, he extracted teeth. He had exhibited phenomena at fairs, and he had owned a booth with a trumpet and this poster: "Babet, Dental Artist, Member of the Academies, makes physical experiments on metals and metalloids, extracts teeth, undertakes stumps abandoned by his brother practitioners. Price: one tooth, one franc, fifty centimes; two teeth, two francs; three teeth, two francs, fifty. Take advantage of this opportunity." This Take advantage of this opportunity meant: Have as many teeth extracted as possible. He had been married and had had children. He did not know what had become of his wife and children. He had lost them as one loses his handkerchief. Babet read the papers, a striking exception in the world to which he belonged. One day, at the period when he had his family with him in his booth on wheels, he had read in the Messenger, that a woman had just given birth to a child, who was doing well, and had a calf's muzzle, and he exclaimed: "There's a fortune! my wife has not the wit to present me with a child like that!"

Later on he had abandoned everything, in order to "undertake Paris." This was his expression.

Who was Claquesous? He was night. He waited until the sky was daubed with black, before he showed himself. At nightfall he emerged from the hole whither he returned before daylight. Where was this hole? No one knew. He only addressed his accomplices in the most absolute darkness, and with his back turned to them. Was his name Claquesous? Certainly

not. If a candle was brought, he put on a mask. He was a ventriloquist. Babet said: "Claquesous is a nocturne for two voices." Claquesous was vague, terrible, and a roamer. No one was sure whether he had a name, Claquesous being a sobriquet; none was sure that he had a voice, as his stomach spoke more frequently than his voice; no one was sure that he had a face, as he was never seen without his mask. He disappeared as though he had vanished into thin air; when he appeared, it was as though he sprang from the earth.

A lugubrious being was Montparnasse. Montparnasse was a child; less than twenty years of age, with a handsome face, lips like cherries, charming black hair, the brilliant light of springtime in his eyes; he had all vices and aspired to all crimes.

The digestion of evil aroused in him an appetite for worse. It was the street boy turned pickpocket, and a pickpocket turned garroter. He was genteel, effeminate, graceful, robust, sluggish, ferocious. The rim of his hat was curled up on the left side, in order to make room for a tuft of hair, after the style of 1829. He lived by robbery with violence.

His coat was of the best cut, but threadbare. Montparnasse was a fashion-plate in misery and given to the commission of murders. The cause of all this youth's crimes was the desire to be well-dressed. The first grisette who had said to him: "You are handsome!" had cast the stain of darkness into his heart, and had made a Cain of this Abel. Finding that he was handsome, he desired to be elegant: now, the height of elegance is idleness; idleness in a poor man means crime. Few

prowlers were so dreaded as Montparnasse. At eighteen, he had already numerous corpses in his past. More than one passer-by lay with outstretched arms in the presence of this wretch, with his face in a pool of blood. Curled, pomaded, with laced waist, the hips of a woman, the bust of a Prussian officer, the murmur of admiration from the boulevard wenches surrounding him, his cravat knowingly tied, a bludgeon in his pocket, a flower in his buttonhole; such was this dandy of the sepulchre.

## CHAPTER IV--COMPOSITION OF THE TROUPE

These four ruffians formed a sort of Proteus, winding like a serpent among the police, and striving to escape Vidocq's indiscreet glances "under divers forms, tree, flame, fountain," lending each other their names and their traps, hiding in their own shadows, boxes with secret compartments and refuges for each other, stripping off their personalities, as one removes his false nose at a masked ball, sometimes simplifying matters to the point of consisting of but one individual, sometimes multiplying themselves to such a point that Coco-Latour himself took them for a whole throng.

These four men were not four men; they were a sort of mysterious robber with four heads, operating on a grand scale on Paris; they were that monstrous polyp of evil, which inhabits the crypt of society.

Thanks to their ramifications, and to the network underlying their relations, Babet, Gueulemer, Claquesous, and Montparnasse were charged with the general enterprise of the ambushes of the department of the Seine. The inventors of ideas of that nature, men with nocturnal imaginations, applied to them to have their ideas executed. They furnished the canvas to the four rascals, and the latter undertook the preparation of the scenery. They labored at the stage setting. They were always in a condition to lend a force proportioned and suitable to all crimes which demanded a lift of the shoulder, and which were sufficiently lucrative. When a crime was in quest of arms, they

under-let their accomplices. They kept a troupe of actors of the shadows at the disposition of all underground tragedies.

They were in the habit of assembling at nightfall, the hour when they woke up, on the plains which adjoin the Salpetriere. There they held their conferences. They had twelve black hours before them; they regulated their employment accordingly.

Patron-Minette,--such was the name which was bestowed in the subterranean circulation on the association of these four men. In the fantastic, ancient, popular parlance, which is vanishing day by day, Patron-Minette signifies the morning, the same as *entre chien et loup*--between dog and wolf--signifies the evening. This appellation, Patron-Minette, was probably derived from the hour at which their work ended, the dawn being the vanishing moment for phantoms and for the separation of ruffians. These four men were known under this title. When the President of the Assizes visited Lacenaire in his prison, and questioned him concerning a misdeed which Lacenaire denied, "Who did it?" demanded the President. Lacenaire made this response, enigmatical so far as the magistrate was concerned, but clear to the police: "Perhaps it was Patron-Minette."

A piece can sometimes be divined on the enunciation of the personages; in the same manner a band can almost be judged from the list of ruffians composing it. Here are the appellations to which the principal members of Patron-Minette answered,--for the names have survived in special

memoirs.

Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille.

Brujon. [There was a Brujon dynasty; we cannot refrain from interpolating this word.]

Boulatruelle, the road-mender already introduced.

Laveuve.

Finistere.

Homere-Hogu, a negro.

Mardisoir. (Tuesday evening.)

Depeche. (Make haste.)

Fauntleroy, alias Bouquetiere (the Flower Girl).

Glorieux, a discharged convict.

Barre-carrosse (Stop-carriage), called Monsieur Dupont.

L'Esplanade-du-Sud.

Poussagrive.

Carmagnolet.

Kruideniers, called Bizarro.

Mangedentelle. (Lace-eater.)

Les-pieds-en-l'Air. (Feet in the air.)

Demi-Liard, called Deux-Milliards.

Etc., etc.

We pass over some, and not the worst of them. These names have faces attached. They do not express merely beings, but species. Each one of these names corresponds to a variety of those misshapen fungi from the under side of civilization.

Those beings, who were not very lavish with their countenances, were not among the men whom one sees passing along the streets. Fatigued by the wild nights which they passed, they went off by day to sleep, sometimes in the lime-kilns, sometimes in the abandoned quarries of Montmatre or Montrouge, sometimes in the sewers. They ran to earth.

What became of these men? They still exist. They have always existed. Horace speaks of them: *Ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolae, mendici, mimae*; and so long as society remains what it is, they will remain what they are. Beneath the obscure roof of their cavern, they are continually born again from the social ooze. They return, spectres, but always identical; only, they no longer bear the same names and they are no longer in the same skins. The individuals extirpated, the tribe subsists.

They always have the same faculties. From the vagrant to the tramp, the race is maintained in its purity. They divine purses in pockets, they scent out watches in fobs. Gold and silver possess an odor for them. There exist ingenuous bourgeois, of whom it might be said, that they have a "stealable" air. These men patiently pursue these bourgeois. They experience the quivers of a spider at the passage of a stranger or of a man from the country.

These men are terrible, when one encounters them, or catches a glimpse of them, towards midnight, on a deserted boulevard. They do not seem to be men but forms composed of living mists; one would say that they habitually constitute one mass with the shadows, that they are in no wise distinct from them, that they possess no other soul than the darkness, and that it is only momentarily and for the purpose of living for a few minutes a monstrous life, that they have separated from the night.

What is necessary to cause these spectres to vanish? Light. Light in floods. Not a single bat can resist the dawn. Light up society from below.