

**EDMOND AND JULES DE
GONCOURT; WITH LETTERS,
AND LEAVES FROM THEIR
JOURNALS, VOL. II**

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Edmond and Jules De Goncourt; with letters, and leaves from their journals, Vol. II by M. A. Belloc & M. Shedlock

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M. A. BELLOC & M. SHEDLOCK

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EDMOND AND JULES
DE GONCOURT

OF CALIFORNIA
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CHAPTER XIV

An afternoon with the Desbarolles—Palmistry—The publication of *Renee Mauperin*—Renan, Gautier, Sainte-Beuve at a Magny Dinner—1865. The publication of *Germinie Lavertus*—Letters from Sainte-Beuve and Victor Hugo—Letters to Emile Zola and Claretie.

“*January 3.*—M. Edward Fournier’s little drawing-room. A man with long grey hair, and a beautiful face, in spite of its tired expression. His glance is bright, penetrating, and caressing; his head that of an artist and physician. Beside him, with her elbow on the table, sits a woman of uncertain age with fine gipsy features. Her hair is gathered up in a scarlet net; her gown is covered with a cabalistic design, and studded with jewels which resemble amulets; the whole costume suggests an element of necromancy in the midst of the artist world. It is easy to recognise in this strange couple the chiro-mantic Desbarolles.

“They both take your hand, pull it about, and turn it over; they look right into your eyes. You

have a peculiar sensation, a strange feeling that you are entering the region of the unknown. However sceptical you may feel about fortune-telling, you are seized with a sort of apprehension when you stand, as it were, on the threshold of your future.

“And then the *mise en scène* is good; there is nothing theatrical about it, simply a man in a black coat, the only accessories being two large magnifying glasses, which both husband and wife hold in their hands; at certain moments these glasses seem to throw out fantastic lights, such as might have been seen in those cut by Hoffmann's opticians.

“Desbarolles began to tell me what he read in my hand. He spoke gently and slowly; the little short sentences seemed to force their meaning upon you in little mental taps. He consulted all the time with his wife, who suggested things here and there. There was a word of *Saturn*, and of *Mercury*—certain chiromantic terms. Desbarolles declared that I am musical, but quickly made up for his mistake, by telling me that I possess the temperament of a nervous woman, subject to frequent neuralgia, but full of feeling for form, and with a fine line of life.

“Finally he discovered a hump at the bottom of the first finger, and from this concluded that I am animated by a keen desire for fame, upon which I could not restrain myself from saying, ‘That is true.’ . . .

“Often an impression received in childhood will tinge and mould the character for the whole of a lifetime. They tell me that Merimée's chief

characteristic is a fear of appearing ridiculous, and that it was brought about in the following manner: He heard his parents laughing over the tearful face he had displayed whilst being scolded; he made up his mind that he would never be laughed at again, and kept his word, at the cost of drying up the emotional side of his nature."

To Mademoiselle Juliette Marcille.

"PARIS, *Wednesday, January 27, 1864.*

"Mademoiselle, or rather, my dear Mademoiselle (for after your kindness to me I may surely call you my dear Mademoiselle), imagine my surprise, on arriving home last evening, to find a little parcel containing two lovely pen-wipers, one for my brother and the other for me. Ah! Mademoiselle, what joy, what gratitude! So I shall at last be able to wipe my pens. I may tell you, quite between ourselves, that till your present arrived I used to be reduced to rubbing them on my pocket-handkerchief!

"I am so delighted with your gift, that I exhibit it to all my friends, and it is so clean and pretty that I feel quite afraid to use it.

"I beg of you, dear little lady, to accept my sincere thanks for this delicate attention, which touched my heart, and made me your friend for ever! I also beg of you to recall me to the kind remembrances of your sisters, your papa and mamma, also of your cousins, who are reported to