

**AN ATTIC PHILOSOPHER IN  
PARIS. OR, A PEEP AT THE  
WORLD FROM A GARRET: BEING  
THE JOURNAL OF A HAPPY MAN**

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An Attic Philosopher in Paris. Or, a Peep at the World from a Garret: Being the Journal of a Happy Man by Emile Souvestre

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**EMILE SOUVESTRE**

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OR,  
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THE JOURNAL OF A HAPPY MAN.

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
EMILE SOUVESTRE.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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WE know a man who, in the midst of the fever of restlessness and of ambition which racks society in our times, continues to fill his humble part in the world without a murmur, and who still preserves, so to speak, the taste for poverty. With no other fortune than a small clerkship, which enables him to live within the narrow limits which separate competence from want, our philosopher looks from the height of his attic upon society as upon a sea, of which he neither covets the riches nor fears the wrecks. Being too insignificant to excite the envy of any one, he sleeps peacefully, wrapped in his obscurity.

Not that he retreats into egotism, as a tortoise into its shell! He is the man of whom Terence says, that "nothing human seems foreign to him!" All external objects and incidents are reflected in his mind as in a camera-obscura, which presents their images in a picture. He "looks at society as it is, in itself," with the patient curiousness which belongs to recluses; and

he writes a monthly journal of what he has seen or thought. It is the "Calendar of his Impressions," as he is wont to call it.

We have been allowed to look over it, and have extracted some pages which may make the reader acquainted with the commonplace adventures of an unknown thinker in those twelve hostleries of Time—called Months.

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AN

## ATTIC PHILOSOPHER IN PARIS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE ATTIC NEW-YEAR'S GIFTS.

*January 1st.*—THE day of the month came into my mind as soon as I awoke. Another year is separated from the chain of ages, and drops into the gulf of the past! The crowd hasten to welcome her young sister. But while all looks are turned towards the future, mine revert to the past. Every one smiles upon the new queen; but, in spite of myself, I think of her whom time has just wrapped in her winding-sheet. The past year!—at least I know what she was, and what she has given me: whilst this one comes surrounded by all the forebodings of the unknown. What does she hide in the clouds which mantle her? Is it the storm or the sunshine? Just now it rains, and I feel my mind as gloomy as the sky. I have a holiday to-day; but what can one do with a rainy day? I walk up and down my attic out of temper, and I determine to light my fire.

Unfortunately the matches are bad, the chimney smokes, the wood goes out! I throw down my bellows in disgust, and sink into my old arm-chair.

In truth, why should I rejoice to see the birth of a new year? All those who are already in the streets, with their holiday looks and smiling faces—do they understand what

makes them so gay? Do they even know what is the meaning of this holiday, or from whence comes the custom of New-year's gifts?

Here my mind pauses to prove to itself its superiority over that of the vulgar. I make a parenthesis in my ill-temper in favour of my vanity, and I bring together all the evidence which my knowledge can produce.

(The old Romans divided the year into ten months only; it was Numa Pompilius who added January and February. The former took its name from Janus, to whom it was dedicated. As it opened the New-year, they surrounded its commencement with good omens, and thence came the custom of visits between neighbours, of wishing happiness, and of *New-year's gifts*. The presents given by the Romans were symbolic. They consisted of dried figs, dates, honey-comb, as emblems of "the sweetness of the auspices under which the year should begin its course," and a small piece of money called *stips*, which foreboded riches.)

Here I close the parenthesis, and return to my ill-humour. The little *speech*,\* I have just addressed to myself has restored me my self-satisfaction, but made me more dissatisfied with others. I could now enjoy my breakfast; but the portress has forgotten my morning's milk, and the pot of preserves is empty! Any one else would have been vexed; as for me, I affect the most supreme indifference. There remains a hard crust, which I break by main strength, and which I carelessly nibble, as a man far above the vanities of the world and of fresh rolls.

However, I do not know why my thoughts should grow more gloomy by reason of the difficulties of mastication. I once read the story of an Englishman who hanged himself because they had brought him his tea without sugar. There are hours in life when the most trifling cross takes the form of a calamity. Our tempers are like an opera-glass, which

\* *Spitch*, in the original.