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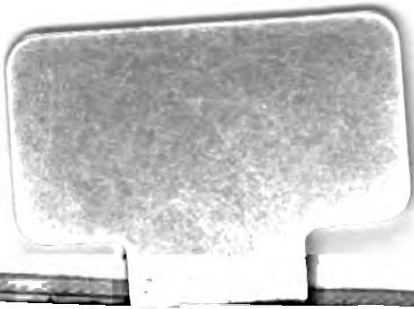


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# CHAINS



# CHAINS

By HENRI BARBUSSE

*Translated from the French by*  
STEPHEN HADEN GUEST

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE EDITION



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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

When he has completed his task, however scampedly, and delivered his last thousand words, however belatedly, and been paid off, however inadequately, the Translator is free to turn and bite the hand that fed him: which, because Publishers are that they are, and because the process of translation rouses the most irritated criticism of every weakness, he is much tempted. But he has spent time and labour, and tends equally to over-value what he has thus identified himself with. Wherefore is he reasonably competent to review.

First, what is known or half recollected of Barbusse before this, his "culminating" work, is opened:

Before the war he wrote, principally, *Inferno*, a study of the relations of two people as glimpsed through a hole in a hotel wall. The observation was remarkable and remarkably relentless; the writing often very brilliant; the ultimate intuition wholly desperate.

Then the War.

*Under Fire* made a deserved sensation throughout the world: and in France, where Barbusse's really noble political courage has raised him a host of enemies, over half a million copies have been bought. It is, simply, the exact revelation of the brutality and corruption of war; with the immeasurable resources of the common soldier in strength and courage and kindliness set over against it.

Barbusse turned to Universal History; that he might discover in it revealed ways of destiny, and that he might reveal in it the dominant, saving impulse of his own vision. First, he extended and verified and deepened his knowledge: then he re-uttered his experience of life past and present in the present Epic, *Chains*.

*Chains* is an *epic*: and as such, only, can it be truly appreciated. It takes all human history for its province, from the most primitive ape-like creature fleeing from the advance of the glaciers to the man of 1924. In the two full volumes the poet—(poet in the book; and M. Barbusse proclaims a poetic technique in his Author's Preface)—*relives* many of the destinies of his ancestors, of whose flesh and blood and brain he is:—The escaped galley-slave who wins ashore to the same dog's head emblem of fidelity that he, as the apish man millenia before, had carved to mark his deliverance: the Egyptian labourer, crushed by the burden of the Pyramids: the mediæval Sovran Baron of the land conquered by the galley-slaves centuries earlier: that Baron's own richest merchant-subject: and that merchant's modernest profiteer-descendant:—and through it all the poet of to-day upon whom a perpetual vision is forced till he is compelled to speak, and to rebel, and as a rebel to be outcast.

The essential theme is threefold.

*Emotion* that must be expressed throughout the ages by utterance, by the War of the Cry:—the primal cries of fear and delight of the animal, and the first carven image of the first man, and the mightiest Temples of Egypt and Assyria, and above all—"Books, just books."

Then chains that link age to age and man to man, and that hold the many in bondage for the profit of the few: chains of force once, but now of fear and ignorance and the self-mutilating phantasies of the oppressed: chains that have often seemed about to be cast away finally—the escaped galley-slaves, for a moment, are going to live in equality and fraternity in their new land: then the early Christians: then the Renaissance:—but that have been riveted ever more firmly, despite all the shams of "Liberalism" and "Democracy" and "Justice". "Workers of the World, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains: you have a world to gain."

Lastly, the ultimate question: *What are we here for, here on earth?*

To this no answer is given, save: "We cannot predict, we

can only create," and (of the God, to the Initiate in all the Mysteries) "I will give thee endless renewal."

Such is the intention, profoundly *religious*, and deliberately treating of the most grandiose realities of universal life and death and meaning.

What of the achievement?

Read through both volumes: suppress incidental irritations: look back over the whole sweep of the construction: and—you will admit an epic.

Moments of intenser poetic vividness; stretches of eagerly-held curiosity; other stretches of redundancy: and many affectations and mannerisms which (altogether apart from the translator's shortcomings, which he knows himself better than any critic) greatly annoy:—but apart from all this, transcending it, a certain true *sublimity*, or greatness, or tragedy and splendour that is the authentic, integral beauty of epic.

Just as in the people, the masses, the slave-father of mankind, Barbusse sees an inner integrity of conserving and creating power, of truly consecrated passion, that redeems all individual, momentary obscurity and baseness and weakness in the grandeur of the whole: so in him the passionate intensity and brave universality of his dream-and-action redeem blemishes that would destroy less-inspired work: redeem them and leave, at the last, something of the awe and grandeur Barbusse has himself felt before the great mysteries.

In the detail of translation I have followed my author as closely as maybe; but much is simply not transferable from this most idiosyncratic modern French. Barbusse balances the universality of his thought with the intensest individuality of expression: he is poles apart from the formless cosmopolitanism of current journalism and, though very much in the tradition of essential French genius, very far from that eighteenth century cult most English-speaking people suppose to be the only literate form.

S. H. G.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Perhaps the novelists will call this book "a mere history-book", and perhaps the historians will judge it harshly, as "merely fiction": and perhaps both will be right. The discussion does not interest me.

Here I want only to say that if I have sought by the aid of artifice to give to the normal structure of the "novel" proportions without parallel in literature, it is because I wanted it to contain more scattered adventure than is possible in the usual, time-worn procedure, and it is also because I wanted my framework to be large enough to contain certain great indications that shape themselves from out the mass of collective facts.

It was rash of me to attack directly the whole tremendous drama of Man deployed across the centuries; to stir the silence of history, its complexity and obscurity, its jungle of cyphers and of names whose meaning has been lost. At first I was adrift in the mass of documentary detail. And that was indeed what was necessary—at first; to be adrift, or at least, to be *alone*; to bring with one no preconceived idea as to fundamentals, nor even as to the form of the work. I have striven to surrender myself to the decyphering of life, with unbiased ardour and closest attention wherein the least prejudice would have been a blot. I have striven to let myself be moved only by the awe and the emotion of reality. But the need for universality made me attempt a new form; and when I tried to con-



dense the multiplex evocations of my vision, it seemed as if I were touching diverse forms of art as I groped my way forward; the novel, drama, poetry—and even the immense perspectives of the cinema, and the ever-present temptation of fresco.

Does this mean that I present this book as a pretentious synthesis of these great modes of expression? Such was never my intent. I wish merely to make it clear that it lives on borrowings, and I, just as well as the most hostile critic, know how much easier it is to imagine than to execute grandiose literary designs. Besides, all the definitions in the world are of little worth. All I hope is, that a few friendly readers will find in this book a souvenir of those I have written previously; and that in these successive pictures, peopled by phantoms which strive to attain a semblance of life, some few may perceive the great landmarks and the vast contours which exist—and which I have endeavoured to unmask.

I have spoken of the indications given by the moving panorama of things. The first of these, as obvious in collective as in individual life, and in space as in time, is the essential similarity of the main human situations; the terrible homogeneity of history. The differences between the crises and institutions which mark the evolution of entities are nearly always either merely apparent, or superficial; the resemblances are always profound.

If one penetrates deep into the reality of the living, thinking masses, one finds suffering and misfortune—and always the same misfortune; that which intensifies the natural fatalities of life by the crushing pressure of our social institutions. Behind and beyond the picturesque differences that strike the eye, is the unchang-

ing, fundamental mechanism which produces them—*A few against all.*

Another indication is, the sovereign rôle of language in the procuration and consecration of this perpetual defeat of the public interest—the ascendancy of formulæ. This is a fantastic, almost a divine, instance of that collective folly that has reached its paroxysm in our own time. By it, words have been allowed to supersede reality in religion, art, emotion. It has brought to mankind the shame of abstract utopias; and in social affairs, it has made all hope of progress retire into the world of dreams; it has procured the abortion of all the revolutions of the past—even those that succeeded.

And the third indication is, the urge in all men to-day toward *extremism.*

This, of all the lessons of the age, will be admitted with least grace, because it demands the sacrifice of all those "approximations" wherein the majority of contemporary minds find delight. "Neither reaction nor revolution," they say, echoing a common rhetoric. But in reality there *are* only these two realities, face to face: reaction and revolution. The society which will arise from the heavy twilight of our day must be that of kings, or that of men.

Theoretical debate and practical measures are inextricable—look at the chaos all around you—unless one goes to the very foundations. Besides, the intermediate tendencies between the extreme terms, the collection of compromises and middle terms, eclectic because mediocre and superficial—all the sickening nuances that men discover for their amusement between the white flag and the red—all this is now disappearing under the pressure of facts, falling away to the right or to the left.

We are caught, like interlocked wheels, by the unfolding of events, in the acute, definitive phase of the long-drawn-out antagonism of autocracy and commonwealth. Autocracy is the artificial social and political system which has reigned until now under various names, by means of violence and imposture, swollen continually the one by the other, and by reason of the division of the masses into factions.

It is the régime of the particular interests of a few great personages—today, by the apparatus of finance, raised to its final perfection of cynicism and voracity. The commonwealth, on the contrary, is hewing out a new carnal division in the world,—with all the rigour of a physical phenomenon; it is outlining the convergence towards a single centre of a certain species of men; the poor, the exploited, the oppressed of all the earth, above and beyond the puerile mosaic of nationality, the savage geometry of maps. (Of course I do not mean that “show” republicanism, in whose theatrical tinsel the cohorts of social conservatism in all lands are at this moment bedecking themselves). Until this vast mass has everything, it will have nothing.

Do not turn away saying, “This is politics.” The matter is of higher import than you imagine. Matter of politics, which is to say, of reality—yes. But above all a matter of imperious logic, of morality, which must shake this generation to its foundations, and force it to emerge from the shadows of milliennary falsehoods as well as from the abysmal perspectives that loom around and about. Wherefore, through this book, I address a desperate appeal to the conscience of mankind.

We bring no cabalistic formulæ, only the dictates of simple common sense. And it is not we who have invented common sense. But it is we who are applying

it. I believe that all who, with the writer, will let themselves survey without mental reservation the unhappy masses that have suffered too much; that in the midst of so much material progress are so deeply entangled in barbarism by the effect of our institutions; that present so much human wastage; I believe that these too will judge, not in order that they may be at one with their guide, but that they may be at one with themselves.

We must become strong enough to see the importance of the crisis wherein, whether we like it or not, contingencies have involved us. And a greater crisis has never been. It is a second form of collective life that is at stake. It is a *second history* that is in preparation, with the fine, clear mastery of the intelligence. All is at stake once more, or rather, for the first time.

And our rigidity, which ill-informed or too well-informed opponents decry as sectarianism (and how often have I been deluged with objurgation and challenge!) is that of workers who obey to the bitter end the principles others profess, yet remain, consciously or unconsciously, blind to the corollaries. To put it over-condensedly, reason is folly, and honesty dishonesty. We have reunited reality and thought; we have bound action to dream, thereby ending an all too hoary myth. And we demonstrate that it is the ancient rule of law that, henceforth, is utopian.

Let the "intellectuals"—with few exceptions, an élite of timid ignoramuses—be not surprised to see the rapidity with which universal humankind of today, the People, who are one like the God of old, and of which the separate *peoples* are but mutilated fragments, will henceforth realise its extent and its weight, and become the youth of the ancient earth. Let them not be the

last to perceive how rational and moral, how magnificent and good is this total reformation now roughly mapped out by a minority—a minority which, none the less, embodies the power and the spirit.

If in the following pages I have been unable, at times, to restrain myself from evincing anger and hatred against the too visible causes of the great social calamities, I ask pardon of those whom I single out, and whom I should merely have set with their fellows. But ought I to apologise for that I have not considered literature as a drawing-room game, and for that I have made it overflow into domains closed to it by the spiritual prude-hypocrisy of my contemporaries? Am I to beg excuse for myself and for him whom I have attempted to show in his passage of the centuries, if it is indeed true that all the great problems are linked together, past, present, future?

HENRI BARBUSSE.

# CHAINS



# CHAINS

## I

### ONE EVENING

I awoke in agitation. I straightened myself up as if I had been falling. . . . What was it? Where was I? . . . At home, my elbows resting on my table.

Yet the hallucination was still with me, vividly.

A moment ago I had been sitting there arranging my papers, my poems. My head had sunk forward, my arms had sagged to the table, and I had been transported far away.

I was a man fleeing from the avalanche of the North, the eddying confusion of a man fleeing; a man and his dependents; wife, child, dog. At my flight's term was a sombre embankment whose transverse lines muttered and groaned. And in the midst of this obscurity I had been assaulted by something like myself, and I had resisted with my whole strength! By tremendous strainings and heavings my body subdued another which stood gripping it; bite for bite, and the living roots of the encircling arms cut off, destroyed. When for a moment my neck bent backward, I saw above me, like a rock against the dark sky, the terrifying crest of this human death-trap that gripped me, his vast arm outstretched and seeking its prey; and against the sky,



among the stars, I saw two bowed summits . . . I, he. A marriage of hatred, whose one half must falter and fail and be vanquished. I struggle for breath, and feel a hollow gulf within me; my eyes burn in the night with the heat of over-exertion. My pulsing heart wavers. Which of the two locked mountains is to crush down the other!

How vividly I hear the cry of the dog barking near by . . . and the hoarse silence of the women, who wait. . . .

I awoke in my own little room,—my head sunk on my table in the midst of a collection of marionette fragments. . . . But my flesh still quivered with what had gone before. My opened eyes could not forget the celestial form of those leaning peaks, nor the crumbling whiteness of the sea, nor the ravening, strangling, falling body I had crushed into stillness.

The salt of the sea was still on my lips! Was I going mad? The tang of the sea on my lips! The sea, the sea!

It was over. I pulled myself together. A dream. I was cold—so perfect had been the dream's illusion.

I paced up and down the room. I was in evening dress. Mechanically I took my hat and my overcoat, to go out to Ariés' soirée.

On this winter night, Ariés' studio is a chapel of solid light. Everywhere the solar spectrum meets the eye. Chequered boards, triangles, radiating streaks,—a placarding with all the rare tints of chemistry and the crude decorations of popular display; the whole scheme divided into violent contrasts of colour. The coming-and-going of the guests in the studio reception

room alternately hides and reveals the tall crystal vase in the centre, tapered like a jet of water whose spray is too fine to be visible; in its transparencies and varying depths, fleeting, jewelled reflections shine and move and flash away; a red lustre, geranium red.

The springy divan of black velvet filling the further end of the room (its dark brilliance shows up sharply the white satin on the black satin of the cushions) is hollowed out by two exquisite forms—heavy and slender. In front of the two women, a tripod holds with skeleton rigidity a bowl of bluish glass wherein shimmers a gleam as of clear moonlight. They are both given forth in planes of crystal and azure, as if seen through the facets of a sapphire. They are two divine caricatures of blond beauty.

Behind them in the great mirror—a framed abyss which deprives of focus all expression in the eyes of those whom it reflects, and crystallises the tensions of distance—I see revealed the perspective of the carpets' zigzag chequers, trod and retrod by scintillating ink-drops:—the reflections of men in evening dress, silhouettes of white paper-collars and shirt fronts—outlined in black. And among the mat faces, razed by the excess of light, and the napes bordered by the black or the light stuffs, I discover my own little form, with its eyeglass and its crown of waving yellow hair.

Further away, in the glaucous distances of the glass, I see the legs and the body—red blue, blue red—of an officer; and above the elegant casing that supports him, a flat profile, sleek, handsome, chic. And the mirror, creating space within space, reflects various pictures. On the indigo border of the sea are rocks, skinned of their ordinary appearance, analysed and resected to the very entrails of their geometrical form, surmounted by a panel of sky and a packet of cloud.

Others show persons annulated in armour of many-coloured and multiform polygons—and this scientific apparatus imposes a strong, crude articulation which re-assimilates the accustomed anatomy of the body and its investment, that has become too familiar to us. Elsewhere are figures with great significant eyes, and nudes bezelled in blue, trembling, geographic frontiers.

Over there, at the end of the sofa, in the angle of the wall, sits a lady in black, silent.

And I come and go and tack about among the rest, like the rest. And I resemble them. Like them I am young. Like them, I am a poet and a seeker, straining toward new things, ardent and pitiless. I behold myself, urging myself forward to the advance-guard of my generation, which is itself raised upon all generations, at the end of centuries.

There is talk, there is dancing. The talk, as always, is of painting and sculpture. Everything is to be begun afresh, taken up anew. The world is a chaos. It is the new spirit breathing on the waters.

I impoverished and enriched myself in words. But this evening, I cannot wholly participate in this enthusiastic hubbub where our war-cries are formulated and forged. I am bewildered and attracted . . . what is it, what flame?

It is not Mme. Fontanilles, over whom there ripple delicate and irradiate lakes of light yellow and the blue of running water. The ever-laughing Sylvia, with the golden bell in her magnificent, amber-muscle throat? The whiteness of the shawl she plays with is intensified by the azure wafts that scent it. She plays

too with whatever one says, and when one talks to her, she seems to fly away. No, not Sylvia.

It is the girl in black who is next to them.

Her name is Marthe Uriel. I have already met her; this is the third time I approach her without wishing to. Her hair is part fair, part brown, with certain traces of gold on the lineate bronze. Her face broadens exquisitely at the base—an almost rectangular oval, and it is as if a fine leaf of light adhered to it. The flesh of the temple is white camellia; the cheek, pink camellia; and the eye, very deep-set, very large, is black. Black. Such fine, elfin fragility breathes over her that her every movement enhances her beauty, and one's mere gaze upon her is a too gross contact.

My eye is caught by the clear-cut red and blue of the officer. He has set himself before her to ask her to dance, and he is gazing upon her. (Thinking of what?—in his cannon-ball intelligence.) She lifts her face to him, the fine squared oval of her cheeks, pale with the shade of a smile. "Yes." Smiling, she rises, and places on the man's body her docile arms, which already seem scarcely to belong to her any more.

She has adjusted herself, ritually, against him; she has made as if to give herself up to him. The shy acceptance which does not say where she will stop short, the openness of that "yes". . . . Her profile stands out clear against the crude blue of the military jacket.

They are gathered up in the increasing sweeps of the rhythmical tide, and are absorbed into its pulsations before my eyes. I look at the two of them—and at them alone—amidst the shifts of the scene. Her eyelashes and her eyebrows, the framing of her eye, is black, and even more than black, as in a portrait. Her

dress also is black, and the great, swirling silken oriflamme is made neither of the too thin paper of taffeta, that breaks and swells, nor of the puffy softness of muslin, which makes faults appear in the lines of the figure; it is a heavy tissue, with jet meshes: it presses her closely, showing only her significant gestures.

The woman is revealed, shaped-in by the shining darknesses that cover her and become part of her, demonstrated by the major lines of the shoulders and the balanced curves of her haunches and legs: in the general illumination her main structure of interior harmony is manifest. The waves of movement caress her and guide her and make her shine forth, brilliant. Her dress is white and black star-flashes of her nakedness.

And he cannot conceal all the male effort that clothes him as in armour; the effort he must put forth to carry this lightness regularly, and fit himself into the detailed rhythm. From time to time the coincidence of movement lessens, and his eye penetrates her.

The slow flux lifts and lets fall about them the heavy, onyx silk with its oblique, pyramid panels. It is as if the phantasm of their double body strikes me in the face, with the wings which spring from them when the measure whirls. I gaze at the supple hammering of the two velvet feet; their tensed swing mounts in the muscled shadows, through the balanced pivot of the body, and writes its sign aloft, on the pale, ecstasy-pale face. In the same segment of the circle, amidst the swarming movement and the fog of others, I obtain suddenly, after an eclipse, sight of that turning figure whose clear-defined cheek is most apt for adoration: she is too calm and too pale in her deep-centred, withdrawn, carnal sureness. I suffer the realisation of this blind beauty as if I had received a blow, and the whole scene is but a cameo in a storm.

I subside on to a stool near to where she had been seated, and when the sudden stoppage of the music disconcerts and suspends the transport of the dancers, who uncouple, and walk about prosaically—she comes back towards me.

She returns wholly within the shell of gleaming blue. She takes her place once more among the boulders of black satin. The ampulla, drowned in the oval aquarium, sends pale blue ribbons along every fold of her black dress, and encircles her chin with a pale, bright crescent, like that which sometimes casts a silhouette of the light and colour of day upon the nocturnal sky.

She sits down. She looks at me because I am there.

Her whole body still pulses. She is warm and opened out from her exertion. Her features still show her contained joy; her throat vibrates; her face gleams in places, velvety-soft with a fine perspiration, which appears in delicate beads on her forehead, and at the commissure of her lips. And I perceive the colour of her blood where I can trace her teeth's margin. Her feet are still in a musical immobility. Beneath the transparent covering of her stocking, and intercepted by the velvet of her shoe, I can see where her little toes begin.

She lifts up her half-bared arm, and it passes before my face. In the penumbra of the short sleeves I see the fine curves, and the damp nest of the armpit.

Her own fragrant body intensifies the manufactured scents, and envelops her like an astral body.

With a large, circular movement that makes her silks rustle, she has stood up, then reseated herself. She has thrown herself back, crossed her hands on her black, polished knee; and the edges of her nails—fleshly jewels—sparkle like her rings. Her dress

drapes itself over her legs in two deltas of folds, and the two great pallid articulations of the arms are parallel. Moving statue, redefined each instant in sumptuous luxations! But a living statue, rounded out like an amphora. Her form turned now toward the white lights, has whitened. Her dark eyes have become tawny, and gleam with all that gleams.

Because I am there, so near, her face banishes its indifference, and this magnificent composition smiles at me. But one does not give what one gives in looks! Alas, can one hold fast a smile? . . .

We talked together, and that seemed amazing to me. One word, two words uttered with difficulty, despite the easy habitual-social smile.

She spoke of art, and said she felt with those who sought. She thinks we are in a period of transition, in a middle age, in a time of prophets and iconoclasts who trample on broken fragments; the poems are only annunciations, the motley pictures merely banners. It is time for the creation of works.

"Truth awaits some discoverer."

"Yes, yes." A strange question rises in me: "Whom?"

She answers straightly:

"But . . . you!"

She smiles. I smile, enveloped in her smile. I laugh a mixed laugh. I pucker in a little bit of glory. Me. . . . Evidently, but. . . .

And suddenly I want her to have spoken the very truth, and to know it. I want to talk to her of myself; to show her, in fact, the great labour and faith of my vigils. . . . I sketch for her, rapidly and with bold strokes, my project for a grandiose and, in my opinion, new synthesis: poems on love and death—on Man. Through the resonances of my own voice, I perceive

that she has adopted the humble attitude of the listener. . . . She has said, with the authority of her beauty: "It is beautiful." And she has even cared to add: "You will do this. You must!"

While I, in the depths of my soul, already arrange and stutter some madrigal full of obsolete words. While I am dazzled by the sight of the white, pearly, lustrous garlands that range themselves in her eyes—she has spoken of Provence, and has said: "I shall go to Alicant." As there happened to be at that moment a heavy weight of music and a surge of dancing in the studio, she said more loudly, she declaimed above the music: "Alicant!"

She begins to tell me of the country-side, the red rocks, the blue sea, the two bowed peaks. . . . And I laugh with joy. It is my own country! Alicant is *me!* There I lived, there I shall live again. This village name which is so much to me,—she thinks to teach it to me!

And that, of a sudden, put all the others far from the two of us, and first and foremost, at the head of the cohort, the officer to whom she lent herself a little while ago, her beautiful figure seeming to enjoy the uniform.

She laughs for me. By stretching out my hand I could touch her. She doubles her stature in the invisible ether during this brief moment of our communion together. In the deeps of my being I take her body in my arms—her body now hidden by carefully adjusted shadow and separated from me by the light all about us; her body that I tremble not to know. The smile that makes as if to surrender; the thought-phantom that makes as if to take. . . . There is a tale of another world, on whose margin two beings of flesh and blood await, saying nothing to one another.



With this splendid body she shall go whither I shall go. . . . The future. . . .

*THE ISOLATE*

The fête, wearied, scatters, and its life burns out. And I am suddenly alone in the street, with the rain and the black cold in my face, a desert before me, around me, above me. Accompanied by the noise of a stream which I see as little as it sees me, I walk along the great avenues whose perspective continually contracts and expands while the horizontal lines perpetually mount and descend.

Within the sad circle of the street lamps, the wet pavement gleams like steel, and I can discern in the night the pattern of the rain-drops as they rebound.

At long intervals, couples detach themselves from the lateral shadows—and then return into them, re-absorbed. I encounter passers-by; the men, bipeds; the women, swathed bipeds.

These people, as they approach nearer and nearer, as their facial masks grow more distinct, become more and more alien to me; then, when I have passed them by, they resemble me more and more closely. They depart with the same step as at their coming; and my mind still thinks of them when they are already lost and gone, like Time.

My route—my steadily diminishing line of march—cuts across the circus. Over there, a wine shop sends forth a bright streak of light where a shutter has swung open. The muddy road gleams in front of the white door-sill. And above this poor gleam, seeking escape, the huge house piles up its calcareous layers. And east and west are other houses, shouldering and backing up against it, hewn out of the night, ranged in

an amphitheatre. On the other side of the walls and within the vaults there are sepulchred fires and buried metamorphoses.

Beyond the circus, once more the doorways of another avenue; uniform, hermetic, sealed into the stone with knots of iron. It is strange to feel oneself a prisoner, because free, and to be shut into limitless space. Suddenly a near-by door swings open—in black darkness! My heart leaps up. But a confused babel and a mass of people stream out; some meeting breaking up. I am afraid of people. Crossing, precipitately, to the other side of the avenue, I see a black cloth flow between the dim plane trees with their great nests of scrambled boughs—and my solitude is multiplied.

From out the brilliant, heated scene of the party, one form and one voice alone remain to me. That voice commands me to triumph—and I feel a great chill as I listen; because in this extent of streets and houses, and the whole urban geometry, I see well enough that I am nothing.

To triumph—that would be to embrace everything, to share myself among everything and everybody, to augment myself through others, to send a glow through the world—I!

The simplicity of her mouth has made all things clear and unfolded. Now I can look myself straight in the face.

Who am I? Clément Trachel, twenty-year-old poet—who has written nothing sublime, who is only desire. I belong to a sort of men who live and move in all the epochs of history. I am the normal young man who is always about to win glory, love, the world.

I am a speck disappearing step by step into the maze

of Paris. The complex splendour of the city they have made—in the narrow gorge of the street it casts a reddening reflection on the shifting city-smoke—is a hell-fire barrier between them and me. Reality is as unattainable to me as the genius of Dante. Yes, it is fine to be the last-comer, to be twenty years old in 1912: but one is not a victor because one swims in the full flood of the mounting days, years, centuries. I am far from men, and I am afraid of the crowd. I am the Isolate. I am powerless against the night's mourning. The world is banal because I am inarticulate; because, in the silence, I have nothing great enough to say. My words do not write themselves on the wind, and my steps leave no trace on the pavement. I live by hoping, as do others, wholly destitute, by feeding on their own hunger.

To flee blackness, cold, death—and to win my place with my whole strength! A gleaming light has exploded into being within me, afar off. An echo has resounded in my head, and so strongly that I halt my steps on the pavement. Where was it that I had heard the original of that great cry? . . .

What if I were He Who Shall Speak! If the radiant woman of this evening had indeed spoken for the future! If I, whose youth is but youth,—I who go, wasting myself, leaving the world unchanged,—what if I were to accomplish the prodigy of creation—to come upon the rose sprung from amidst stones, the miraculous! If. . . .

Trembling with joy, I breathe out into the night my deep-moved cry.

I am in front of my house, with its low, dilapidated façade. The high portico sways like stage scenery, too flimsily set, and shadows fall upon me from the

little courtyard, the other side the doorway. "To create a work." While I repeat this monumental phrase, standing in the building's dark well of courtyard, all my black discouragement has returned, like overtaking justice.

I enter the porter's lodge to take down my key. The huge Toni is there, lit up by a night-lamp. Late as it is, he has not gone to bed. He sleeps, drawn up, on a bench, like a log.

He is very ignorant, unintelligent, and nearly always drunk. He has been shut up in there so long that the hole smells of corpse. I can see the grey skin of his face, his grimy sweat, the curve of his unbuttoned collar, streaked with soot, the two bunged holes of eyes. One of them half opens, with a white, glazed look as of bleached bone—an empty eye, the empty vent-hole of those who feed on illusion. This man is the hollow obverse of a noble dream. His breathing is cadenced, voiced. One can make out a sort of refrain, that chirps on his lips. He smiles genially. He smiles, and in his dream, he sings. He has a too small brain—which is not the fault of his goodheartedness—he is a foolish Christ. . . . This very little poet—like a cricket—shows me how far my own poet's dream is above me. I cannot understand, I don't know how to love. I bend over this form. Infinity, the angel of infinity, is it our difference or our resemblance? I have outstretched my poor hand toward something difficult, and far off, toward him, toward me. . . .

Standing up without a light, I feel my way in the vestibule that reeks like a vault. My hands grope along the falling débris of the damp wall, along the crumpled paper. In the black darkness I grip the fishy

balustrade. A rush of air comes up as from a great way off. I stumble against the first step. I stop short, suddenly assailed.

The sea, the sea! Before me, the dazzling azure, the great, hemispherical sea!

Everywhere the sea streams away before me, smooth, rippling, concentric right to the horizon, starred all over with the sun. Thick blue, intense green, green-blue, green-sunshine, all poured from jars of colour, interlace and sink in its immense depths right to the last, dying tinges of the furthest distance.

The upper layers of the sea, done over and glazed by the sky, reflect and draw on cargoes of clouds in blue-divided white chequers. Around the reefs are hurled whitenesses, standing like sails, and the bare arms of the sun! Gusts of wind dibble hail into the water, drive back the glossy, liquid mirror, and with swift swissling rush over it sudden rafts of dark water.

Yonder is the blur of a wooded crest, jagged so loftily and so distantly with its trees that the sight of it is a blow that pushes me away. My eyes distinguish, amid the volcanoes of light, two peaks bowed near to one another. In the fine-ground deposit of the cape, right in the soft sand that my feet pound, disturbing the pebbles, is a palm-tree, a blinding panoply of sunward daggers!

Vibrating with the din of the waves right through my teeth and right into the inmost of my skull—ransacked by the lances of vertigo—the prey of the distances, which ever and again draw me into their midst—I have more light, fragrance, damp warmth, immensity than I can contain. The black shadow at my feet lengthens, shivering, over the sand; my legs rigid, my body swaying. The wind seizes my long

black hair. On the ground, above the round of my head, I see this snaking cloud's bushy shadow.

All becomes dark.

I climb. Before me is printed a squared hole in the shadow-levels, a nocturnal window, dirty and in places thickened by cardboard; the misshapen window with its broken pane which gapes and snorts and puffs like an engine on the first floor of my staircase. My nose recognises vividly its musty breath.

Whence have I come forth? From another world, or a nightmare? Surely I am going mad.

I pull myself together, compact. Clément Trachel on his staircase. But no! I feel myself slip outside Clément Trachel. A different light penetrates my walking darkness. . . . The giant who passes by projected, his striding legs archwise, against the screen of a different sky. The gigantic passer-by who arrived one evening by the shore of the sea, his frame powdered with the dust of centuries, like snow.

I am the fugitive, fleeing from the glaciers.

The cold that comes from afar and from on high, that shut me in and chafed me to madness in my long, blind flight that numbed and broke my hands—falls solid before the blue sea with the red rocks.

My eyes, when they half open in dismay, keep the borders of their sockets. The vivacious hillocks of my cheeks are huge because fixed so near. My view is blocked, below, by a shuddering body. I discern in my head the ravening cavern of my jaw. My hand, feeling over my face—my face that is my life hewn and carven in every conceivable way, the creature of my

will, the life-mark—discovers it full of blood or water; my hair moist, and sharp pain everywhere. My breathing is sharp and broken, and my sudden full-stop, making me sway first backward, then forward, has sunk me into the soil like a tree-trunk.

I have come to a stop at the extremity of the dead wastes. I have come to a stop—I am the boundary-mark of the avalanche—with all the North on my shoulders.

And they too have halted, heaped about me, the blinder hearts I drag after me—wife, child, dog.

Yonder in the ancestral plains, how long is it since the great change came? One day, utter night fell on the sun and slew the seasons. Earth-movements broke our shelters, the cold solidified the rivers among the tree-roots and suspended the waterfalls like trophies, and sometimes the wind was so violent that it tore up the grass, and bowled along the flints in coveys over the ground.

Amidst the darkness we saw the ancient, pale mountain chain, too high, advancing on us like a gaping cavern, with livid crests melting and bending over, and peaks descending. The reverberating thunder carried right to the horizon and was re-echoed, penned in by the mountains—the noise like a flail—And from that moment, we had fled the enlarging glacier.

From the sun flowed nought save cold and obscurity. There was nought save twilight in the desolate gulf of space through which we fell toward the South. The squalls were black and as if solid. The falling snow and the spread snow was black, and we could not see the howling storm. But at intervals, when the dense mists cleared, we saw one another fleetingly—I, and the woman, and the child—without

outlines, mournful walking débris, arms held tight to our bodies. We saw ourselves, striped by the soft, shattering rain, the hail, the deathly gleams of the cold; shaken by the unseen wind and the thunder, that fracture of empty space; drowned in the air like the shining blue-headed water-creatures; bearing onward the pierced wounds of our eyes, of our mouths, of our nostrils; and at each step traversing abysses. The dog—fragment of ourselves—followed us.

Things are unwearable. Nothing that is against us makes a single mistake, and nothing, save only ourselves, sleeps. On the corpse-like rivers and the lakes that are become rigid water, the cold devoured swiftly the tattered thicknesses that covered us, our shattered bark of skins,—stripped us naked—and reached to the steady fire of the heart and to the steady light of the brain. And we were struck and sent staggering by the ever more tremendous noise in our ears; the noise that, in front of all rushing things, rushed upon us. And I doubted all things, even myself, in this swaying world of which I was ever the centre—for since my life began, I am the centre of things.

We arrived—I leading—at the extreme edge of the glacial region, with all the height of the world impending over us, on that day that is the day of days—since it is today.

And we all—the two adults, and the child, and the animal—planted ourselves there, marking with the breath that tears itself thickly from our bleeding lungs the limit of desolation; with head high, making the circle of despair.

Behind these heaped rocks which close in our universe with two bowed peaks, one at each end—suddenly the wind drops. It is incredible to be denuded and unwrapped of this wind, to be emptied of the per-



petual cry which bound us in, speechless, and to be separated from the inseparable burden of fatigue—and no longer to know, obsessed, what we must do not to die.

For so long we have fought with the cold, that anger of death. We have cleared through the low sky, and the frightful sowing of the snow, and the ice-armed rain, as it had been mud. Now the war of fleeing is accomplished. The great winter is over. I am alone, and I feel myself expand in winter's abandoned place.

I have found out the way to lift my arms straight up into space, to stretch myself wholly toward the impossible summit of expanded height and breadth, to see the beginning that I am. For the first time I have raised up my frame. I have the frame of sky and earth.

A stream whose waters have resumed their gentle form, marching on, and so inflammable to reflected lights! On the green leaves, it is the sun that snows. A sandy slope, then a red shore where the waves splinter whitely as they touch. The earth proclaims peace. Beyond the sea, one can see that there is nothing.

But I am alone against everything and everyone. I am borne back by the mass of things, I am the Isolate, I am nothing, and I am afraid. So much afraid that I stifled in my throat a howl that tensed me like the stubborn, central fear of an evil dream.

Through the space around me—a gulf within some dim roundness—somewhere are the lines and forces of a scaffold staircase whereon someone climbs confusedly, whereon turns someone heavy who wants to flee.

The squalls were black—desert—I am the Isolate. . . . These words are fantastic. They are those that the black wayfarer sounds forth in the mournful rain,

along the furrow of the long dark avenue, which the bright-lit fête has ploughed behind itself.

I sought them with focussed gaze, these traces of footsteps like my own on the warm, bright sand.

At my approach, over there in the outskirts of the wood, a bright streak trembles, stiffens, then plunges into the thickness, opening and closing the foliage, melting into the forest. At the spot whither I run, there remained the imprint of a woman who had lain down. My gathered strength leaps from behind into my empty eyes, and into my empty hands. And then I walk on, dazzled by the grandeur of what had not been. This ceaseless *mêlée* of my body, and a body unknown, this dream of joy which is in me, and is nowhere! I am alone against all women.

I looked down on my wife, at my feet. The being who for long has doubled my being, and who imitates, on a lesser scale, my destiny. There where she let herself fall in the sun she still remains, weary, wildered, terrorised by exertion—her eyelids, her lips, her hands—immobilised by what has gone before.

Then I look at the child, at the girl, at the mass of her body opened out and expanded as she lies. Her head is so sunk that her face is hidden, her hands play with the sand, and all around her on the white surface where the sun scatters its transparent frosting, her shadow is intense black like a deep cavern, with sudden black fragments thrown out and taken back again.

Her polished shoulders gleam, and the sun rolls a block of light through her hair that is caught back by a thong, and through the dust that flows from her hand. I cannot see her face but I know what is writ on it from her laugh.

She has lifted up her body and her head, and she is a sort of radiant light. The tremendous, right, direct straightness that comes forth from her eyes has hurled a splendid challenge. The sun has moistened her mouth; her red cheeks have blazed back the sunlight; and her breasts have shone forth like her shoulders, like breast-plates before her, her large raised breasts with their dark buds.

Astonished, I learn the dimensions she has come to. I thought till now:—the child! But during the space of the flight she has become a huge stranger, large-curved and a warrior, with this lion's treasure which crowns her. And now I remember that it was because of her burning hair that I kept my faith, obscurely, in the sun, during the endless twilight.

Sitting, she is as big as I! Seated on the sand, bruising it, running the grains of sand through her fingers she caresses the little hillock made by the delicate roundness of her knee. Her foot, whose toes she stretches out and contracts, with childish pleasure, is still a child's.

Her blond, swelling thigh—my two hands would not go round it—her two thighs join in the tawny shadow of her girdle of skins; the primitive gateway and thicket of womankind.

She laughs without thought of what she is; but she laughs with her life, and her laughter strikes into my flesh.

Ah, I have seen that she resembles her whence she is come—the woman yonder. Through her, I remember that other, and at the same time, everything that was about her on our earth—for there was no place where the light was not hers. Then I see her figure in the world, and I recognise it no more. I see the bestial advance of old age that lines her and soils her

hair, now that she is alone. We were attracted to one another by a power of anger that has ebbed.

And she—the fallen—while she loses all before my eyes, she does not look at me. On her knees, heaped in softened curves, and her mouth sagging, she gazes intent at something distant. I followed her look that drove a feeble parting through space, and I won a fresh cry of pain; she watches a comely hunter go gleaming through the trees.

I too—I too—I too have shone on too many mornings. I am vanquished, chastised by old age. My body is bruised and my face buffeted. I can shine no more. I am but a phantom aping myself—my ugliness—and the grimace of my smile. My apparition is ill-boding. I know that at my coming is flight.

I wandered throughout the evening, the night. Despite my will, my hands, my arms sought out the virgin and felt her absence. I came upon her track and followed it, feeling along the margin of her vast, unknown existence, in the warm night, under the stars that are cold to human gaze. Into the low excavation I entered like cold.

In the depth of the retreat she was outstretched, asleep in the arms of a man whose youth was like her own. And in the centre of them, her fine extended belly was like a slain beast of the field. Both slept. The breath of my irruption has not reached them, and the torch that my hand bears aloft—searing my eyes—has merely revealed them vesting them splendidly in themselves. My head, that at first I had bent low, inquisitive, struck against the rock. I, the master! My fist petrified, became leaden. . . . But I no longer want to vanquish them, since I am vanquished. My small muttering has not awakened them,

it has only awakened on the two faces a single smile.

But now I cried out! In the black depths, in the further slope of the rocky hole there is someone hidden. Something listening while it breathes; something unseen.

Because I had not seen that which saw me, I cried out as when one tries to throw off a nightmare terror that grips one's eyes and throat. This mass, this rock darkness with which I am one body—with a moaning parturition it gives forth a thickness, a man, me. . . . I hold in my hand a balustrade, and I stumble up square steps—and *all that, around and about, is the vision of a man who climbs a staircase.*

There is something lying in wait—here, but I don't know where—looking at me. And through the light shed by the torch that I grip, behold the dim phosphorescence of two eyes in this hollowed entrail of earth, and around the eyes and in place of the head (that which contains the similar obverse of my own world) an unending black monster!

But from the thing opposing me there comes forth a moaning cry from beyond the smoky, harsh crackling of the flame. A moan, the last residue of speech, which shows only the ignorance of the sufferer, and the ignorance of him who hears the suffering. I recognised the monster by the sound of its alien moan. It was she, my wife, the poor enemy whose heart has turned back upon itself.

She had followed the allurements of the young man's body. She, like myself, had come sudden, upon the pair of them. She had retreated within the substance of the shadows, and since there was nought to do, had lain there enshrouded.

We extricated ourselves from the hole together—silent animals—so different, so alike; supporting one

another, with our two new wounds. And as much apart as together, we let ourselves be borne along whither chance should lead, to imitate love and to rediscover, perhaps, in the darkness—and with buried eyes—lost truth.

Under the sky monstrous with clouds, the bowed peaks clasped together the mountainy ruins with two crescents, as of black stars, half covered up, more lugubrious than the night itself. How comes it that my distress is in all this? Not to die—not to die! But we are dying. Already something is dead. A great part of life is destroyed. A small part of life fights free and lives on. Life is no more than the surface of life; and now, all that one says, all that one does, is scarcely anything.

At dawn we saw each other clasping one another close at the foot of the tall white stone that is on the red arch. We rediscover ourselves, livid, fallen. Almost we are afraid in this wan, rending laceration and we draw near to each other on the ground.

Yonder, at the bottom of the gentle slope, is the heave of the sea; the sea whose gleaming immobility seems to climb continually, line upon line. . . . A thicket full of flowers. I laid my hand on the flowers, I tore them up, I threw them at her feet—I made a sacrifice of that multitude of living creatures. . . .

Feeling blindly toward one another, like the two halves that we are, we think—though nothing can procure anything in that sorrow—of life that passes and youth that flees away. We think, with our whole life's intensity, of the perfection of death—the sole thing one sees for long and distinctly here below—and the more we meet in each other's eyes, the more we think of death, for death will embrace all.

We have closed our eyelids, to gather the fleeting

moment that is with us, to deny the supreme, anguished cross each of us bears for the other. And now, our eyes open, we look on one another and, face to face, strive against forgetting.

I have seen, I have seen strewing the earth flowers cut short, and still fresh. The plaintive call of living beings, that is inordinate, insistent, as if they were very far off from one another—their murmur, their cooing is exhaled, like as the fragrance that ascends swiftly from the living but slain flower.

*MORNING, EVENING, MORNING*

Morning, morning; embodied freshness in a gulf of silver; the pathetic border of the last-come day.

I lean toward the dawn wind that stirs me, toward the day that floods to the heart my human carcass.

I lean, poised and waiting, above the stone edging of the quay, in front of the broad stack of casks, between the criss-crossed, tanned ropes, facing the blue, dancing waves.

I lean, after a night of rain, above a misty crossing of leaf-spangled ways, full of transparent fringes.

Beside a doorway, I stand enveloped in by the superposed folds of my mantle's cape, wrapped round by the breeze, by the noise of the vehicles on the paved streets where red and green shops begin to outline themselves against a far off background as of a feudal stage-play, and where one hears fleeting English syllables.

And all this is in me, as I climb, leaning forward, toward my at-first nocturnal, then dawn-lightened room. Tomorrow—once more morning, streets, the café, news, friends. . . .

Or something prodigiously like it, veiled in the depths of an abyss. I am nought in the world save only this; the young poet, and the youngness of morning.

Morning . . . colour in all its tints infuses itself into shape and everything comes back. The darkness I had dragged after me fades. Grief is—that which was. Death is dead.

In the sacred glade, the stone fountain with its pool lapping the earth. My bare foot penetrates the liquid plaque, whose chill is like a sharp knife. The water, disturbed, springs into life around me, and spreads its light, unceasing face in convex circles. And, in the great disjointed circles of the watery buckler are the reflections of my upclimbing legs and of my tunic, in soft, confused rents and tears, in cold flames striped with black in the blackness. And through these swelling, ever-renewed strata, my eye beholds my eye.

The hypostyle halls of the undergrowth are greenly radiant. Sparkling sickles of sun fall in stiff bands, mingling, up above, with the hanging bunches of the rose-bays,—sickles of black—and on the thick wall of solid foliage below, lighting up like lamps three rose-coloured roses.

At the height of my face and like a face, the light heaviness of a rose. She does not stir, she lives. She is oval and outspread, but she has not the veil of a smile; she is grave, serious, like a living body. She is much more bare than one would think. There is nothing here-below so carnal, so perfect, and so deceiving. The long fragrance that rises from the lips of her lovely wounds—her personal fragrance that is at once internal and external, like a cry—makes her single and alone, as I am alone before her; only life separates us from each other.



In the evening, when all was rose, I perceived, staid and terrible, the soft, dainty-footed silhouette of the woman at the edge of the high promontory. She is rose-coloured; the tranquillised colour which is between flame and light, the mid, cool colour.

Night is come; its coming unperceived; one wakens from the day. The moon is outspread, and the solitary form there aloft is still rose-coloured in the lamp of her robe. The statue of her body rises darkly. From the rose veils that are impregnated with the azured sun of night, the globes of her breasts—one hiding her left-ward heart—make more slender-seeming with their doubled contours the column of her figure, her swelling haunches, her central belly, her fine, tapered legs.

This is not Astarte. This is just a woman, this is the superhuman stranger of whom one cannot see clearly either heart or form. Her nakedness is like all other nakedness, and yet she is different from all others; she is herself alone, for such is the miracle of bodies. It is a woman who awaits; the half of a couple, avid, nuptial, and down-falling; like a shorn eagle on the Continental cliff, like the Wingless Victory that tramples the upper steps in temple-stairs with all the weight of the sky whence has descended its own high fall. She is the detached, immobile fragment of a dance, she is the song of that which shall be said near to her. Woman made ready, asylum of wandering man, sanctuary where poverty becomes riches, light, passing, changing form, like the days and like the names of man. . . . Her form is hidden behind all the curtains of the dusk. It is the clear, light face with blue-crystal eyes, the reddened cheeks framed by goldness. . . . It is the sharp-defined sphere with black eyes, black hair that gleams, moistened with blackness,

on the ivory. . . . Or it is the square-cut face with arresting, wild eyes. . . . Or it is the closed smile of Isis who weeps.

Always I shall come back to her. My fate is nought save the labour that is necessary to go from out myself to her, to fill by my unaided effort nature's empty space which separates us all from her. I shall come back to her, even if she seem to me to be another; and I shall recognise her even when the divine intruder, voluptuousness—gushes forth from our two-ness.

Are these walls and lamps, or the starry walls of night? . . . Is she not seated? She has thrown herself back, crossed her hands on her black, polished knee, and the edges of her nails—fleshly jewels—sparkle like her rings. Her dress drapes itself over her legs in two deltas of folds, shining like black marble, and the two great, pallid articulations of the arms are parallel.

Her face, turned now toward the torch that, doubtless, I bear before her—for I have stepped forth first, creative—has whitened, her eyes gleam with all that gleams. Her face, it is her name in radiance. I am there, near her body, near enough to touch; and I tremble, that I do not know it.

The days are resuscitated after the nights, but night follows day.

I, poet and seer, huntsman of joy, have passed among the crowds of those that pass, that are broken-up, but limitless. I have found at the last that the joy of man is more mortal than man, and that they are all alike, these couples; too simple mysteries, who weep when they have laughed.

The creatures lift their arms to the sky, seek to

touch the blue with their hands. They bind themselves to one another by covenants; saying, "never" or "for ever"—and write their names in sand. But men and women fend one another off all too well. The clasped embrace grips tight separation. Shining eyes never illumine, and the savour of lips is verily without savour. Here-below, love can only die—or kill.

There is an unending malediction in the surge of life. Is not each being a point in the universe? And yet, is not each being the centre of the universe? Life mingled with mind entails a divine contradiction. In the midst of the four infallible elements, the being with two feet and boundless head, is ludicrous.

Carried away by the whirlwind of phantoms and of dust, lovers, priesthood of that which must die, creatures tied two and two by nothing, desire the arrest of time, that they may stand fast against their everlasting fickleness. Finite, they play with infinity: "O Sun, do thou halt!" And in the spasm of dream that joins us to dream, it seems that it has really halted; for men believe that which they desire.

They are right, they are right! There are two creations; there is that of the flesh, and there is that of the *cry*. The magicians who fashioned me, the bistred, white-skirted petticoated priests grouped behind the squared pylones in the Libyan mountain-cave which, like destiny itself, retires into western depths—these (and near the long arm painted red on the wall, one of these shaven heads, that which is nearest me, with zigzagging forehead near my eye, haunts me by the gleaming facture of his look) announce that the first Sun God, when he was alone, at the dawn of all things, created the elements of the universe by the Word. "He called his sons." He called! Supreme dogma that crowns all that shall have been said by be-

lievers and unbelievers from the beginning unto the end. He summoned the socle of all things. It is by the *cry* that light has weight, and that we are that we are.

#### THE CRY

I sought passionately for some stone that should be harder than the light-coloured rock of the red cavity.

I had need to mark the shape of that woman's face on the white, over-hanging, proffered cliff; of that double face, unmade—then re-made, around which must circle my fate from the first day to the last.

But the dog, rising from his corner, came to me, and I saw only him.

He has never left me since his life began. He has remained by my side in the depths of the abyss, since we were unsepulchred of winter. Why? For nothing. I gave nothing, and I asked nothing. But he is bounded by me, and I—filling his life to its utmost horizon—am his anxiety.

He has raised his head towards mine as in intent moments of danger. I looked at him, and his body trembled while I plunged my power into him. Alert on his yellow paws, his back stretched—his neck is a great, interior stream, his whole life is a curved line, at whose palpable extremity, two black eyes inundate me with their gentleness. It is in the depth of these eyes that simplicity and innocence live and have their being.

In the expanses of evening, a hand that is night— isolate as a separate body, almost cut-off, yet alive with my life—puts forth, and flexuates down this long, pointed mass that is warm-throbbing with the fine excess of heat, pierced by two circles blinking forth warm moistness—irradiant blackness. The cavity of the eye

moves and contracts beneath the soft, responding pelt. His whole and entire being is attent to the hand that softly touches him. He listens, he dedicates himself.

My caress is doubled by his. He loves me too much ever to be at peace; he loves me too much ever to know anything. His eyes absorb me; his whole universe tastes of me; he is disposed for all my wonders. His eyes approach mine, they approach, exigent, interior, filled by himself and by me. All is vague, effaced with the colours of twilight. . . . It is not because of evening, it is because of truth.

We must force ourselves to listen to low resounding truth. Truth—all that which, here, there, everywhere, is still stronger than ourselves. I know that I am . . . and then . . . I can never know the other human creature that stands over against me. The mêlés of humans are always struggles: whatever one does with one's body, one is ever looking oneself over, measuring oneself; and the savage heart feeds only upon the unknown. Where there has been a woman and myself, has ever been both love and hatred. The dog is the thing of attachment, the living proof that sincerity, certitude, peace are possible, beyond the rotting frailty of lovers and conquerors. He is reduced and little, he is much less than a human being, but he is much more superhuman.

As it had been a burden I carried the reflection of his head into the rock. With ceaseless toil I imitated in two dimensions the apparition, the visible shocks, of this pointed form. Suddenly the hollowed confusion is recognisable. Here-below there is something more, and not the stony frame of his body, but the frame of his whole self, placed where I had chosen to place it, like a secret. . . . His secret? It is above all a part of *me*, chosen and torn from within, that is placed

there; each time I look at it, I am revealed. The new thing that I cannot tear myself from gazing upon is a *cry*—my *cry* that has taken a new form. It is a sort of *débris* that death will not know how to touch . . . that will wait on for ever; that will for evermore have increase from those that pass. The word of the mouth diffuses into emptiness and lives its death; the word made with the hand devours death. Henceforth among the living who fall slowly earthward this stone is alive like a tomb. It maintains: I last and endure; I extend myself; I have taken to myself that which I had not—and limitless joy alters me.

The inscription imposed upon the rock by the desperate hope of a crier who had taken a tool, is enlarged and reaches even to the stars, in temples.

Several points on the roof sparkle. Over there, are not those the escarbuncles of that temple which lights the shore of Ratnapura, made of the dust of rubies powdered by the waves, on the threshold of Taprobane the copper-coloured, the resplendent among all huge things?

No, it is the vast, helmeted temple of the Great Goddess; it is the shore of Byblos, the most ancient of all cities since she is the transported double of that which El Himself built on the White Mountain before those that gaze on the skies were fashioned upon earth; and the only glory of Beryta is to have been born almost on the same day. Through the branches of the forest where were harvested the ships, one can discern the slopes of Lebanon, the colour of morning mist, of the precious tin come from that northern sea that is gripped by the claws of the cold and the vestments of white. The water of the springs flows rose-

coloured, weaving rose-coloured ribbons, and the sea as far as the maritime lands of the Philistines makes rose-coloured ribbons, because of the eternal blood of Tammuz, Adon Adonim, who, since Astarte loved him, dies every year when summer slays the spring, and is resurrected when spring lives again despite winter, in the land of Canaan.

And far off from that evening and far off from that place, of a sudden, while I passed at the base of all things like a shade in whom mingle distant words and things disjointed—I who dream, invincible, the victory of joy—I saw the monument of light.

Above the evening-opascent sea heaving with its great diurnal tides, rise up the abrupt cliffs of dry land with forests like grass, cleaved by the beginnings of the celebrated defiles. On the harsh summit is the temple; one of the two original temples that the Lycian Cyclopes have hewn, to solidify the great names of Athens or Eleusis. The hand of man has directed the superhuman power of the rock towards the rising of the sacred constellation; and in order that its façade may remain perfectly applied towards that part of the measureless façade of the firmament, it must in the course of ages be turned like a boat. By day it adjusts itself to the sun. In the scarlet of evening it is red, because of the pure whiteness of the newborn marble—this great empty throne of wisdom. *Clarté*, clear, illuminant radiance, is the other form of wisdom; that which comes to dwell in the spaces of temples. This belvedere is truly naked at sunrise and sunset. Its importance is, to take the light of day like a mirror. Its splendour is, to be the funeral pyre of the sun.

[The cry, the call. . . . I must indeed confide my resolve to the sun and to the moon so that I may build grandeur with the grandeur that is in me. The tem-

ples of earth, their warrior mass sunk into the earth, their façades sealed by the harmony that is beyond the diversity of clouds, have sprung from flesh, for they prevent the dream from being carried off by each one that passes at the summit of his burden.

“And the temples are enlarged, and unfold themselves in books.”

I hear the voice of the master; he chants above the serried attentions—mine in a corner—that are like roses in the sanctuary:

“Bel said to Kasisatra: Throw away thy goods, but omit not, to take in the bituminous vessel that shall float above the annihilation of humanity, at the same time as the seeds of things—Books; those that contain the beginning, the middle, and the end.

“Thus did the just God announce that books are things that bring light into the light of day. It is by the discovery and the considered study of books that the war of the *cry* is to be pursued. And it shall come to pass that that which cannot be seen *shall* be seen, and that man shall so far raise himself that he shall discern as a single river the origins and the sense of humankind in the folds of nature. And above all, just books, weighty and sure: for these, through and beyond erring fables and the capricious shifts of opinions, shall show forth firm and solid the marvellous adventure of the mass.”

#### I HAVE A HUNDRED ARMS

I regain hold upon myself on the vast, beating shore. Like a ghost whose contours have converged from the horizon, I condense into myself. I sway and am suddenly intensely alive in the being of the sun.

I am become beautified. I have plumes, collars, well-



considered patches of colour, all taken from here and there about me. My destiny has filled out. The richness of my breast gleams radiant. The young man cannot conceal his respect; a bone shaped like a mask members his sombre face, his fist is the head of a club. I have slain them—creatures—to seize for myself their *raison d'être*. My hands have devoured lives. I have multiplied myself with inert things, and peopled me with dead men. Their suffering is but a word, the name of my giant—joy. There is not enough joy for all. If I had not been the slayer, all that I have dared love, all that I have set myself to hold, would have disappeared into others, as into holes in the ground.

Today above all I am resplendent with the blood of Eno, whom I tore to pieces before I strangled. Yes, his blood was still hot when it covered me. I have—admirable anointment—his mortal wound shining upon me. The sole head that was raised over against mine, above the low heads—it is broken like an earthen pot. On my chest is the lengthened, lengthened collar of his teeth! . . . And now, I have the arms of all.

I, who draw after me this fate—to be always the same, impelled by the need to persist, and to aggrandise myself, to begin anew; I want to reiterate my name; my breath must pass into my fellows; I want to tattoo something upon the skin of crowds and upon the skin of lineages. To use for myself those that have survived around *my* strength. And then, there must be lines drawn. . . . Authority . . . lines around and afar.

The emblem, the dog-head, is there—and to see it makes my laughter of pride fall like a cascade. Around the central treasure, the soul of the tribe, my arm, my great, strong arm, this branch of me. I am become

a tree that turns on its base, the beginning of a circular gesture that impends the face of the world to trace a line, a limit. The beginning of a great order that grips all the land with a name, that projects into space the dream that I revolve in my depths. (It is from night that colour comes forth.) A terrible cry. And behold. . . . Nothing. Nothing.

I am only a loose shred on the margin of the floating heaviness of the crowd. My face straining, attent, I gaze on what is happening in the cleared space.

Squatting, the man with the three oily plaits and the creased neck strikes the rock with great blows, deadly blows. The noise of his hammer is of iron. From time to time he turns his yellow face, with its curved eyes and its cheek-bone that juts like a fist—because of the personage who watches over him, formidable.

In his glittering robe, standing upright with his upright sceptre, the master of Heth—sole king, for he has dethroned his brother—has about him the allied sovereigns; about his shoes with their upturned toe-points, in the rocky space whence the servile crowd has been cleared. And one sees the resplendent princes of Ilion, of Pedasos, of Mysia, of Lycia, and the envoys of Arad, queen of the wares, which is the same as riches, and of the land of Amaour.

The group of these essential men, infinitely more heavy on the earth than other men; these men who fashion the earth according to their egoisms, who laugh at the powers between whom they are placed—for they have strength to defend barriers; who await with firm-planted foot Pharaoh, and the Czar of Nineveh, that recent daughter of Kalak, she who is herself daughter of Assur;—these men gaze on the cliff plat-

form-space that the workman fashions with groaning breath.

The great sovereign of the people of Heth uses artifice. Immobile, he wields the hewer of stone, who is but the tool of a tool. He ordains that there shall be written, from left to right and from right to left, the testimony that shall prolong his glory among the men of the future, and his name, the sign of his shining solitude.

And he has wished that there shall be introduced into the violent obdurate rock, an image—the opened, poised eagle with wide shadowing wings and two heads, which symbolises force;—that is, rending and devouring, the splendid creation of misery for others, to the east and to the west. The dust flies from the granite, strident under the sharp blows, as the lines and forms cut themselves in. The Isolate: it is in him, it is in his heart of granite that the royal eagle unfurls, and at each stroke he tenses.

Eyuk, nest of mineral birds—stone and metal—which shall enter into the flesh of the crowds that are spread out like tith lands! Eyuk, the rocky centre whither just reaches, like a pinion, the crenelated shadow of Gargamish the Naharanæan, the city of cities, which was the first after Khati, and which shall be of peopled lands the last!

I gazed down unhappily to the bottom of the furnace of flashing whiteness, of the white fire of day, in the ravine of regular blocks that lie, scattered haphazard; in the ravine where I await with the workers. Upon these white, sun-vivid cuirasses, upon these millstones of light, was a black block, everywhere broken up by sharp points; the flung shadow, designed from the life as in flowing pitch, that a squatting Shasu—

two paces from me, his chin on his knees—daubs without knowing it on the silver-whitened plaque of the squared stone against which he leans. His shoulders, angular and flat like a door-lintel, the sun-lit triangle of arm bent at the elbow, the pointed egg of his head, and there, and there, the two knotches of his knees—all of a thick black that the porous stone scarce limned in.

It was a negro from Punt, and the white dust deposited in the cracks of his skin powdered and hollowed with bluish crescents the relieve of his pitch-black chest. His head of pounded, shining lava was covered with pale wool. For we were in the continental construction-yard, in the country of fearful whiteness, of new stone, of stone that is sawn, scraped, polished even into our hair, in the country of clouds of stone.

The monumental blocks must all pass here—dragged, pushed, struck—to go to form the great sepulchre whose inclined plane slopes gently both toward the azure and toward the earth. It is so huge that it is redoubtable to behold. (If thou regardest the smooth slope of one of them that is finished, and set forth into space, putting thy two hands on the fleeing base, thou feelst thyself lifted up by the middle, thou seest thy look glide into the air, then roll back and reflux upon thee, and re-enter thine entrails.) It is impossible to move these virginal, frightful rocks; and yet, surrounded by an ant-like swarm, they are detached with extreme exactitude from the Arabic pylones; then they follow the water, and escalate the causeway that goes through sand and through marsh, over the rolling countryside of the Delta where each palm-tree is silhouetted, shimmeringly. And the

causeway is piled high upon itself so that the stone blocks may be inserted as the courses rise up steadily.

If this region of the earth with brand-new ruins, if the down-crushing city of massive houses in each of which dwells nought save the blind stone, changes its form, it is because for a quarter of a century a hundred thousand men have here toiled. They drag the enormous block like ships cleaving the earth, they drag them into the sand and out of the sand; they unroot them with their strength and fashion the mountain statue with their hands. The work of each individual counts for nothing—he cannot see what he is doing. Yet all is accomplished.

In the intervals of the toil that is watched and sharply stimulated by guards whose very voice is a blow, we fall back here and there, supporting ourselves on the blazing stones that are whiter than white from the sun, so that our perspiring eyelids are sore and aching while our feet are in a pool of shadow. I am in pain because I have struck hatefully at my task, that has struck back, and wounded me. The tool and my arm make one single instrument, hardened right to its root, that is planted in my heart. The workers, their bodies. . . . Work with its hundred different pains, the child-bearing of males. And we are there. . . . The labour draws sweat from us, drenches us with moisture. Our hands hanging down, burnt and weeping from the incandescent stone-dust, our tongues as white as our teeth, breathless, mere corpses of Force. The hand of the slave, slipping down over the flat, tooled side of the bleached hardness, leaves a starred, humid and smoking trace; it vibrates before my sick eyes.

The pitch-black negro with his milky scales opens his mouth to eat some garlic, and his greasy hand goes

up to his jaw—the swollen half of his head with its gleaming fissure. There is a strong smell of coarse food. But the crawling animal is proud, and he dares to use his mouth to boast of the worth of his race, though his one-time king, spared for the sake of his looks, follows His Holiness like a greyhound.

I do not reply to the sacrilege of the vile child of Sit—brother of the impure hind and the hippopotamus, for a profound bitterness floods my heart, and fatigue suggests mourning; and this thought has come to me during this one moment among all the moments of the day: in order that the successor and destroyer of Senofru may have a tomb that shall inscribe his name for all eternity; in order that his mummy, the socle of his immortality, shall be sufficiently concealed and sufficiently protected, a hundred thousand men must toil for thirty years. That means more than a thousand million days of work—for one man! And if the phantastic solitary took only captives, impure strangers, it would be well—(for does not Horus himself give us the example by immolating some alien man each day after putting out the crocodile's eye, when his celestial vessel enters the domain of morning?). But there are not enough captives, and free-born Egyptians like myself have been conscripted. I, a free labourer! It has been done because we are poor. If the light of day could be bought and stored, the poor would not get a pinpoint. And when we are worn out and dead, we shall be put into the earth at two cubits depth, not embalmed, nor even clothed; and thus deprived of all support we shall be excluded from the life to come, annihilate. He who is poor is as the vanquished.

The glossy, black, moulded ribs of the form in front of me lengthened and went up and down as in a mir-

ror, and were striated as if pulled out by one's forefinger—for I was gazing through my tears.

But there was silence in the land of man-made rocks, silence in every throat, in every thought, in every grief.

For upon the summit of the terrestrial heave raised by his future tomb, Khufu himself had deigned install himself to take count of our labours. Khufu himself, the double master of the two worlds, from Anu to Abu, from the papyrus to the lotus, the legitimate son of Onofroui. He is God because he is King and King because he is God. He is seated on the other side of law. Usually he is not seen, or only once or twice in each destiny. Pharaoh is invisible and human supplication is blind.

But I, I see him at this moment! I can read his form, yonder in the narrowed space that the slopes of the two rows of stone silhouette hatchet-wise on the perspective of the plateau and of the sky. He floats in distance amid circles of gold. He, the irresistible conductor of the thirty days of the month. He who manufactures grandeur by the aid of the mass. He is so surrounded by needle-points of light, so devoured by aureoles and points of gold, that he seems small and black in the distance, like a character of writing—for after all, he is a sort of man. The glory of the setting sun disperses in long universal petals above his tiara; scattered seed of *Clarté*. The sun-in-heaven rains down on the sun-on-earth starry sundust, a perfect radiant pyramid. Yonder aloft, the barque Soktit, weighed down by its gleaming burden, lets the thick banners of light stream away, the vast transparent blaze which overflows the lake of the Nile as the Nile overflows its own two banks. . . . Sun—appear to us, for we know thee not!

I was consoled for my own small grieving by the feast of the presence of His Holiness; and long after, I was consoled when I called up before me the glory of that unbelievable moment where he was before my eyes.

## ALL

"Each of us, O Ligarion, is a mystery that dissolves; the poet must not stop short at the individual; he must include all men."

Thus speaks Méléas on the warm, heavy, upward pathway, as I shut fast my eyes that stream with light against the assault of the gleaming, glass-green leaves—(and against these nests of vivid brightness is the black, whistling, crooked line of flight of a bee).

I climb on. I had stopped in a whirl, stubborn and as if stupefied; but I came hard back to earth, into the very midst of nude, crude, Nature, and the strong savage light. About me are the quivers of the myrtle, the hard gentleness of a she-goat, the hatchet-backs of the black buffaloes scattered over the country-side; and beyond is the circular inundation, and the reddish beaches painted sharply in white and in brilliant rust by the waves—the slender bi-coloured, re-echoing beaches—and the voice of Méléas.

He tells me that the poet is a soothsayer, and that this soothsayer must depart from each to go to all; seek out the wondrous adventure of the masses.

"The masses that make war," murmured within me a closed, unwilling voice.

"The masses that make things!"

My great companion opens space for me. My feet climb step by step upon the world. And thus, by the help of height, we attain to the vision of the masses and the cities of silence, the living necropolises where



they are ensepulchred, nameless; to the vision of their sorrow and their joy that stretch away beyond the horizon, and that are unheeded. The wind, so strong that it makes waves in the far-off forests, inserts its lever between the boulders, shakes the steady sunshine, and hurls itself especially at me. Right to the belly I drink in, willy-nilly, its sharp, bitter tang. I drink in the red, blue, green landscape, and the double estuary of the immense panorama.

Iamgadal! The name resounds and appears, as if present in person in the structure of land and sky, as if it tinted the sea.

My gaze travels further and further over the mountain from the vantage point of our steep path. The spiral of a stairway, that is like a new instrument, a sort of strange frame that surpasses me, mingles with Jacob's ladder, the stairway of the clouds. The desert divides and rears itself back from where I stand, like another Red Sea.

Up above, on a black knoll, a man kneels, and lifts up his hands in the solar purple; his arms are as if nailed to the rays. Flashing gleams of light show forth his helm and his scaly cuirass. Over his shoulder hangs a tiger-striped skin. Around him, in the distance, planted like rows of copper nails on a living palisade, the Hebrew trumpets—and celestial battalions animating the crests of the awesome cupolas.

The voice of my great companion wearies not in breathing into me universality:

“Poet, poet, play not on the lyre with the sound of words, but make that which is:—war. Happiness that is cruel. Never life *and* life; always life *against* life. The redskinned warrior with his sparrow-hawk amulet must fall upon the dun Anu who watched his flocks of gazelles; and upon the southern wanderer with

black, oily, shining hair, the fugitive of the high plateaux; and upon this stranger another—the insatiable exile from the paradise of white men, Aryanem Vaedjo. The Siculi with their stone axes upon the Sicani who were almost weaponless, and upon the Siculi, the Greek with his bronze axe that cleaved as close and as sharp as the edge of the Scarabs' cuirass; of the Siculi, nought remains save the name, trampled under foot on the island of Trinacria. And the Thyrsa, whose boats are marine monsters, upon the Italiot—Sabellian and Umbrian—or some other blasted name borne by the weak and the vanquished.

“Never life *and* life, always life *against* life.

“You are the inhabitants of the shore that the Inner Sea washes, from Joppa to the river of Egypt? We, we are the Philistines, a stricken remnant that survives of the peoples of the sea. Driven thence, we disembark here to be your overlords, and for that you shall be the multitude of our armies. . . . They are here before you; try to see them through that which has fallen since: clear-cut, white, declining any new gestures—dusty statues of stone in front of the breaches of temples, or cunningly armoured in their death against the decay of the flesh by philtres—those who, among others in the dead past, were the Sarnim of the Pentapolis: Padi, prince of Ekron, Mitinti, prince of Ashdod, and Zillibel, prince of Gaza: they, or their portraits (a portrait . . . that amazing being that is equally dead and alive).”

And he continues, more strongly, to efface reality by yet more reality.

“*All, Ligarion, all!* Everything comes from the mass, from that mass whose silence, by its own grandeur, overflows and streams afar from the great, deserted cities. Let the poem enter into it once more,

plunge into it, like the falling rock that makes a wave in the sea! Call up before thine eyes the marvellous flowering in wisdom of some public gathering that, moving yet held fast, shall listen to the work. See with thine eyes, with all thy flesh, O poet, the echoed ritual of that sea of heads; the ardent, manual crowd; all the fertile labour changed into attention—at the sovereign call of one who has found happiness.”

The sea appears rounded-out; from aloft one can discern its body, the desert of its shapes, and its intangible, indestructible ruins. The fortresses, moulded glossy cliffs with white panels, chequered like cloths and laced by pathways upon the blue and mirrored silver of the sea—these are the counting-houses where the Canaanites of Lebanon strut and have their being, the adroit, organising, rich pirates of commerce.

They are come from Tilvun, the Persian isle whence the Fish-God set forth to tow the ark of salvation through the waters of the deluge to the sole, island shore of the waste; the crown of one of the Gordyæan mountains.

They have traced out their busy lines among the first floating hordes of the Pelasgi and Danæans and the advance-guard of the Archipelago, at the limit of Iamgadal, the Inner Sea.

The peninsula of Sidon, the islands of Arad (fed by a submarine spring of fresh water) and of Tyre that is planted with masts:—the cities of ships that have the breadth and spread of the wind, scintillating masses whence go out boldly along the surface great lines that seem now jetties, now waves, the black entrepôts stretching like clouds along the coast, the black towers

that support float-boards, the curved basins bordered with white zigzags; and the silky roadsteads where the armies of broken waves—the dust of navigation—fall naturally into great, distinct quarterings, as if the seas were oblique.

It is the Canaanites of the shore who have pioneered the great trade routes of raw-materials through the world. There is the maritime route of Tin which crosses the terminal bounds of Melkarth and climbs northward to the Caledonian fogs: there is that of Perfumes which, through the maritime corridor of reeds, reaches the seaports of the Aromatics, the lands of the Hymiarites and of the Sabæans, and even, it is said, fabulous Ophir: there is that of Gold, that goes down the world along the coast of Punt for many months of navigation, to the extreme southern territories of the negroes, to the estuaries of the two unexplored rivers between which gold is scattered broadcast. And there are the great overland routes, marked out by depots of merchandise and of weapons where come and go the caravans organised for trade and adventure—teaching and increasing the law of exchange—according to force—and fraud. And the route of Amber that goes even to the hyperborean coasts of the Cimbri, to the cold lands where the pole-star is in the zenith. The route of Jade and Silk, the central routes of humanity whereby whole populations changed their destiny—millions of men, driving before them millions of animals, disappeared, to reappear elsewhere; (and so powerful were the currents they drew after them that there flowed away, through the same breaches and at the same time as the surging sea of human heads, the waters of Han-Hai, the vast inland sea of which nought remains save uncertain wandering pools in the depths of Mongolia).

Multitude has changed the face of nature. Multitude has produced cities.

Along the seashores, it has made a constellation of temples that are sufficiently far apart for each magnificence to be wide-displayed. It has inscribed, from the east to the west horizontal civilisations whose universal characteristic is, to have been successively more beautiful. It has waged, by means of work, the great war of creation.

My companion, his scant hair waving above me, shows me the rhythm of the stones, the resplendent victory of regularity.

We think of the vast masses of the living. He says: "Seek their joy."

My eyes went forth to seek the joy of creators.

Sombre masses are at the base of the mountain; the world gradually darkens, like the sky before a storm. The converging lines of the highways and their junctions, the expeditions and the traffic, plunge into the bottomward shallows that exhale strength; the shallows whence are come the strength, the life, and the exaltation even of kings.

My gaze—that half of myself—falls like a stone, from I know not what narrow stair-head, straightly down through the geometries of space, drawing from me a heightened, vertiginous gasp. I discern a movement in which nought save movement can be distinguished. It is made up of points, in the distance where is no longer colour. It is the trampled, social layer, the agglomerate, animal crowd, low on the ground and earthy, that hurls itself upon the elements with tools, or upon its own body with tools gone mad.

A fog of voices. What are they saying? By what

clamour are they distinguished and revealed? It is ever the same cry that all, all chant—whining or weeping. They cry: "*I, I, I first!*" They say: each against all. They hurl against each other their need to persist. They testify that their terrible destiny is, victory or defeat, and that there is no peace between those twain.

And lower still I discern as if I had been suddenly set down beside him, a being who is succumbing beneath a burden. . . . I see, half sunk into the earth and half drowned in the air, the Caryatid.

It is that which upholds all else. The whole world is a many-floored palace, a temple, a throne based on his level nape, superposed on the symmetrical courses of his bowed shoulders, on the great, dark slabs of his back, on the indented, stony line of his backbone. The torso of the vanquished is dislocated by the universal burden. His chest and his grimacing visage are the colour of earth and its minerals, pick-axed and forged and knobbed and hollowed by his effort. He is the monster of effort, that lifts up from out of nothingness power, law, event; that carries the living globe; Atlas! The hideousness of his paroxysm, and filth, and vice, and the furrows of mental night make bestial the face of the Titan. He is in the muddy night of poverty. About him is cosmic ignorance, and mire in clouds, drifts, masses. All is black, as black as the sewer I was shown beneath the temple at Jerusalem, through which ran out the blood of victims; as black as that sterile dust made of cinders and burnt bones, of the baked corruption fallen from the altars, that I saw accumulate in an oval hillock before the oil-streaming statue of Olympian Zeus.

The exclamation of egoism against egoism envelops him on every side with a groaning fog. The invincible war for victory or defeat, for heaven-on-earth or hell-

on-earth. "The happiness of one man depends on the unhappiness of another" . . . For that is written everywhere, that is proclaimed on every fronton, on every altar, as if this pathetic, ferocious lamentation contained the whole mystery of the house of Adam.

The head seen close up. The anvil of the low forehead where are sunk the lessons of the shadows. The too small hiding place of the brain, where the eyes, the flowering of the sombre human depths, enter in by their double stem—his repulsed, aborted, downcast gaze. The mouth through which is exhaled the exigent breath, and the rhythmical groaning of the muscular machine.

A man, an ordinary man such as one might meet any day, at evening, by some river-side—a bargee, a breaker of stones, a labourer or a soldier. Tomorrow as today he must strive with all his might, lest he be overcome by the weight of all that presses down upon him. And yet, since he bears all things upon his shoulders, he contains within him the earthquake. And inside his head that confronts me upon this evening . . . what? *There* shall blossom forth the joyous refusal. *There* shall be born the word of the masses, whose first unformed form is this cry of *No!*

A chilly breeze has effaced everything on the hard islet where we stand, a breeze from immeasurable distance, that has passed over the thousand Necropolises that mark out and measure the dimensions of death.

I see the horizon all around me as from an island in the sea. The clouds move past to right and left in great drifts interspersed with empty spaces. I sway backwards and forwards, I fall, although I am already firmly pressing into the earth, gripped tight in my in-

tense effort. The heavy, planed soil slips away from under me and then returns, like a massive blow. Covered with sweat, my eyelids glitter in the sun with drops of fire. I can see the mantle that the stinging oblique rain brings forth from the sea; and I can see the sweat of my body that sticks to my thighs and rubs and irritates me like an ill-fitting skin. My huge, horned, black knees, and my thick foot that flexes, with the sole tapping flatly in the muddy, trickling water, and my streaming fists that are red-glazed pottery veined with blue. My hand is on a squared joist. My two hands that are like raw, moistened meat flatten themselves on the rough wood, backward and forward: . . . the oars: . . . my body is coupled to its body that passes beyond my sight. I can feel my arms, like strained cords, and the surge of my strength. I pull like two chains, complexes of chains are within my arms and stretch the skin, my shoulders heave, my neck cracks with a rusty sound, like the rounded neck of the mast in the wind.

High on the gallery a thick-set man in a Phrygian cap overlooks us. He gesticulates, shouts and strikes.

I turned my head. I saw the others who, like myself, are rowing; shaven, razed heads the colour of stone, their foreheads bound with cloth and with their own blue veins that bulge with the pulsing blood. And by this movement of mine I have upset the adjustment of the long wooden apparatus that, beaded with heads, follows closely the sides of the boat, and gives it a symmetrical élan that is wingless, like the Egyptian sparrow-hawk. And now the guardian of order has leapt to his bowed legs. His gesture, the turning wheel of his whip—his red cap in the middle—is directed toward me. My miserable head is struck. I resound like metal, right to the heart.



I cried out: "Hei," and in the madness of my pain I stopped rowing. A groaning cry that I howled like a dog or a nightmare with the full strength of my voice! I let drop the oar, I let drop everything. And it happened that my voice—that thing—entered into the others. The wooden cavern of the rowers grumbles; the wood itself, stopped short, cries out. And now some, awkwardly, have stopped altogether, and rise up—dazed, like cattle confronting an empty space.

I struck at the forehead, the cranium, of the red cap, dodging the whip. Others about me struck out, and suddenly, around my own arm were twenty strong arms. His scarlet cap was smashed on to his head and on to his shoulders. His cracking, empurpled carcass, doubled up on the deck, was beaten like iron on an anvil and smashed in, and his limbs soldered to his trunk underneath the bench where it was forced like a chunk of wood; and there it rested in a ball with the violet horror of its anger nailed to its face, the eyes burst in and rivulets of black blood thickly encrusting his neck, like the bark of a pine-tree.

And on the bridge, men at arms—bucklers, glaives, pikes, clanging swords—around one of the masters who kneels on a cushion of rich cloth.

I jumped into the sea, and others on each side of me jumped, too; straight in like wooden things.

My breath stops short, the water pricks me. My life, withdrawn into me, gasps. The sea is unchained. The huge boat before which I seem suddenly very small rolls and heaves away from me, with its toothed rows of oars. From the slope of a watery valley, I heard right through its sides which, like ramparts of bronze overhung my brittle scalp, the low tumult of the bales of Phœnician merchandise stowed away in the hold. The boat was no more.

The water unfurls and swirls about me in scarlet ribbons and shadowy serpents. Vats of dark blue, vats of sky blue, roaring vats. The hollows and slippery sides of obscure hills, all of them yellow on their summits. I go up, I go down. The great icy see-saw lifts me up and then flattens me out, pounds my ears, applies sudden bars of cold to my neck, and sends jets of bitterness into my mouth, like an impure beast.

With my forearms and the palms of my hands I strike out.

I strike out at its howling aspirations, its cataracts, its blinding, watery lightnings. The water is as thick as fish-spume, thick with the smell of fish, the smell of a whole fish-market. I turn round and round, my face masked and liquefied.

The back of the deep-rooted reef is glaucous. The water is its cuirass. It grinds like a mill, and when I am thrown up and wielded on high I see on its peak-like summit, first swelling full and then drawing out, thinly, the gigantic braided muscles of the sea.

Around me gleaming bucklers come and go. There are wells sunk into the sea. Hewn full out of the liquid matter are torrent cross-roads which destroy one another. The tentacle of a gulf, a spiral that is colder than cold, drags hold of me by the heels; still upright I slip down . . . my open eyes grated harshly by the friction of my fall see and look round in the depths of the drowned water; palpable death. Shadows. The blood of the sea is black.

Then I am hurled elsewhere, as if I were a light projectile, by this vast softness that is full of shocks, that has me in its grip; and the cold wills that I shall be straight and rigid; it claws at my skin with its nails, grips tight my limbs, screws down my joints and makes my teeth chatter.

The swelling sea that is myriads of times heavier than I, heaves so that I cannot stir, so that my eyes almost burst. The heaviness of the sea mounts up and turns back. Fatigue is stuck fast to me, my weight is infernal. I am my own stifling enemy; and right up to the mouth I enter into these formless, stinking entrails.

Then I looked upon my last hour, then I saw in a dream the northern lands whence long ago I was carried off . . . the country of tin and the isles of the Cassiterides, while across the glory of the sea passes, jolting, the chariot of Melkarth.

But a kindly wave fished me up and raised me on high at that moment showing me the rocky thundering coast.

Now I am stoned by the foam. The rock crystal of the waters thickens into bubbles and then into marble. The waves rush out in foaming jaws and in flat snowy cloths sifted all over with watery boulders. They carry me on, then drag me back again, poised above them.

Nevertheless I rolled whither I had wished, but powerless, with the worn-out oars of my arms on the last wave, into the scattered breakers of the bay . . . in dazzling, bitter, bursts of light that are like hammer-strokes, I can discern the line of the shore above this mountainy transparence that shrills cries and plays with me. Up above, over there is a red block beneath the sky with two bowed peaks at each end. I saw it climbing up and going down again, but the waves are sovereign and when they have pushed me forward, then they drag me back again with their anchors.

A column. . . . I see it. . . . It is planted white and smooth on the stony beachless shore beneath an archway of rust red rocks, among glutinous red gum

trees. All this I see when the wave swells back and descends in a great, oblique, pouring cascade. I shall never arrive there. I am hurled, vomited upon it, then dragged away. This time I am going to touch it. . . . I grasp it, I grasp it, and it slips sharp-cutting and oily-smooth far from the sick clutch of my hand.

A wave breaks over me like a wall, the column is against my breast in a field of whistling whiteness, sharply it enters into my flesh and I close upon it, I embrace it, and I gaze at it with my whole strength while the undertow laces me violently round my neck and round my stomach, drags at me and strangles me, and creates for itself a supple body to fight limb to limb against mine; the shaft of stone breaks and a fragment comes away, bearing the signs which have been engraved upon it. Before my face is the triangular clear cut form of a dog's head; into my pupils that are washed and hurt by the sea it brings a puissant vision of disaster and joy.

Others, like myself, have been thrown up safe by the sea. They climb the rocky shore with all their strength. There, bending down and gripping tight, is the Ethiopian, and the wind and the sea lash and shake drops of spray upon the soft bronze of his cheek. I see them climb up, naked and glazed by the water and unscaled of the sun by the wind. Their shoulders are poised, their short heads are pyramidal, glitters of water and splashes of foam are mingled in their close-cut hair. Their eyes are level with their heads, their muscles that are like spindles and discs are piled up and bolted to one another grooving upon themselves, lustrous roundnesses in the brutal sun, like the silexes of scarabs. They pant, and the pestles of their throats rise and fall and their cavernous bellies are drawn out and hol-

lowed by the claws of their striated sides. And they do not help one another—not one has a look for anyone but himself.

Toward what destiny do we climb? We do not know, for we are fleeing into the future. But nothing could be worse than that from which we have come after the Carthaginian merchants had borne us off from our homes that now are ruined and forgotten even by ourselves. Nothing can be worse.

Up yonder, bare fists grip the rock in the sunshine, the slabs and bases and regular blocks whereon are written the verses of the laws of the land and sea, laws like tombs, for life is victory or defeat and the happiness of some is built upon the unhappiness of others.

I have taken foot-hold, still unbalanced, sonorous and icy cold, still but half disincarnated from the sea. Violently I throw off this sea-weed that sticks to my forehead and blinds me—and I sway about, my hand to my head, as if I were still pushed forward and drawn back in the heart of the measureless wave.

On the landing of my staircase under the glass roof I almost fell forward because of the force of this gesture. *And I saw myself*, coming out from my vision with my arm uplifted, like a phantom. I surprised myself at that moment when I was still my own shade. I perceived two beings melt in me, and my hand stayed near my calm, safe, twentieth century head, with its eyeglass and its soft hat.

## II

### THESE ARE MEMORIES

My key rattles in the keyhole. I enter.

Mechanically I seize the cold lamp reeking with paraffin that stands in the corner and turn up the wick with my hot fingers. In the glimmering light cast by the lamp in my hand I can see the ornaments in the narrow antechamber and the square room, encircling my upright form which I cannot see, and the distorted zigzag of my shadow.

Here are the motionless table, the pictures occupying their monotonous places on the wall, the bits of pottery in their familiar grouping creating a whole which is impressed upon the retina, the inanimate blue sofa which serves me as a bed in the depth of the four-cornered recess—the presence-absence of everything!

This dream. . . .

What is it? By what am I assailed?

During certain periods of my life I have had abnormal dreams so extremely violent and tangible that they intrude upon the half confusion of my recollections.

When I was seventeen years I had a mania for repeating too frequently: "Have I really done this or that, or said it, or did I dream it?" But these dreams only developed during sleep in the paralysis of the night hours when I lay passive between the sheets, and never were those disturbances as strong and as striking as this hallucination.

I had just felt—I still feel—the shiftings of the walls of the universe, of the winds directed against myself, of the power of the void when I fell into space like a leaden bird. I have suffered in my own body the extent and precipitation of distance visible and audible as a solid thing.

I have felt my head whirling round filled with the pressure of the rush, and in the distance the vertiginous slowness of the circulatory movements of clouds and ships. I have gathered up the immensity of the sea stretching to the horizon. I have breathed in the flood of odours. The resonances—a mingling of waves and dulled sounds—are woven into the fibre of my brain. And the concrete majesty of those presences. *Colour comes forth from night.* This cry uttered from the depths of his soul, issued in groans from the being who stood up straight and vast in my place.

I look at myself in the glass to efface that which has no existence. I am in a black suit, my overcoat open. Resting upon the papers on my table is my stylograph, magnified by a ray of light.

I go down on my knees, and stretching out my arms mechanically light the fire that I had laid before going out to Ariés' party. What worries me above all else is, that I had not noticed that I was going upstairs. The sense of the unconscious which temporarily interrupted my waking self (this black hiatus in my real life) grips me and stays my hand. And yet, thinking on it amid the smoke of the paper, I have an absolutely detailed remembrance of mounting each stair.

Very quickly this consistent and solid impression of the stairs and floors in shadow at my feet springs forth in parallel lines, then masses itself above the dream and I am saved. I escape somewhat from the fascina-

tion of the limitless air. My room once more has walls.

I force myself to open the cupboard. The door resists. What is it? It is locked. I had, indeed, locked it—I had forgotten that. But the door had not.

Inconvenienced by the very troublesome angle of the table I sit down on the blue sofa. I wish to become myself again among the objects lying around whose absolute passivity is sad but yet tranquillising. Helped by the noise of the fire in the grate where is yesterday's refuse I return to my dominant preoccupation, what ought certainly to be my dominant preoccupation. Marthe Uriel, my poem. It is the same cause of anxiety. She will love me if I have genius, if I become greater than the others—my colleagues who spied us earlier on . . . earlier on . . . yes, just now—amid the coloured lights of the studio, each with his warlike cry of: "I" on his lips! I speak aloud to myself so as not to be disturbed by the inner voice. In a loud voice I utter the name Marthe Uriel and then, in a lower but stronger tone: Marthe! This name is new here and there is a kind of visible astonishment in the room at hearing it. . . . This woman, more precious than any of the others whom I have ever met, whose smile I retain in my memory and whose approach and advent I sense. . . .

But my attention will not yield to guidance; it is shaken and then carried away by all the images I have been revolving in my head!

No doubt the overstrain of my recent nights of hard work has reacted in incoherent psychic phenomena.

I turn over the pages containing the sketch of my poem. The cerebral lassitude from which I am suffering reveals nothing to my gaze but my big handwriting. Fever burns within me. I rise and go to the kitchen



to draw and drink a glass of fresh water; the steel-cold water revives me and clears my brain.

I re-read the title, the prefatory invocation. . . . I get back into what I have been doing. Then, suddenly, I am ashamed of myself.

Oh, how great and solemn is this evening! I no longer like my lines! Nothing now can prevent me from depreciating myself as I re-read them. Dull pages! Lifeless words! Words from which nothing but an empty meaning can be drawn; a plan far greater than the actual accomplishment lying there visibly and clumsily spoiled. My refining away, my ultra simplicity, are two puerile excesses. Artificial and ignorant. . . .

Letters ought to be not the actual black that they are, but luminosity on the whiteness. The Just God announced thus that books are something that bring light to the light of day.

In the supernatural confusion from which I can no longer escape it was a question of the book settling human affairs.

This book, how could I have planned it! The beauty which a toiler, released from his daily work, creates notwithstanding it and in opposition to it, is the sole absolute innovation which can be attained on this earth. There is no ignorance so perfect here below as that which precedes the creation of a masterpiece. Where then is genius and how is it achieved?

As if I know! But I do know that this book springing like all other books from daily life and the manners of the day, will contain much that is trivial; it will have a place for the crowd and it will delineate the supreme design which is at once so stable and yet so revolutionary; the limitation of each and of all.

My head sinks into my hands. I collapse. It is

essential that the most profound mental gropings should end in the discovery of a correspondence between each and all. Somewhere must be discovered the identity of the individual with scattered humanity. Somewhere the dividing walls must vanish. Whatever be thy research that must thou seek. Whenever thou speakest thou must express likeness and agreement. The genius of being understood. . . . The crowds, the animated multitudes on the shores, the night sparkling with stars, the fertility of cities, the waving banners which the armies acclaim and bear with them, the charnel dust which form the slope of the sacred primordial mountains. Asnaventa whence came the idea of Zoroaster, or Ararat or Demavend whence the eye sweeps at a glance ocean, river and plain; or Mount Mérou clad all round in beauty of time: this Ceylon which gave its name to the sky and shows at its highest terrestrial point the foot of Adam. . . . Oh, I am scarce freed from a high flood-tide; it still holds me! . . . The conscious streams which have endured for years and have spread out the dimensions of the plain and also from life to death and from death to life; the lines of life, the Caspian gates, the keys of the world, Hérat and Banian, the Caucasian gorge of Darial full of runic inscriptions seen by the eye between Siberian Altai and Scandinavia—the tumultuous crowds, the resting places at the crossing of the ways, at the breaches in the fortifications, at the fords of the water courses, at the mouths of the neighbouring valleys, at the circuit of the most impenetrable of all the barriers of nature; the prisons of blackness, the patterned hell of the forests! . . .

But . . . suddenly— Oh, Oh! I stand upright. There is something I forget when I say to explain it

all—overwork—and the bad dreams of ill-health. I am a fool never to have thought of this.

What are these nightmares made of—their actual substance, their concretions of proper names? Yes, above all else, this element of proper names, unalterable, chemical, against which the most disordered imagination of one individual can do nothing.

They come from somewhere. Whence? Not from me. They are linked to nothing in me, not those, even which a momentary return of my dream rivets on my mind. To nothing.

All this is totally alien to my preoccupation and worse still, alien to my knowledge. I am a humble product of the Lycée who has never travelled save from my Provence to Paris, and intensely ignorant—like all the West. If anybody lives at the antipodes of history and archeology, it is surely I. I only know what is requisite for a literary man. And how irritated I am by the hobbies of my uncle Raphard, the intellectual star of Alican, with his craze for ruins, excavations and coins.

No, the fact remains that I do not know any of these proper names. They have the hard, dry angles of words which had not yet been introduced into the mechanism of the ear and the throat. They are rough, astonishing, sepulchral. Iamgadal, Heth, Khoufou. . . . Their clearness arises from the unexpected; from the frozen and corpse-like absurdity which crystallises in my flesh and makes my teeth chatter.

Nevertheless, they are *appliquéd* on me.

I get up, I walk about. I try very hard to calm myself, to take a saner view. Nevertheless, this can only emanate from myself. There is only one solution; these details, some of which are connected with the general ideas that I have, I must have read some-

where, somewhen, in books, or rather (for I should remember, probably, books) in articles in some encyclopedia; perhaps I have heard them at college courses, lectures, in conversations. . . . Perhaps in my uncle Raphard's chatter—though he boasts that he knows nothing outside the Middle Ages. —

And then I recollect a curiosity noted in technical psychological treatises: that sensations once registered on the cerebellum are always in existence—as if in a state of suspense—and are always capable of manifestation under the influence of a particular sort of excitation. The case is quoted of a completely illiterate old woman in a hospital who, in her delirium, began to recite faultlessly long passages of Latin, Greek, and Rabbinical Hebrew. It was ultimately discovered that, thirty years before, this woman had been for a time servant to a clergyman, and had heard, while she was busied at her own tasks, her employer reading texts aloud. The material impressions corresponding to the auditory perceptions had remained in this servant's head, and the pathological disturbance—a surgical phonograph—had given them utterance.

That's it. I have the clue, the only clue—but I am astounded to learn that I knew all this without knowing it—and all the same, I instinctively refuse to admit it.

But what are books to palpable, pulsating things? I was in the very centre of what I had seen—of what I had lived through. This creature crouched in the sand before me, actual as newly-spilt blood, the taste of her love in my mouth; her proximity that made my hand shake and moisten; the naked thing which is her laugh, the all-powerfulness of three strands of hair

turning white in the sun against the winding shell of her ear; the wind wreathed rocky pools in which bloom serpentine gardens. The waves sweeping in, at first arched, shimmeringly, blue, then gnashing their teeth in foam, their down-falling crests thundering from one end of the beach to the other. . . . And the mighty suction of their withdrawal, the water's claws clutching the fine spun sand denuding and shattering the shining pavement of shingle. . . . The regular demolition of the mountains of Arabia. . . . To displace the blocks that are inserted into the mass of the world, space itself must be shattered. . . . The burning levels of the temple that mirror the fire on high. . . . The cloven prow of the columns that by night are turned towards the rising of Sirius and by day are the perfect beacon of the Sun!

I *saw* that slave's body fettered in earth's uttermost depths: I, a crawling atom on an ant-heap, with the wholly imperceptible sacrifice of all my labour, saw Pharaoh in his radiant-clouded tent, at the summit of a smooth, precipitate incline whose colossal height voided the eye.

I saw the battle. I saw—since I see them again—two struggling forms; strife itself swaying before temples and before names; a maze of lines articulated by points. All dimensions are confused. Those two forms—insects crawling one toward the other on their angular limbs with desire to destroy—rise up like waves to devour each other. One is made of green lineaments on which are traced wings of grass, and at the end of a neck as long as a stick two turquoises peer out from the sides of a bullet-head, while in front is an apparatus of enormous flails, double-hinged and furnished with blades perpetually hammering and sawing. The other, more compactly built, is fitted into armoured

cuirasses of which the topmost—the thorax—held together as if with padlocks—carries the weird lantern of its head. One has overcome the other; rending, grinding, utterly destroying. The victor on six golden and mobile pillars, horizontally sharpened and shining like flashes of lightning rushes into a chaos of earth-fragments between the huge blades of grass.

Our need to persist is like a central flame that holds together the atoms of which we are comprised. On this axis, effort, like the world, revolves.

I am drawn towards the sombre central statue. . . . I resemble the monolith against which my shoulders lean, the monolith which has endured so many winters and summers. I resemble it; it is I! It is I!

A while back on the desert of paved streets, I said—as it had said—“I am the Isolate.”

With my fingers that grip the stone I feel this larval dog’s profile; the round hole of the eye, the upstanding sharpnesses of the ears, the zigzagging bisection of the jaw.

And that same image, alive with the partition of *my* life, surviving from the deluge and the cold agony of the water that had an animal taint, comes right into my room, and even now fascinates my eyes.

It is so strong that I understand the dog as well now as when I was in chaos. He came toward me, like the other half of the world. . . .

Did not the majestic and pure Yudichtira force the gods to receive his dog along with him among the blest—a little before he forced them, out of sheer kindness of heart, to change Hell into Heaven? . . . The land of yellow earth, Hoang-tu; the Yellow River, Hoang-ho, the yellow Sovereign, Hoang-ti. The sun and splendour are yellow like silk. The god who is on the empty summit of all time is the sun, the shining

origin of all else; Amon-ra, Utu, Ahura Mazda, Mithra, Surya, who have imprinted on countless brows the humility of adoration—and who have fecundated, too, the generations of the dynasties.

At the end of all long journeys there hangs in the sky the golden fleece. . . . And the everlasting urn of blood that dips into the mist—the eternally unvarying stain of blood. . . .

I struggled free. . . . My face retreats from my ten fingers as from a vent-hole. I *will* not believe in spirits, in magical evocations, or in any of the ghosts that are fashionable today.

I am like him,—I am,—this great beginner; against nature, against woman, and against his fellows; alone with his own heart, ever destined for the worst. Alone and single, despite the multitude. I have felt the individual man deployed against the masses;—and I have seen the masses. Each of us is the centre of the world, and the most insignificant point on its surface. Each wishes not to die, and seeks to express himself, to be the sexual god, to perceive some reason in the universe. The inscription is the embryo of the temple, and man takes refuge in architecture. But the masses are tamed. And, above all: “Seek their joy.” These inexhaustible words remain to me. And also: “Nothing can be worse.”

I come and go like a sleep-walker. It is greater than I think, it is greater, greater. . . . Another universe thrusting itself on mine. What is this thing that lays siege to me?

The bowed peaks! Suddenly I recognise them. I do indeed know them. Yonder is an overturned barrier of rocks, at whose ends are two summits that lean

toward one another. It is on the shore a few hundred yards from the last houses of Alican. They are the same as those of that night.

It is true that if in my dream they were the same as those I had seen last year, it would prove that my dream is reflected from my sensations. I relapse into a tortured gloom. But at this very moment, as if I had found, I know not how or where, a point of leverage, my doubts are brutally dissipated. Everything that I have seen, everything—these are memories.

These are memories. I was the man pursued by the massed descent of the snows, and the disequilibrium of the cold. And I was the fugitive slave who swam the sea, and came to the stela he had himself hewn with his own hands in the immemorial lapse of ages. And I was he who at different stages of time had wandered along Mediterranean shores.

Metempsychosis. The journey from body to body of the indestructible soul. Many learned men have believed in this. That explains everything—that alone would explain everything, and especially, this pulsating certitude.

I seek to find out all that I can on the subject from odd corners of my text-books.

And suddenly the sight of a chapter-heading stirs me vividly. *Ancestral Memory*. I read:

“The author of *Modifications of Memory*, after quoting the case of the clergyman’s servant, and another, equally typical and no less authenticated, goes further. He enumerates many observations, made in the course of twenty years’ experience of neuropathic work, and from them deduces the existence of a *quiescent ancestral memory*.”



“His research was contemporaneous with the investigations into heredity and temperamental and physical atavism, and from data brought to light by scientists in that field, he infers not only that all impressions—without exception—remain inscribed, *potentially*, and in a latent state, on the brain, but also that they are transmitted in their entirety from individual to individual in the embryo.

“In this way he establishes a psychological system parallel with that of the transmission of temperaments and of individual organic characteristics. This comparison is justified by the fact that psychological heredity itself is in its nature exclusively *physiological*. From the scientific point of view, it is not intangible entities such as sensations, conceptions and ideas which are handed down; not intelligence, imagination and reason, but the development of the brain-tissue, which, accompanying all mental manifestations, serves as foundation for these various kinds of operations. For want of adequate data and of a more explicit and scientific descriptive system, we say, using a literary metaphor, that memory stamps itself, prints itself, on the brain.

“The author, like all who have studied the question, adds that *ancestral memory* is aroused only by an abnormal pathological stimulus. Normally the accumulation of more recent impressions continually covers it over, restricting memory to a field of progressively reduced intensity and dimension. *Ancestral memory* is, in effect, abolished, and it is necessary, in order to study it, to venture among the phenomena of the inner world’s deep seismic conformation, running down the slopes of mental vertigo, from genius to madness. We have little knowledge or grasp of madmen, and their secrets are well guarded. Men of genius, on the other

hand, are characterized in their monstrosity by balance, harmony, and moderation. The many components which, exceptionally, are completely united in genius—artistic or scientific—are very finely divided, and consequently impossible to isolate.

“It is, nevertheless, on these solemn heights of psychology that the experimental method will seek to solve the problem.”

I raised my head from the threshold of the book, astonished and dazzled.

These are memories.

. . . . .

I travelled up the line of beings which, after a hundred thousand years of humanity, ends in me. Bit by bit, actually, materially, I went back into some of those out of whom I am come.

There is no metempsychosis, no supernatural re-incarnation, no miracle. There is only the positive principle of organic heredity. There is only the miracle of thought and of memory—that persistent and truly superhuman tracing—that phantasmagoria of the world within the mind which gives to space an inner skin.

In truth, my problem is the impingement of earlier experiences on the material structures that embody me today. Life! Life! And by an explosion of life I can say open-eyed, “I am dead!” and say it yet again!

Sick, distraught. . . . Perhaps. . . . No matter—so much the better! I am affrighted at this marvel that is in me. I look at myself in the mirror. There is something strange about my colour and my form. I seem quite white. I do not know if it is really pallor, or the dazzlement of my eyes.

Was ever man seized by an emotion as majestic as this that paralyses me as I search, groping, through the *Historical Dictionary* . . . ?

With sudden, painful pleasure I found: "Iamgadal, the Phœnician name for the Mediterranean." Then I sought to find in the residuum of the printed word, the two deep, ample syllables which the mechanism of the dream unfolded—Khoufou.

And I read that it is the Egyptian name for the Greek Cheops, first Pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty, famed principally for building the great Pyramid of Giseh, that he intended for his tomb. I read that Cheops reigned about forty centuries before our era, and was therefore contemporary with our European troglodytes and with the Swiss lake dwellers.

I stop. There are too many directions; too many words,—words which vibrate drop by drop and germ by germ,—each one capable of infinite growth—in the microscopic summaries of history.

Four strokes of the clock jolt my sense and bring me back to reality, restoring the structure of my normal life. I am at home, in evening dress, and the accustomed things are all in their usual places, unmoving as the dead.

I am not master of my memories.

When I try to bring to mind one of the beings, which a moment ago palpitated with life—the crouching sculptor, creator of the two-headed eagle—I cannot call up anything beyond what I saw. In vain I call him, he will not turn his head! He hammers, without a glance at me, and there comes the noise of his blows.

And already the vision weakens and decomposes without varying. I cannot produce a resurrection. I am led by chance, or rather by the unknown, the physiologically, infinitely small particles on which I

float, which is for me the same as chance. I must keep to organic order;—I am outrun by my own reality.

Then again my memories are never untainted. In spite of everything, I keep with me, when I re-live the past, more things than belong to it. I bring to it adhering patches of contemporary cuticle, non-adjusted epithets. Amid the momentarily recreated confusion of primitive nudities I set the symmetries of a machine's working. With my modern flesh saturated with images and words I make mixtures. I cannot get rid of today.

And now? . . . Shall I still dream of far off things? I am forced to admit that these terrifying pleasures of my dual being have become more and more intense and frequent. They will begin again. I utter a cry of joy. . . . Intoxicated, with outstretched arms, I cry out: "Marthe!" I am alone, but my cry was uttered, and re-echoed from the walls. Now all is changed. I am filled by the greatness which I had so pettily sought to assume, that might dazzle and attract the woman. I am of superhuman proportions—I, who am not the man I seem, but a dynasty of living men, linked one to the other—the lineal multitude that shall be begotten to beget me. I am he who represents in reality that which everyone represents in truth: an infinite and compact ladder of creatures in whom all the past is present.

The separation which cut me off from life has vanished. I am he who is *not* isolate. Ever since I existed, I have been the centre of things! This greatness stifles me, because I know I do not yet see it in its entirety. I know neither what it will command, nor how I shall use it. Marthe Uriel thinks I am like the others. She shall see!

Over-big, I, who have one foot in the tomb, get up.

I, whose significance is, to resuscitate. I, the eternal man.

I step across my room, my vast body stumbling.

• I have hewn out a prelude. Where, when, and how shall I re-live some other portion of man's universal, anterior, existence?

### III

#### THERE ARE TWO TRUTHS

The force of habit. I get up and wash near my window, like that *other* whom I have been till now.

That other? Already one night's sleep—a single night!—has brought a reasonable forgetfulness. I dress and go out. The mere descent of the stairs enwraps me in the spiral routine of every day. Down below Toni yawns and looks at me with his grinning smile. Beside him is a gesticulating, female mass, a globulous body with a great cardboard head, and short turtle arms that grasp some guignolesque broom to her swollen bosom.

Ten minutes later, Madame Anne, standing beside the counter of the pallid creamery in the fragrant mist of café-au-lait, gives me a moist, sugary smile. Her palms are placed flatly on the white-lacquered counter, between an inkpot and writing materials; her cheek is touched to a rough blotting-paper red by acne, and between the brilliant rubber-red of her lips appear little, vaporous bubbles.

How swiftly, despite everything, one returns wholly and entirely to one's average self; to the self created by one's normal environment, to the vaguely-defined, superficial, and rather mournful user of life!

It was all very well for me to think: "This great thing has been: it shall be again—and I shall go to meet my dream in the land of my origin, the land of the bowed peaks. . . ." All belongs to an exiled enchantment, an enchantment grown now, in the light of

day. What remains through these present walls? Diffuse vagueness evaporates, the immediate remains—and the universality of the present. And my immediate cares as I cross the pavement: “I have forgotten this, or that . . .” the choice of the flags on which to set my feet,—these things are more substantial than an epoch of human destiny, and weigh more heavily than the two or three cosmic systems. We live amidst littlenesses that are magnified out of all proportion.

There are moments when I shiver:—the moments when I understand; when I perceive the excess of my thought, and the forbidden which thought gives rise to. In the grip of such tremendous reality, I blink my eyes and almost sway where I stand. But above all are those moments when I perceive that I am incapable of comprehending, of adding to every-day truth, debauches of truth.

I sought help at the museum. I walked through the white, sober aisles of that church-like place, where the broken fragments of a thousand diverse pasts are ranged side by side, in enigmatic ceremonial. With slow step I brushed the streets, the cities, the civilisations of tickets pinned upon the centuries. . . . I stopped before the statue of a seated pontiff,—hewn from black basalt; black and shining, a princely, priestly thing of Chaldæa, set up like an altar in the sanctuary of Egypt. . . . And I gazed upon this black block gleaming with the condensed caress of the centuries within its four fore-shortened planes,—and with the same glance I saw disappearing down the museum gallery the retreating backs of a man and a woman who had just come together and who were departing, arm in arm, regardless of all around them.

The long and patient work of succeeding ages has made hollows in the immobile statue shining like polished ice; in the sockets of the eye, on the angle of the shoulder, on the hand. On his knees is a ciphered square, everlastingly square and ciphered.

And then . . . he stirred.

The most ancient of cities—Eridu.

The being who is as if enthroned in the black rock seems to advance, and to tower above me without losing his immobility. With him he brings the whole rocky mass within which he is sealed. His striated, turbaned head, flattened and thick lipped, is magnified in the depths of this well of knowledge, with its crowded pictures on the four walls.

We are all in the temple.

I arrived there one spring night. . . . In the subterranean place amid the flapping of enormous wings, my lamp radiated great circles of terror, and in the movement of its light the long, diverging line of gigantic statues, sitting on sepulchral cubes, advanced and retreated before my eyes. Then I forced myself forward, clinging with all my strength to the falling horror of the yawning pit, advancing step by step. Then I traversed the burning breath of the flame; I plunged into the maze of flamboyant barriers. I know not how I escaped from the conflagration.

I crossed the rapid and bestial river. I know not how I saved myself from the flood. I fled as far as the narrow platform where nothing in the world is left but a door and two rings. I grasped the two rings, but in truth was grasped by them, for suddenly I found myself hanging over a tumultuous abyss which appeared beneath me. I remember still that instant when I clung to the shattered palace of the storm.



The sudden blast extinguished my lamp. The formidable crash drove all thought from my mind while the cadaverous cold from the bowels of the earth entered my bones. When I was on the point of losing my hold from exhaustion I found the ground once more under my feet.

With my jackal-headed mask I entered, by the door which is in the pedestal of the statue of the Holy Trinity, into the Temple of the Goddess, of whose grandeur I had had a glimpse from the bottom of the colossal tomb. . . . But no! . . . What am I saying! That is a terrifying, anterior adventure. . . . I entered the temple, stepping heavily on the stairs and landings of the poverty-stricken staircase to climb up into the night. . . . No! That too is an adventure hidden by the oscillations of time.

We arrived in full daylight before the square and oblique pylone which was like a miniature mountain. With the priests we came among the palm-trees and the water carriers whose square shoulders carried a yoke from whose ends were suspended swaying urns, and as these slaves moved about in all directions the water which they spilled had in falling the appearance of glass rings, scintillating in the light. Before the threshold the earth was moistened by the water spreading from the fountain, and as I stepped over it my garments were reflected whitely.

It was he, seated, who spoke to me; and as he spoke he employed that strange vivid exactitude of proper names: he said all that the sixteen letters of the alphabet can comprehend and express. . . . On the grey tissue of his bossed robe I saw the double plaque of dust brought by genuflexions.

A breath of dispute blows through the serried heads—mine in one corner—that are ranged like vases in the

sanctuary. All of us are engulfed, trembling, in this stormy mêlée:—which is the greatest, which is the first of the two great countries? Does triumphant creation belong to Chaldea? The thing must be established finally.

And now the strange priest, strange—and yet gathering us together like brothers, says:

“Bel said to Kasisatra: throw away thy goods, but do not forget to take with thee in the bituminous vessel that shall float above the annihilation of humanity, at the same time as the seeds of things, books: those which contain the beginning, the middle and the end.

“Kasisatra threw away his goods and preserved only the seeds of things and his books. At last land hove in sight, when the waters withdrew:—the mountains of Miliddu. Even the gods who had caused it were terrified by this cataclysm, for, when they saw it, they climbed to the very zenith of the firmament of Anu and howled like dogs,—especially the goddesses. And the ancient divine, astral dynasties were at first continued on the earth that was henceforth weighed down by this memory, by monsters, of whom Titan was the first.

“But Eridu is in truth the most ancient of all cities. This first landmark in the unfolding of the world was established by the two first-born civilisations, Akkad and Shumir, which, descending from the platform of the world, from the Asiatic socle, cleared with their hands and their feet the great route of human emigration that follows the majestically breached wall of the Paropamisus:—the route of the nations, the line of life. And Akkad to the North, Shumir to the South, were established in the plain where the Idigna and

Poura sometimes overflow into one another at flood time.

“After Eridu and Uru and Unu, came Zirpurla, and then Agadeh and Nippur and then, later, the Ziggurat of Borsipa at the narrowest point between the two rivers: the tower that had seven cubic storeys, each one glorious with the perfect colour of some god: the Tower of Tongues whose completion was prevented by the confusion of languages, and that was at last overthrown by the wind of the centuries. And then came Ur, Larsam and Tin-tir-ki which, when many generations had fallen to dust, was called Bab-Ilu. The greatest, though not the first,—for his ancestors were even more numerous than his descendants—was Sharganisharri who had one foot in Potamia and the other in Elam.

“The Akkadians and the Sumarians discovered the three major inventions,—after fire, that terrestrial hearth of the sun; the ploughshare which replaced millet by corn; the baked brick which at one and the same time replaced huts by houses and spoken words by the stored library; the wheel, which diminished all distance.

“They and their successors, the Khaldi, who assimilated them—(inter-marriage very swiftly destroys the purity of species)—created the alphabet, which is the basis of language, which is the basis of thought. Through science they brought the starry vault into our destiny, re-discovered previous ages, and set themselves mightily toward the future. They were the pioneers, and they stamped indelibly on human genius the habits of mind and the modes of understanding which, ever since, it has followed. They established above all else, above the aspirations of life and of races, above the rending passions, a fixed order. All that which has

been shall be again. The acts of the first men shall bind all future ages. It is like an overwhelming force, an army loosed against the void of that which has not yet come into being. It is a mighty lever, an imponderable weight."

By thus omitting Egypt—and omitting it hatefully—the Chaldean violated the certitude that was in our very bones, and sent through us a spasm of fury. He continued:

"Those of whom I have spoken spelt out in the beginning the formless religion from which are come all religions. With astounding audacity they raised up the personifications of nature, and from this conflict of light and shadow—(the two contrary halves of sight)—which is in all the planes of the world,—but of which we know only a black and white—they mapped out the official contours of the invisible universe, the sanctuary for all the harassing doubts of mankind. They said: The goal, and the cause, are some one. And all the elaboration and fabulosities of belief come from their sojourn in the world. They come forth from these necropolises that are immense in their extent beneath the sun and yet more immense in their profound depths that are sunk into the past: from this vast cemetery where the residue of successive cities is superposed in even layers, and the dust of bones begins to fill up the gaping hole of the universe,—the Hypogea of Erekh."

And then another voice speaks, summing up all our anger:

"No. Egypt was the beginning."

But the alien pontiff chanted yet more loudly, and so fixed was his gaze that his eye seemed more that of a bird than of a man.

"Chaldea was the mother of mothers! When the

shepherd Abraham went from the land of Ur in Chaldea to settle in Aran, when the Bak Sing—the Hundred Families—left their fields that had already been ploughed for thousands of years (and in places their memory yet remains)—they carried the multi-form spiritual plan with them into the new Mesopotamia of the Yellow and of the Blue river; the land which, by the calm life of agriculture, they transformed into the greatest and most peopled of all empires. They carried with them the astronomical calculations which govern space, and time and the periods of the day and of the year; the cardinal points of the compass, the twelve figures of the zodiac, the golden number of celestial identities, the sacred numbers, and the colours of the planets. And they carried with them, beyond that key of the world, the gate of jade,—where Lan Tcheou was afterwards to rise,—the system of weights and measures, the decimal and duodecimal system, the notation of music and the symbols of writing that are upright and pointed, like thorns, and apt to engrave the brick.

“And all flourished, and enriched the eyes: look at a wonderful efflorescence of dragons. It is the land where all is yellow. The soil is of such vast depth that it could cover the whole universe with a fertile field, though it has all come from the rock-hard mountains of Sayan, of Altaï and of Tarbagataï, wrested away by the winds every second of the day. The vestment of man and of plants is yellow: even the clouds that are like silk, even the sun and the tints of distance. And he who through the centuries raised himself single and almighty over the work of the miserable toilers was the Yellow Emperor. And one of the first transplanted masters was called Shen Nung, in sonorous reflection of ancient Shargina.

“It was long after this that proper names began their struggle for survival. Chun and Yu, those architects of the useful, lifted up their firm, positive voices on the other side of the immense massif of the Pamirs—so high, so rugged, so shattering a barrier that the birds themselves have to go round it—on the other, the Pacific slope of the old world.

“And then, in the basin of the seven rivers that afterwards, because of the drying up of the high springs of Immaus, became five, there arose the first monuments of Shindu Hindu, which were storied pyramids like Birs Nimroud, the Tower of the Seven Lights of Sennaar; and there too arose the law of the Rig Veda—full of Chaldean truth. A brief and almost unique epoch of splendour, when the mythology of gentleness and nature pulsed with divine sincerity,—before it passed and lessened from one Veda to another, growing ever more depraved and unfruitful, because of the Aryan lust for conquest and the political machinations of the Brahmins,—till it was despised even by the passing stranger for its ludicrous inequalities. And at about this time, at the head waters of the two rivers, there appeared the terrifying Assyrian.

“Those who bore on the Vedic chant came to the shores of the Hyrcanian sea. They sang of the sea, but because they had tarried long upon the landways, they sang it without remembrance, without knowledge, confounding it with the sky.

“The Assyrian also came from the Armenian Taurus, from the shadow of Mount Kacyapa, whose name, in a later epoch, was transferred to the sea it overhung. He was of the same stock as the Chaldean, the Arab, and the shepherd who overran Egypt and the feminine Nile for two dynasties: as the Canaanite, the Aramæan and the Jew, who all worshipped the

moon, the Lady Ishtar, the queen of war and of love.

“The swarthy, hook-nosed, Assyrian instituted war as his sole industry: war was his only invention—and in truth, war, if it is successful, is all-powerful in the world for one instant of eternity. The Assyrian’s virtue was military,—equally compounded of cowardice, perfidy, and bravery; and for eight hundred years his function was, to reap the bountiful harvests that others had sown and toiled for.

“And all the generations of the future will hear—it will not profit them—the low, ceaseless cries given forth by these fallen stones, by these remains of the terror of the world; I left my chariots in the plain and I escalated the mountains. With my incomparable warriors I confronted the tribes of the mountain. Out of the débris of torrents, out of the fragments of high and inaccessible mountains, I fashioned me a throne, and I smoothed out a mountain summit as a throne room for my throne. And I drank the water of the mountains; the august, pure water, meet to quench my thirst. What no man had dared, that did I dare. Like a tempest I fell upon Saraoush, and ruin alone remained. I chastised their armies, I decapitated their thousands, I sowed their bodies in the fields and piled them up in the hollows of the earth. I impaled their chieftains and skinned them alive before the eyes of their subjects that were become my slaves. And I burnt, I demolished, I destroyed utterly their proudest cities. For I am Tougoultipalesharra, the powerful king, the flail of ill-doers! And I took up arms to glorify Assur, Assur my God!

“And just as Assurbanabal imitated the clay books of ancient Shargina, so did multitudinous Elassar and Nineveh appropriate Chaldean sculpture. They displayed it on the porticos of the palaces of their kings:

the military carapaces where curvets linear, parallel discipline—muscles outstretched as rigid as wings.

“And in the same way, many centuries after, the sacred chronicle of the Jews that Esdras elaborated in five books, and sanctified with the retrospective authority of Moses, imitated from Chaldea its events, its legends, and its numbers,—but distorting them and compressing them into its jealous, dwarfish history. That twelve-fold band of thieves with their grossly ‘unique’ national god never managed to conquer more than the highlands of Palestine, and once the ephemeral prestige of the victories of Joab and the commercial prosperity of Solomon had been dissipated, it met destruction in internal feuds, since it could not conquer any large empire; till one day when the ten tribes of Israel surrendered to terrible Sharoukin, and when Nebuchadonozar of the Chaldean entered in among these bloody prophets of God as into a field of clucking hehs.

“All these things are far off in the past, and there is no Chaldean empire now, but gigantic and fragile truth must be re-established on its lovely throne.”

And he cursed the brigand who despoiled immortal Kar Dyniach: the round, full-lipped face with its vertically striated turban and its frightful smile. What is there more ancient in this district of To-Mehi than the tumulus of Saqqarah? Well, it is strewn on the ground like the tower of Babel. But lovely Kengi is a gentle garden, unhappy because it has no stony articulations like the valley of the Nile, and because it is bare of monuments. And she had to build her immense testimonies handful by handful, with bricks made from earth that are mortal and fall to dust. Time passes, and they fall back to their mother like the flesh that dies.



"The most ancient of towns. . . ."

At these words uttered by the mouth of the stranger, a reply rumbles and echoes in the air. Where am I? I know not. I must consider deeply. I hear the ritual instruction issuing from the corner of the temple that is many-coloured like a tomb—the priestly threshold of the beyond. On the wall, lighted up by the oil flame, before my eyes that are now fixed in meditation, a slight touch of brown paint shows up the red riband of an arm ending in a delicate royal hand, with long pointed fingers which divide and give out the offering of grain. And round this centre, half blotted out beyond the narrow range of my vision, tremble other fine textures traced over with signs, and sacred words enclosed in rectangles, and inscriptions so marvellously cut upon the stone that one can see through them the heart of the world.

The holy ceremony agitates me profoundly. And at last the voice of the master rises, voicing the silence of the disciples:

"The most ancient of towns is Onou of the North!

"It was discovered, complete, built of mud and wooden stakes, by men from the country of Pouanit, who bore on their banners the image of the sparrow hawk and for whom the jackal Anubis opened up the way.

"The followers of Horus were the conquering race; *their* past is the fixed horizon of the past.

"They had in their hands weapons and tools of copper, at a time when all other men save the Anou were dwelling in caves, in trees, or on rafts on the lakes,—and used only flints. They overcame the Anou in the two halves of the country of Kimit, and placed like a mantle upon the earth the race of those who governed over the race of those who obeyed—the red

Egyptian over the yellow Asiatic, over the black Shasou of the desert and over the white man, the savage. Since then amongst men the happiness of some has arisen from the misfortune of others.

“And as far back as tradition goes, the whole of Kimit, from end to end, was ordered in this way. Because to enclose and define the limit of the poisoned marshes of the primitive river, to regulate its terrible fecundity, and to shape its vegetation, required the third part of a hundred thousand years. Egypt has been the mother of mothers.

“Around that district where the Nile flows out, having brought grain by grain from the furthest part of Libya the pointed delta which every year becomes one pace wider,—the river is so rich and so loaded with silt that the weight of its waves inundates the sea itself and dominates it to the distance of one day’s sail. There as far as the desert cataracts reigned three dynasties of gods, each for ten thousand years: towards their decline, they cut out the rock of the sandy plain into the shape of the image, virginal and armed with claws, of Harmakhis the Rising Sun,—countless ages before Mini, the human ancestor of ancestors, before Khoufou, Khafri and Menkaouri, the fathers of the grand pyramids in the midst of whose strength they have been buried for so many millennia!”

And thus the response that resounds within the sanctuary restores the right perspective to distances.

The little sacred flame rises above the great shadows of death, above the dawn of truth. It lightens, from the still living side of death, the white wall and the very ancient paintings, whose delicate texture is broken by white clouds. And a god-king newly painted is so beautiful and so full of colour that he seems constantly to grow.



That statue of Isis in black basalt is not perceived at one's first entry, and it is startling when one is suddenly confronted by it. Its dark skin is both luminous and not-luminous, like that of living bodies. It dominates life with that grandeur of immobility with which the whole place is impregnated.

Faintly emerging from it is a half-revealed face, and forms almost concealed; it is surrounded with a wondrous beauty. The two great articulations of the sides, the arms, are parallel as the two banks of the river of time; the face is over-calm. The mouth and the eyes are horizontal as the horizon itself. The base of the head is black as blackest night.

And the grace which is exhaled from that stone face of Isis images the eternity of a rose.

It is also the eternity of succour. The liturgical representation which sweats from the walls of this supernatural vestibule is truth itself in line and colour, rare truth, chiselled upon the gross matter, reverently displayed in simple leaves, clothed in colour, and surrounded by the transparent wealth of sacred writings. It is the plane, magical projection of the image which one sees everywhere in the sky, the supreme image; the solar pageant which dominates life, and which, acting upon all that trembles on earth, is the manifestation of the one God who ordains the universe. For he is one and eternal, and his diverse names are but a prismatic system which gives a special reflexion to each sanctuary:—to Onou, to Mannofri, Aboudhou or Apit.

The struggle of day against night is one with the struggle of life against death,—human agony, the tragedy that ceaselessly approaches every living being. Thus are adjusted the inmost personal desire of every man, and the high consecration which imposes obe-

dience. The depth of the mystery necessitates the commentary of priests, and intense fear inculcates into all the worship of the priest-king who is interposed, an intermediary, between what is on high and what is here below.

"Our temple," says the voice in which my faith blindly trusts, "is the image of the world, and all other temples are ~~the~~ image not of the world, but of our temple. All high places represent, and will for ever represent, the universe as it is in the eye of the Egyptian. The ceiling is the sky; the floor is the earth; the columns represent the months or the planets, and there are few sanctuaries in which the procession of the faithful does not, like the sun, pause in its progress at each of the twelve zodiacal stations. There are none in which ritual dances, processions, and multitudes of torches, do not imitate the luxuriance of nature by day and by night in those aspects which overwhelmed the Egyptian mind; in which, amongst the accessories of worship, there do not reign, as in our original ceremonial, the venerated image of the sexual organs of man and of woman—whether it be the leaf or the fruit of the fig-tree and the divided pomegranate, or the ansated cross, the phallic symbol. And beyond the linear representation of nature and the frame of the astral orbits, you may read in the plan and the records of all the temples the consecrated cyphers which are the absolute symbols of phenomena.

"And in every temple in the world, you will see the same prophetic initiation of the layman, with its degrees and trials copied from those of the initiatory ceremonies of Isis and of Osiris. The terrifying, sacred ceremony proceeds, surrounded by the same aggressive and deadly secrecy—and by the same devouring allure; on the dark waters of Sais, on the shore of

the blood-coloured waters of Adonis, at Gebel or Byblos in Phœnicia; in the temple of Jerusalem, which is an imitation of the cosmic system modelled on exactly the same plan as the Tyrian temple of Astarte and of Melkart (the holy place being, in the light of the seven planetary branches, the earth; the holy of holies, the heavens, inaccessible to all men, and the veil of the tabernacle, in its material and its colours, representing the four elements of reality); and in the temple of Agra surrounded by the waters of Ilissus—where Isis is Demeter,—as she is also at the temple of Eleusis in Attica, and at Corinth, and in Argos and in Phocis; and even amongst the gods of the north, or of Persia, of Chaldea or of Pentapotamia, in the monasteries of the Essenes and the Therapeutics, of the Druids, the Pythagoreans, and the Kabbalists.

“All these mysteries, which seize hold violently upon the adept after the examinations in connection with the four elements, and after the purificatory acts, are the same astronomical tragedy chosen by Egypt from the chaos of the world, and fixed by it in symbols. In each, it is matter of immolation, of death,—then of the dazzling resurrection of a man. This man, who in the mystery of all the imitations of the world plays the symbolic rôle of sacrificed and of saviour, is a god; he is the sun. The actor-priests incarnate the immemorial drama of things, and perform in the person of the Mithrial, the Isiad, and of the Corybant, the defeat-victory of every day over every night, the passion and apotheosis of the star which rules mankind.

“We hold the source and fecundity of books; those of law, of science, and of exaltation,—it is we who keep the treasure of Hermes in the great epitome of writing. Legislators, priests, and poets, whatever you may do, you will obey Egypt. It is by Egypt and by

the magic of her priority that man's architecture of explanation has been ordained and established."

"The world is round," replies the dark pontiff.

"The world is square," says he who—barred with white—faces him.

They look at each other. The storm of contradictions stored up in these two figures is about to burst. No—for at that moment the great hollow silence of their mouths smiles!

They know well enough that beyond restricted signs, and the palisades that are words, there is no disagreement. They know quite well that there is one only religion at the root of life; that which has been invented by living hearts, that which is the sincere faith of men, the cry of cries; but it must take many forms in order to consecrate by the luck of strife the supreme power of kings, who bring order into the human mêlée. If one left all beliefs alone, they would soon resemble each other, they would mingle one with the other without knowing it, they would disintegrate in the houses, they would go for nothing at all in the streets and squares. Reigning authority desires the private business of each to be a public matter. We must have organisation. We must have detail, unalterable and fixed, and the cry of war must be nourished by the shout of an enemy. We must have two—one against the other. Chaldea and Egypt must reply to each other, the monumental Right and Left that are beyond the infinity of the primitive dream—each capable of inventing the other. We must have echo and reflection, and jealousy must have an anvil whereon to forge itself. We must, we must. Therefore, we shall. Do we not all know that it is because it has been so willed, for reasons of state and after secret meetings and agreements between priests, victorious generals, and

thinkers, that Egyptianism and Hellenism have interpenetrated through certain appearances and customs; that Alexander has entered all armed into the ancient solar myth of Abydos, through the intervention of the personality of Dionysios? Faith obeys; of all the winds that blow, it is faith that obeys most unquestioningly.

They smile at each other; they understand each other. Then the matchless grandeur of the priest stands out like a black thunderstorm above the motley crowd. I, the initiated, who have succeeded in coming here after surmounting so many snares, here am I on the threshold of a revelation which shall never end. Here are the cross-roads of truth. Is theoretical truth, the thread of systems and dogmas, the essential continuation of reality? No, that would be too simple. The content of the word *truth* is double: what one believes because it is manifest, and what one must believe because it is written. Face to face with the solitary temptation of evidence, is the law of crypts and sanctuaries, woven into the signs of the alphabet by those who first organised.

The spoken word is terrible: at one time true, at another false. It belongs to life, it belongs to death. And words are no longer the same once they have been spoken. The form of phrases takes the place of meaning, when that living meaning has been dispelled by the shafts of darkness. First of all one speaks as one thinks, afterwards one thinks as one has spoken. Those in power profit by this sad folly, to dominate the inverted reason of us all—that is the universal snare.

Then I saw, like the sudden manifestation of a God upon the earth, that the artificial truth which, once consecrated, is no longer at the mercy of the human mind,

is more important than the other. I saw why religions hate as much as they resemble each other, and why they love the luxury of complications and, ever on the watch, spy into the differing freemasonry of races; why high places are as mysteries, and great certainties are everywhere, first guarded, and then, deformed by cycles of symbols. The common people have access only to the coarse, outer edge of adoration. Its view cannot but be short-sighted: it can only see the blinding, impending idol to which the earthward ends of infinite ideas are attached. The mass of men are given nothing but vertiginous desire for the intangible,—and the pretended puissance of amulets—so that they may remain dazzled, amazed, without hope, and docile, while kings pursue their way.

Men are easy to catch. Need and confidence and a maternal credulity are re-born whenever the human prey is re-born, and nothing can prevent each human heart from pouring out some of its heart-blood. Crouched on the stone, my temples pressed between my hands, I had a moment of unhappiness. I, belittled and humbled, am in truth torn by the thwarted greatness of the things which hang over me and reveal themselves, and touch me, as the perfumed gardens of the city touch me, through the intervention of the wind.

In my deeply tormented flesh, I thought; and within me I brought forth phrases which lived:

“It is you, you alone, who create, ye poor and oppressed: Power arms against you all your own acts, and it, that cannot make life, makes use of life. You have made with your sorrows the sorrowful legend of hope, as with your hands you have made the great pyramids and the great wars. But you obey. The immemorial maxims of Persia, which faded before those of India, have proclaimed: The greatest good is



to obey, not one's conscience, but the word of the priests. You obey. If one wished to describe humanity with a single word, it is 'obedience' that should be chosen."

The high windows of the "Musée du Louvre" scatter oblique sunlit tiles and a long shaft of light up on the solid flagstones. A sweet rhythm ripples on the pallor of the limestone. It is the pair of lovers, departing. They have taken only a few steps since these visions first overwhelmed me. Time is not what one thinks; one cannot compare it with its absolute self. Then, lost, and reduced to my ordinary stature, I pass through the gallery from ruin to ruin, I look at all that really remains of an accumulation of almost astronomical vastness, all that has come to the surface through lapse of time,—fragments, stumps of limbs, objects disfigured by dust and oxidisation, jewels of the void. Bent over them, feeling behind my eyes the strain of handling them, the more I unravel this wasted wreckage, these old insoluble exactitudes with their portentous and ridiculous rarity, the more I am separated from what was. Life is not in this immobility, it is in me. The past holds no more than I possess. The noise of my steps on the flagstones wears me out—I am tired of walking on this white paper. I went in, and have come out again. It is the wide-open temple of nothingness. Then, after that hard and colourless disillusion, I read books of history, piles of books. I had great hopes when I entered my study. But in turning over the pages everything became remote, transposed, and diminished. I was struck, as if I had made a discovery, by the sterility of letters. The minute text in which facts are preserved, and which

one must peruse close to one's eyes, has a funereal crackle. Signs, erasures, signs, signs, buzz in the head—all that is dead ashes! History is a blackened book in one's hands. Details remain, but the essential dimensions are for ever destroyed. The tale of the dead is dead.

As I returned home through the tumultuous streets I thought of the temple wherein I had been initiated . . . and among the houses and the shops, along the streets through which I cleaved my way, I seemed still to see vivid strains of yellow ochre and deep red. Mechanically I dodged the passers-by and the traffic.

I stopped suddenly at a street corner, brought up sharp by this question: *in what language had that deep-voiced pontiff spoken?* I listened intently, but I could not recognise the words. The form of his speech was dispersed into space, as if it had never existed. I tried to grip hold of one word, to place it—a strange hyphen between two realities, a sort of vampire of my thought—right before my eyes, as if printed on the window pane of this fashionable store. And perhaps a word did come forth: Ptolemaios. It is a proper name, it is not a familiar word of every-day speech. *Ouni, the overseer of the prophets of the sepulchral pyramid: Ouni, he who wears his sandals in the palace. . . .* The essential content of this phrase is precipitated from the associations of this proper name. I see, vaguely, a solitary wanderer among palaces—his legs, his face, faded and obscure like a dilapidated painting: he passes beneath vast, petrified, square penumbras of monumental columns. I am lost amid so much confusion. This half-evocation is so fragmentary that it seems the strange obverse of an unattainable reality. From time to time, at certain moments during *that* night, I was sensible in my delirium, of the hard, defi-

nite shape of the stairway. And now it is much the same, for I touch, intermittently, the unsteady pavements of dream cities.

I called to see her one evening, to tell her everything.

Visitors, women in pretty frocks, were there, taking their leave when I was announced.

Only after much talk and lingering the outdoors finally engulfed them, as though the portal was too narrow to let them through. And when the heavy, stifling silence closed on their departure, Marthe Uriel returned to her frame of gilded wood shimmering with dull silk, steel blue, and bright Chinese red.

I had only seen her by feverish, artificial light. I had not met her since the mystery was declared,—four nights ago. I came to her now deliberately, proudly,—I came to tell her all. But in her presence, like a sleep-walker who suddenly awakens, I forgot everything, save only her.

She is the centre and the life of the world of luxury in which she lives. I cannot conceive her apart from it. I see her, but at the same time I see her setting; gilding, pictures, ancient and lovely things that love her, satins, frames deep as coffers, a classic-romantic lamp painted with trees and ruins, Corinthian capitals and Roman shepherds, carved boxes, fine porcelain, fans. I see all this, and I see, too, her hand playing with some wooden beads, and the way her lips move as she speaks.

There was a moment when, as we talked, my secret very nearly escaped me. Indeed I thought of it, and prepared myself to speak. Yet I kept silence. Why, since I was already well on the road? Swiftly I

counted the cost, counted it again in the face of the definite decision I had to make. In truth I was afraid of the clumsy, almost monstrous, grandeur of what I had to say. I said nothing, and that was the end of it.

But hastily, for one brief instant, I looked at myself, while my silence lied for me; looked at this man who, driven so far by a theatrical impulse towards confession, now stammered and hesitated, hardly daring to raise his eyes, keeping them fixed on the ground, embarrassed by his enormity.

In that instant, I saw at one glance my two selves, and I was afraid. Is not this dual life too much for me? . . . Can I breathe, walk, live, with myself

Yet my thrill of horror changed to delight, for while I was thinking of all this and saying nothing, Marthe Uriel was letting me look at her, and smiling her secret smile.

My room is very humble beneath its veneer of coquettish colouring, and it seemed, on the eve of my departure, full of parcels, blank spaces, and stacks of oddments—queerly hollowed out and queerly full. I stood there feeling that I had no existence. Was I truly journeying towards an unknown far vaster than that of other men? Yes . . . when I quit this room, it will be as if I am taking leave of nearly all myself; for in this room I grew up, developed; and here sleeps all that I know of myself.

Who can plumb the depths of Life? My gaze follows intently the struggle of two insects who are met in mortal combat on the window pane, and this glimpse of eternal truth leaves me pensive—almost awestruck.

## IV

### EYES THAT MEET MINE

Far away on an azure sea the white sails of a small boat seem to gather up all the sun's light—their whiteness is radiant, starlike.

"I used to come here long ago."

"I often came here, too."

But this is the first evening we have spent here together, Marthe Uriel and I—and we feel insignificant, standing side by side among these huge rocks that jut out into the sea, with the great winds sweeping in upon us from all quarters of the globe.

I have left everything—run away, to return to Estérel, the country of my fathers, to perch once more on this steep, red roof of the continent! Tightly packed in with other travellers in the cell-like compartment, (on a journey one's brain becomes nothing but a worn-out taximeter,) I roused myself again and again to repeat: "I am going to a new life": I even made up beforehand a sort of scenario for that life.

There is nothing left now of that beatific arrangement! I am possessed utterly by the force of the play itself, put out of action by events, and I cannot express how small I have become.

All the same this is my native land, this land of spacious terraces, wrapped in a wondrous silence which makes them seem infinite, unending. . . . What a quantity of red! That cochineal plant's bunch of spiky leaves, the mounds and footpaths of ferruginous

earth, the little pools of lava belched forth from the mountains and still retaining, in flashes of light, the colour of the brazier from which they flowed at the dawn of the world, . . . even the submerged reefs which, rust-coloured, eat into the ocean far below.

In this fair land where the earth blossoms in perpetual sunshine, the light on the foliage quivers like a candle-flame in the wind. The leaves are smooth and polished; plants, like the granite, are studded with mica and feldspar, the pine-needles contain iron as well as chlorophyl, buds and twigs are covered with successive layers of gum and now are sticky with sweetness in the sun's heat. . . . All nature seems to have been varnished, and smells of paint and size. And the warm mixed scents of this tangle of stems and leaves go to my head and make my throat smart.

Now the dark slopes of the promontory, with their darker chasms and their crested summits, melt into the glassy immensity of the sea. A veil of intense Prussian blue, unfathomably deep, yet clear, diffuses through the air its misty, ink-blue clouds. The watery mass, foam-bordered, seems to spread its cloak over the earth, yet it still lies before me, silent, motionless, immeasurable. . . .

On its lightly ruffled surface, great circles, smoothnesses and sudden changes of pattern show the movement of the currents. On the horizon, immense parallels are separated only by minute spaces.

I am lost. . . . I thought I had more firmness of purpose. . . . My dream! My talisman!

Marthe Uriel is here. We have gone for walks together—without many words spoken. There she is now, standing a little apart, a few yards away. Her face is simply a speck,—like mine, exactly. Is not each of us just a speck on the earth's surface?

But does not everyone, when you get near enough to know him, find a way to show you that he is the centre of the world? This centre somehow changes the balance of things. When I turn my head, I shall see no more of nature's image. But I see *her* just the same, even when I am not looking at her. If she gives me one word, a smile, there will be no more to say herebelow!

Night falls on us—and on the centre of everything that is I. Clouds, crags and forests sink from the zenith, triangulated by the rectilinear pathways—and then the night. . . . In truth, what remains to me?

Ripples glide unceasingly over the surface of the water. Two winds meet and the ripples form a network, so that from the shore of the bay to the farthest horizon stretches a sort of concave, mapped globe, whose meridians run ceaselessly from right to left and whose lines of latitude steadily converge. From time to time deep cracks appear in the invisible depths, almost cosmic, the dull creaking of the levers that support the world.

But just when the unfathomable simplicity of the light makes me feel lost, isolate, before these terraced landscapes that are so silent that the least sound seems a spot of colour fading into infinite distance, I find myself thinking: *It was exactly like this!*

When? . . . Always. Generation upon generation has sought its fate in this cruel land, this land that is still uncivilised, abandoned, shunned. On this ground which I tread none of them paused a moment. As far as eye can see there is not, has never been, a single city, a single building to crumble and change. Where the

forest paths cross each other—along the shore where the earth's mountains meet the ocean's, countless thousands have wandered; yet the shapes that meet the eye remain unchanged. They are too strong, too mighty; the very structure of the earth. What could change the outlines of these rocks in a few hundred years! What slimy silt or glacier débris could so soon deform these mountain peaks that enclose the horizon; what accident of nature could leave its impress on these summits whence falls—purple and copper-coloured—the sweeping curve of this storied valley! Nor can the eye detect more change in the vast green piles of the forest.

The men long dead who walked here, treading the mineral kingdom beneath their feet, saw all this just as I see it. They saw these ramparts of bronze-green and terra-cotta which flowed forth hot from the subterranean melting-pots of the volcano; these narrow wooded ravines which the sun's rays festoon with green or golden fires as they plunge down into the darkness; these ravines, which, opening towards the north, envelop me as I enter them in a cloak of icy shadow. . . . The eyes of men long dead were surely my eyes.

Then I seemed to rise above myself. . . . I saw the endless stream of time, saw it and understood with my whole and single reason unconfused by subterfuge or personal recollections, unhampered by hallucinatory dreams. I understood then what is meant by the succession of destinies. I was in entire and direct contact with that reality, with that life, which inconceivably surpasses my petty dimensions in every direction. . . . And it seemed to me that this calm functioning of pure thought was more mysterious than the magic of any man-created resurrection . . . in fact, that we are much greater—much finer, when we are not dreaming!



Yes, we are better without our dreams, when we build up our life with the aloof and colourless instrument of pure thought, when we take the trouble to use that simplicity which is within reach of us all. But in the names of places, of people, there is a majesty which never comes to the worn-out names of things,—there is a sacredness about them. . . . More real than the light and shadow of the rocks. Forms half-rise before me . . . and make a darker enclave in the rock's atomic night, like a darker pool—black lava from some black volcano. . . . This is what I see; On the Great Wall of Iran, which looks forth from the crest of the mountains of Zagros to the Western world, Persian sculptors carved long since huge portraits in relief of Chosroes. His neck—vast, solid as a pillar—is turned westwards towards Europe, his eyes still gaze out across Mesopotamia, towards that subject-continent of Imperial Rome; beneath his feet, as beneath a gravestone are waged the campaigns of the Emperor Justinian.

This evening I am half drunk with all I have seen—the sheer horror of slopes that lose themselves in abysmal depths; crags, pine-trees—impregnated with fragrance—always on the point of falling into some chasm, or just escaping destruction; the partitioned creeks bordering the blue enamel with its sudden cats-paws of gleaming nickel . . . and in my exaltation I strain my eyes through the mist to catch a glimpse of a face, of a building, of those majestic vistas which I saw through classic porticos—of the whole geographical revelation. . . . Because I see the worn rocks, it seems that once it was said—just here—that the escarpments and torrential gorges that surround the watch-tower of Uru-Salim—Moriah—Millo and Zion—that crown the summit of the divide between the

Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, and dominate the frontier between Egypt and the vale of Esdraelon—it was once said that they have suffered attrition through all eternity.

This giddiness that overcomes me. . . . I have felt it before . . . exactly the same sensation!

We have reached the top of the headland which rises over the sea, carved out of the ragged plateau which commands the whole horizon, and there we halt for a moment as if stunned by the sight of the cliffs, perforated and riddled through with caves, which edge the terraces. This platform of rock jutting out into the void, how terribly indistinguishable from the abyss itself! They seem inseparable.

This sunken path with its dilapidated rail, by which we came and must return, is nothing but a funnel full of treacherous rocks and rotting branches, piled up as if for some gigantic bonfire; it is shaded by pines and firs, dead trees blanched with brine and chalk-dust, their spiky foliage and their gnarled trunks like the bleached and polished wreckage of some ceaseless aerial tide; dried-up cones still cling to the sapless branches, and still show traces of encrusted foam. The winds they have weathered, the lightning which struck their branches in the days when they were yet alive have left their mark.

I move forward a little, very slowly, towards the edge, my feet suddenly grown heavy; I am numb, bloodless, as though I were swathed from head to foot like a mummy. On the sloping edge of the void I pause a moment, leaning over. My knees shake, I feel the skin of my face suddenly electrified. The immeasurable space seems to drain my strength from me, sucks the marrow of my bones. I lean over—or so it seems.

Through a gap in the cliff I perceive, far below, at the very foot of the precipice, the sea. I can see the waves come in, so far below that they fall, break into foam, and withdraw in foam-flecked blue smoothness, without a sound reaching me as I listen. One day—how long ago?—this mighty sea engulfed me.

I lean a little further over—or rather I stiffen myself; a naked segment of space penetrates my body through my eyes and mouth. The granite mass on which I stand must jut out like a platform and then fall away underneath me, and suddenly the sensation of the void beneath reproduces itself in my body—as if I had received a heavy blow. The shuddering abyss. . . . The allure of the rocks. . . . I have to throw myself back quickly lest my will fail me!

Here, quite near here, in these foaming inlets, clinging with hands and feet to the sharp projections of the cliff-face, my legs and sides cramped by desperate effort, I exerted my mad strength to roll one of those crags down upon the monstrous apparition, the horror that reared its head below, like a peak. The stone like a man's body, plunged into the void, drawing after it a strident shaft of compressed air.

There is a strand of fear that binds myself to myself in eternity.

It is nearly dark. . . . We must hurry.

Twilight comes swiftly, coldly. It hides the forms of things, and shows sudden likenesses. This darkness which brings me so near to nature, yet separates me from Marthe. Displacing immediate necessities, it overwhelms me with that quivering, drab melancholy which is compounded of all human emotion.

All the way home, we felt that we were not merely

going forward, but penetrating, exploring, diving deep below the surface of things. I became more than myself. . . . In the dimness I pursue many a strange quarry. Almost my footsteps seem to tread the intangible world—perhaps, as I walk, the earth trembles.

The footpath leads into a wider pathway, pale and ghostly, which fades away on either hand and seems the lever of some gigantic balance, weighing two infinite spaces which lie beyond it. This particular furrow of life is a very ancient one, ancient because essential: the first man to pass from one valley to the next must have made it, or perhaps it was begun by the unerring, unreasoning instinct of the beasts, or even by that instinct, unerring and world-wide, of the water-course.

In the hollow of the path a sound of singing grows fainter and dies away. Who hears it? . . . I hardly know . . . indeed I am not sure whether it comes from one side of me or the other. It might almost be the murmur of branches in the wind, but for a certain rhythm which inspires it. Fainter yet . . . in the distance . . . and now silence. . . . The song is dead. . . .

The singers have departed so far that when one asks which way they went, the merchants and pilgrims on the road can only point to the stars for answer. The utter sadness that comes from the rhythmic procession of the clouds is, defeat that is distance, the disruption of communal life.

I can hear a strange voice, quite close, speaking as if beside me, a voice that echoes in my ears—harsh, tuneless, deadened. . . . I hear it suddenly, without warning . . . or is it *I* that have suddenly come within its range? . . . That hollow voice as if of a dying man—agonising . . . a thing accursed!

There was no one near me; no human voice could have reached me. Yet I distinctly heard someone say: "All roads lead to Hell."

And the same voice continued—a woman's voice, with tears rising in it—that roads are made only to separate us from those we love,—with whom we want to stay.

Not a soul! . . . I was absolutely alone in the open country. I was a long way in front of Marthe—I could see her following me, a darker shape silhouetted against the grey background of the dusk. Only the silence. . . . I walked on without waiting for Marthe. I could not help speaking aloud: words escaped me against my will:

"Once upon a time. . . ."

I stumbled over a stone in the road that was like a reef rising suddenly in my path,—and stopped. Of course, since the road ends here, here is the chapel. . . . No, after all, the road goes on, and there is no chapel. . . . I stood for a space, hardly knowing where I was or what was the matter, and Marthe came up with me; strangely enough, she, too, pointed out the half levelled mounds in the path.

"Look at those stones. . . . There must have been a house, a wall, here in years gone by."

There was indeed a house—the house to which men brought their brief despair; the chapel. There was a spring, too, and a tree. . . . That low-hanging cloud is no cloud at all, but a tree, the tree,—a walnut, and the only one of its kind in these parts. . . . All at once we find ourselves beneath its cool, dark dome. Look—the trunk is blue, sky-blue . . . robed in colour. There is a cloak of azure sewn with gold stars (day and night in one symbol). This woman in the blue cloak, in her niche in the tree trunk, has a baby in her

arms, and above her bent head with its crown of gold, there hovers, motionless, the fiery dove.

A few minutes later, when I emerged from the enveloping cloud of foliage, the broken phrase begun a while since completed itself on my lips:

“Once upon a time an old blind man returned to his home after long wanderings. His name was Odon, and he found his wife, Clairine, awaiting him.”

Solitary, I spoke aloud . . . and then stopped short, surprised and shocked by my powerlessness to check my own flow of speech. Anxious about Marthe, I turned a little unsteadily towards her. But it was nearly dark . . . it was difficult to see the stones in the path, and easy to stumble over them. Marthe had again fallen behind . . . she knew nothing of the tragedy which had happened. I was really shut off from the world. I had given, and had been accepted. If any had been there to look, they might have seen in my face. . . .

I am wide awake now. But I had felt, through all the racking agony of dissolution, through the discord, some strain of harmony. By the dim light of legend, as ancient as the skies,—by virtue of a fragment of some ancient incantation,—one glimpse was accorded to me of the majestic symphony of grief. Human sorrow touches even nature . . . softens the hardest granite. All these agonies. . . . These roads that lead out into the world, do they ever lead us home? This woman waited for her man, and, as a miracle, he came to her . . . at last.

But how long did she wait for her long-absent lover? Years, all her youth, . . . all a woman's flowering time? In the empty rooms I see her, expectancy incarnate, on her knees before the door through which he will come! She has passed on her expectancy down

the ages . . . a desolate creed! For *she* waited for centuries.

How simple, how mysterious, the conditions under which this great revelation of suffering was made to me! The book of bitter pains, that bible of intimate histories, that everyone has for his own, just as everyone has his own chord, though the sound be lost; and those gentle ghosts of common things, familiar to those whose lives are near our own, and so secret from all the world outside; these are great things that it is now given to me to know more intimately than other men.

The path twists three times, and then one comes in sight of the two bowed peaks which tower above the sea towards Rulamour. As I made my way towards them, I was conscious for the first time of a new, miraculous loyalty which filled me, . . . me, the earth-bound, the maker of indifferent verses. Me, the liar, the mad-man, . . . or, to tell the truth more precisely and kindly . . . the ignorant, the unenlightened. . . . My eyes have been opened. Confusedly I feel myself becoming—profound metamorphosis—frank, honest.

How various she is!

So I thought, as her laugh, sparkling, animated, seemed to annihilate the distance between us. The next moment I had to revise my portrait of her—a calm, serious profile, perfectly chiselled . . . another woman altogether.

Later, I saw her face, vivid in the sun—and that too was a revelation. That hymn of the earliest worshippers was surely sublime in its creative modesty:

“O Sun, appear unto us, for we know Thee not!”

I am quite sure that her soul is stretching out hands of friendship towards me. But . . . I wonder whether that soul will ever bring me her body?

## V

### RE-BIRTH

And what happened to those slaves after they landed, streaming with water and scorched by the hot sun?

The curve of Alican street ends just before me in a patch of waste ground, diseased, leprous, the filthy waste land that is the dregs of towns. The hot sun draws strong smells of cooking from the kitchen windows, and from the heaps of dead things in corners and gutters, a medley of less pleasant odours.

I have just left my cousin, Jean Malplaquet's dining room. The little round market place lay quivering and dancing in the heat outside the cool blue shade of the room where we sat at table; everything beyond our doorstep seemed wrapped in corrosive heat. The blinding light destroyed all colours, leaving to the eye nothing but an arid waste. Only rain can give us back our greenness.

Nature here has been scarred with horrid oases of civilisation. On these immemorially wooded slopes its myrmidons have built up walls and balustrades, and among their chalk-box houses they have even laid out a recreation ground, where it pleases them to set up first in one place and then in another, a collection of rather ragged looking haloes for the distribution of artificial rain. There cactus-plants and cotton-plants are trained in the way they should go, and a palm-tree sticking up out of its little mound of earth, gives much the same impression as a street lamp.



And all around this garden of amputated plants—in full sight of its “landscape gardeners”—various plots of ground lie fallow to serve as receptacles for refuse—liquid and solid: grimy monuments of selfishness, full of orange peel, waste paper, skins, broken glass and all sorts of old tin kettles and pans, useless and decaying,—the whole a centre of attraction for all the grubby urchins of the neighbourhood.

As I leave the crowded suburban quarter, and pass one after the other the sweeping terraces that look out to sea, a screen of cloud suddenly covers the sun; grey-ness spreads over the earth. The sea grows dark,—becomes opaque and smooth, slate-coloured, with fringes of thick white foam where it meets the rocks. I feel my face grow pale in the half-light. Then, in a moment, everything changes once again. There is a strong gust of wind, and the *mistral* strikes the sea, ploughing it up in great regular furrows, sweeping its surface with veils of rain. For a time blue and greyish-black are mingled in the sky, then the wind succeeds in driving all the clouds away.

And the dazzling monotony of that stifling bath of sunshine is here again. A roughly ardent sun catches the mountains by the hair. Before my eyes the trees hang out their screens of green silk with their heavy embroideries, so intensely and vividly green that the sun's light spins mauve spider's webs between them.

On the black and silver of the railway line which cuts the world in two right to the edge of the map spread out before my eyes, a train passes and leaves behind it a straggling town of white smoke, with domes and cupolas floating in the air, and its trailing, long-drawn-out sound, like a slice cut out of a thunderstorm, seems to emphasise the mountain's curve.

To the left, distant, snow-crowned peaks are sharply

outlined against the ether, and feeling nothing but one pang of stinging heat, I look up at their crystalline, icy plateaux.

What am I doing here? How strange it is that a man should try to find his own soul through other people's. Here I am,—on the verge of some great discovery,—I don't even know of what—a looker-on from some other country than this world of today, a stranger 'midst my own generation, a stranger 'midst the past. Just now I was talking to Uncle Raphard about the researches that are so dear to his heart, and which he is always on the eve of undertaking, and to Marthe Uriel about art. I can't remember what I said to them, nor yet what I said earlier.

Present, past! My eyes still heavy with sleep; what am I? What drop am I in this human torrent? Who am I to have persisted through the ages from the first formless living creature to my present self? In the calm which weighs heavily upon me some wind of destiny makes me waver like a weather-vane between today and long ago; some unknown force makes this essential being that bears my name dance to its piping, where it wills. The shadows lengthen, whispering of my dream. . . . Not by thousands nor by millions can we count those whose soul-fibres have met and mingled with ours. We can only imagine them in our dreams, or in the phantasies of mathematics. In the heap of beings who are bound organically one to another, each of them in control of some human soul, am I perhaps number one million and one; one million and two? As when Jacob wrestled through the starry night with the ghostly wayfarer at Peniel in Galaad, when his flesh grew weak and yielded in the angel's awful hold,—even as he, I know not the name of my adversary.

The path by which I am descending leads into a sort of grotto. Other paths lead thither also, from other directions. The cave, however, is not enclosed,—there is a large round opening in the vaulted roof.

In some grotto like this the slaves must have met—since it lies at the junction of several paths. . . . I have to stoop to go in. . . . I walk round—stepping from side to side. In that corner I seem to see one Ethiopian yawning cavernously—he listens, evidently, with his mouth. The most slavish of the slaves appears over the well . . . my eyes slowly distinguish him, and then see nothing else.

Around this fugitive scarce able to stand in his terror of discovery, the darkness now crumbles and fades before a pale beam of light from above. As he stands there the outline of his head grows more distinct—the rough-hewn profile—it might be carved out of stone—towering above the broad shoulders; arched brow, high cheek-bones, pierced nose, and the pupil of the eye rimmed with white. The whole man seems flecked with blackness, like a root just pulled out of the ground and which shrieks out against the rude treatment it has received. He holds out his arm—bent as a bow, an arm that has been broken, and roughly set. The livid scar of that setting still gleams white through the horrid gloom, like the many other scars of tortured hands and feet. He has been worn out,—every muscle, every bone, every joint; that arm has been trampled on so that it is flattened out, eaten away like some worn oar-blade. The man seems made of dried up leather, rust, earth, ashes,—his eyes all whites with narrow black circles. I can even see the feeble pulse that beats in his temple, the vein pressing against the wall of flesh like a finger. And this faint thrill of life makes

me think of the stillness of death, and I am afraid. On his back, vertically, horizontally, like other sets of ribs, lie the scars of the whips.

Haloed by this ghostly circle of light, he seems the earth's pivot. For he is the man of the Laconian shore, the vertebrate animal of the conquering Dorians.

And I am here, moulded by the tides of the sea, pressed into shape by the tides of my endless task, that limitless eternal task which stirred the waters of the sea and infused into them its own life.

And the body of the worst of them all steadies the writhing mass of flesh, like those great carved slave shapes that support the frontals of Tyrinthe and Mycenæ, or like that huge Helios of Rhodes, the Colossus, wreathed in the darkness of clouds and of night.

One after another they reached this cave—following the slope of the earth's surface, for the place lies in a hollow, and through the three sunken paths which converge into it there flows in a stream from the surrounding mountains, all that gravity controls;—even the crags, even, bit by bit, the solid rock. The blind Cretan found his way there directly; his eagerness checked only by his groping hands.

If you follow out that ravine whose opening shows dark before you, you can see the two bowed peaks which seem to enclose the crumbling ruins of the mountain chain. Red stone . . . green-embroidered with woodland . . . blue sea. But the red is the red of battle, the green has a stippled effect in the distance, the blue is the blue of steel . . . and these three colours spread out on every side seem to fill the eye with their harmony. And the sea . . . the sea that, fathomless, laps the foundations of the world . . . the lightly ruffled surface in ceaseless motion: the sea that

always returns, in spite of the efforts of all those wrecked ships and wrecked sailors who have struggled to push it back and to escape from it. . . .

In the roof of the cavern yawns a round chimney; and under the hollow of the walls lie dusky shadows, but a cone of light rises in the middle of the cave to the opening above. Round about this column of light, this tree of heaven, these twenty refugees from the sea's slavery crouched together . . . twenty prisons of flesh . . . twenty black holes. . . .

Free! The word is still so new to us that we would worship it as a god . . . we can hardly find strength to utter it. No chains. . . . No cringing obedience. . . . We feel stunned . . . scarcely awake. Our flesh shrinks from the rest—its consequences were ominous: from peace—it always cost us too dear. We, who were once motion incarnate—a machine in perpetual movement,—as we crouched along the galley's side, pouring out our body's strength in the long line of foam that marked the ship's passage, until they were swallowed up by the sea in her wake . . . we let our limbs lie as we dropped—gazing unseeingly on their clumsy relaxation. Freedom! . . . There is nothing so sweet. . . . No matter what road we tread—north, south, east or west—we are ourselves. . . . We can get up, go whither it pleases us. . . . Say "Yes!"

And then we laughed . . . with difficulty at first—then in crashing peals . . . we laughed and shouted—laughter and shouts of joy, of triumph, cries that devoured space like the wings of the eagle, that rend the blue sky in their measured beat—before he sinks to rest with folded wings, massive as the pediment of a temple gate.

Hadria, Mageddo, Calchos, Jeroubaal.

This is all those around me can remember . . . all

they know . . . all they can find of themselves. Names of men and cities, obscure sensations, sounds that have only the faintest echo in our consciousness. And they try to show themselves to each other with these blunter tools.

The Celt talks about the Dagon, and cannot—however hard he tries—escape from that name; the ship's chains still bind his tongue.

The Ethiopian yawns, his head thrown back, his throat taut. His face is broad, negroid, and, as he yawns, gives an impression of a great bronze ring that sways.

And here, here, am I . . . in the very heart of this heap of humanity. . . . Ligarius, Ligarion. . . . This name, *my* name is as live as the goad that weights the end of the whip . . . it passes over, yet sinks deep within me, drives a streak as of lightning through my head. And when the syllables of this name clash and are joined fast in the throat, then in the air all about, he who utters it is my master. Long enough this name has frightened me! And yet, my lips cannot frame it exactly; they essay it soundlessly. . . . Ligar . . . I am myself, yet not myself. A silence binds my tongue, a silence of awe, that wrests the syllables from me.

With all my strength I try to fix my attention, as do men striving to keep awake. I have simultaneously several different impressions, which complement each other like the parts of a single whole. While I stare at the circle of clear sky above my head, the smaller circle of the moon appears within it delicately traced in limpidity—in full daylight, and as if washed in clear light; human hands and faces that are ever being fouled anew. . . . Between me and the light another vision grows . . . indistinct cloudy.

I see beside me the ripple of muscle under smooth

cushion of flesh of Elcho the strongest, the tallest, the finest of us all. He is heavy, but as a bird of prey is heavy when it swoops from a height through the air, and his form seems half sunken in the rocky slope. One leg is stretched taut, the toes crisped and clinging to the rock, holding the great body steady on the steep descent. His chest is a wall of living flesh whose muscles swell in arching ripples like the ripples of the sea. The great shaggy head towers above massive shoulders, where muscles like steel arch and swell, joining the supple strength of his arms. And I see the terrible mouth, that can crush as well as speak, with its jaws fitted close, as if riven, into the hard skull.

The men gathered here find they have no more to say. A whisper in the air,—a faint yet acrid odour stings our nostrils. . . . This crowd is a kind of beast whose body is encircled by our forty arms.

A voice cries: "Siddartha!"

This voice that speaks without cause and without our comprehension comes from an oily blackness of hair and eyes. Yellow. The yellow face from another world—well do I know it and its far-off thoughts.

In nocturnal riverside encampments I had seen this man by the light of braziers and so I recognise almost without seeing him.

Now he squats on his crossed legs as only he knows how, and, his gaze lost in the distance, lifts an admonitory finger, as he has seen others do. His straight, smooth, dark hair hangs in rat-tails round his head—it has not been shaved off, like ours—and has been flattened down into a kind of topknot.

He comes from the humid banks of the Seven Rivers. He—that is, his ancestors before him—has been twice conquered; first at the very beginning of the world, and then at the true beginning of this life. But what mat-

ters is, that with his own eyes he has seen a king, and that that king allowed him to touch him. He speaks to us of this king of Kapilavastu, whom he has seen and touched. He was a king in rags, and at the foot of the highest mountains in the world he preached the equality of all men. He taught the four duties of man, and showed, in several different ways, that every being is of equal value with every other. When I look at this Asiatic, withdrawn into the cell of his body, I see him shining with the glory of this king, who is even now with him: both of them are far from us. And when he cries out "Siddartha," he is throwing a toy to the rest.

In a corner three men kept silence. . . . A Jew, a Greek and an Egyptian . . . learned men, full of the knowledge that men see not, thrown by fate into the midst of this sombre tide of humanity. In this cauldron are mingled all the different types of men.

The ruler of us all would seem he who sits on the little mound on the right hand as if enthroned; he is blind. It is obvious that he is blind, for his every gesture has a dignity too majestic for ordinary men. In something he is greater than me. He is walled up—imprisoned, and his tragedy is laid bare to us all. This strong, tall man whose gaze seems suddenly cut short was a mercenary taken prisoner and tortured by the King of Persia, and then sold to the Phœnician admiral. He is Cretan or Carian. How did he escape from the raging sea, he who is more alone than any of us, immured behind those eyes that are as blank as stones. . . .

We are all alone and mutilated, we who have clung so desperately to life, and who now are to rule in our turn. . . . The first effort we make in common is to seek, to call. . . .



"Where is Hylas? He knows everything," says someone.

And another answers:

"He is drowned."

"Ah! He knew how to build, how to do things, he could answer questions. His lips contained the world."

A voice, a growl, makes itself heard above the others. Elcho proclaims:

"Hylas knew everything, but he didn't know how to swim."

"He *could* swim, but someone split his head open, and he sank," insisted the shrill harsh voice, a scribe.

"He is dead anyway," growled Elcho.

Nobody answered because we were beginning to be afraid. And the dead man sinks down through the waters of our oblivion and contempt, as he sank through the waters of the sea, wrapped in the whirling, purple shroud of his own blood.

"What are we to do?"

They come from all quarters of the world, from every inhabited land. The names that some of them murmur ingratiatingly are so mighty that, even murmured, they open up great vistas. And after giving the name of his home, or of his master, or of some other essential detail, every one of them is anxious to tell more of himself, to stammer out his earlier adventures . . . to make the others believe him. But they find it more difficult to drag themselves out of their sea of silence than out of the watery sea from which they have escaped.

"There was a fig-tree . . . a cloak of coolness. . . ."

"And we gave great feasts in the Palace. . . ."

Over there, a man traces with his finger the stones that built up his friendly home, the slope of the olive

branches woven into the roof, and the shape of the whole hut. It was so small as to be scarcely more than a garment. . . . Of course. . . .

One form stands out from the confused mass, leaning forward, his face strangely eager, arid, with hands outstretched. Before him he is re-creating a face, two eyes, two hands. . . .

Life was beginning only . . . as life itself teaches.

We found out all the ancient established things afresh. We desired to persist, to increase, to choose our mate, to live with her, to found a house . . . and to stave off death.

And then came unknown men.

Sometimes they came with sparkling jewelled necklaces, talking, making great display; or they would rush in upon us crying out that they had been robbed, outraged. Men you had never seen before shrieked out, "I will have vengeance upon you!" One evening when we came back from work we found the face of our world had changed. Dead bodies, heaped up, barred the doors—in horror we recognised them—and their presence made the house unrecognisable; everything we had done till then had gone for nothing. Or our homes remained unchanged, and it was we who were taken away. Or all our goods and chattels disappeared. Or there was the shock of conflict, a battle of ships upon the sea. And there were times when, willing or not, we were made the tools of the terrible merchants, instruments to their heavy home-comings that were made harder because of the wealth, that, like a secret god, was concealed everywhere about them. . . . And so we began to obey once more, differently.

The beginnings . . . the first steps of history. . . . If we could only see what is beyond this weak wail of

suffering. . . . I question. . . . Suddenly I understand that around me there are only ignorant men and rebels. . . .

They took away the father into captivity . . . and so the whole family, deprived of its support, was shattered.

"Where did that happen?"

"I don't know."

The question is repeated.

"You know . . . when you set sail, and the port-tower slides slowly away from you, and you begin to smell the cold smell of salt water, to see the things that you know weaving themselves into a miniature; . . . that quarter on the slope of the hill, towards the bottom, where the houses are as blue as the sea itself, . . . that sort of rubbish heap of the town . . . with its soft, treacherous black sand, smelling horribly under the sun, and netted over with decaying, yellowish foliage of dead palm-trees. . . ."

"But where . . . what town?"

"I don't know."

"Gebel, Milet, Utique? East, West . . . near, far?"

"I don't know."

I don't know! But I do know that in another land at that very moment, a king had need of builders. . . . Or else. The land up there and all that dwelt thereon . . . plants, labourers, walls, changed hands. The masters have made arrangements between themselves, fell heavy on our shoulders, and once more cut off the earth from its faithful lovers.

For these, who were slaves, slave-born, it means only a change of masters . . . for us who were free, it was sudden slavery . . . for me, for the Egyptian, the Greek, and the Jew, who stand together a little,

you can read on our faces how long our captivity has lasted.

The Scythian says that cold is white, that some warm current melts the snows.

"The snow is rosy . . . ever darker as you climb up towards the doorsteps . . . it is crimson. . . . Ah! Where there were three before . . . there is only one now. How black is the human heart! Within each one of us is nothing but a great blackness! And I, who, before, was rich, so rich!"

Another came from the north, even farther north than the Scythian (I also am of the north). His sloping shoulders showed that he was of that half-amphibian race that can glide over the slime without sinking. . . . Something draws him . . . something he has missed.

"Every year, every winter, we decorate a young pine-tree—no taller than a little child. . . . A symbol of returning spring. . . . Winter and spring together. . . . Is it not strange?"

"Here," we tell him, "here the trees are green all through the winter."

But it is not possible to realise in a moment the contrary of what one has known all one's life. He replies:

"Oh, yes . . . when one travels. . . . But in winter the trees are all black, and ragged."

Someone else says: "At the cross-roads there is the statue of the Great Goddess. She wears a long robe, blue as the sky, all sewn with golden stars, and a golden crown on her head. In her arms she carries the child Eros . . . over her head hovers desire, a dove of flame."

The Celt speaks: "No one—not even the wind himself—can pierce our forests. Even the wind dies there,

and never comes out again. They are too lofty . . . and too dark. Underneath the forest of trees there lies another forest of rottenness, of decaying wood, stagnant waters, and fever mists. None can pass. Yet Hamilcar Bakri *did* traverse them, and he reached the amber of the shore."

"We must burn," says Elcho, "burn!"

His voice dominates the crowd. It is a giant like himself, and other men fall silent when he speaks.

"You could not burn the forest! It is too horrible. No flames could ever reach its heart . . . they flare up, and die away without doing it any harm."

"Burn," said Elcho.

"As for me, they crucified me, but I fell from the cross. The wounds in my hands grew heavy as stones, but I could not throw them away, . . . they were once more those two nails which he knelt upon my body to drive in. From the first hour my wounds re-open . . . my oar is always drenched in blood!"

Others, having listened to the speakers till their patience was exhausted, said only: "Yes." They tried to speak, seeking painfully for words to begin, cudgeling their brains, but whenever there was silence, all they could do was to say, as they pointed at him:

"So was I."

And they all fall silent, because their secret thoughts seem to have expressed themselves in the words they have just heard, and yet they are astonished because their story is not really alike.

"This is what we must do."

Their attention, which had been held fast, is suddenly distracted . . . a peal of laughter, a gesture, disturbs one corner of the assembly, then spreads over the whole. . . . Someone has discovered that his

neighbour is like him, because both of them have had their ears cut off. . . . Little fleshy holes in each side of their heads . . . like spare nostrils. And this likeness in ugliness makes them swell with importance . . . there is henceforward a relationship between them. They choke with laughter, and make faces at each other to show each other what they look like.

Between them, into full view, a man with no nose insinuates himself. By mutilating him thus, the hangman—who visits the richer families regularly in search of work—has somehow confused the outlines of his face. Instead of his nose there are two dark furrows, with a white bone between them.

This face stripped of its decent fleshy covering, naked as a pebble in the road, is as if hideousness itself had set her dreadful seal upon it. He is slave-born, a native of the Ascalon littoral whose ancestors were tamed by the peoples of the sea, when they were forced back from Egypt. His punishment was that of the slave who has attempted flight a first time. This outrage upon his master also secured for him the loss of one foot. And now he is laughing heartily as he thrusts his head between those two heads without ears. All three make grimaces to show off their exceeding deformity—it is their only possession.

Another, in the background, has set fire to a branch, so that the light is shed upon his face. . . . This time, it is the mouth that has been mutilated . . . slit by an axe. It still seems a bleeding wound with uneven teeth, tongue and gums like entrails sickeningly exposed within . . . and it glowed in the torch light, like a brazier.

All the adventures are the same. . . . All these ruins of sentences come to the same thing in the end. The same wounds, the same blood. . . . Violated, twisted,

tortured into unbelievably monstrous shapes, out of all human semblance, we are an image of a world of agony. We are a special creation . . . a creation which sets the world a stage back on the road towards chaos.

Are there differences between us? . . . No! All differences were long ago eradicated from our flesh as from our spirit. Our various origins are no longer of importance. Neither colour nor race have any meaning now. The more countries we name as we talk, the more surely rises in our midst the one, the only, form of suffering. Our resemblances grow more and more striking, falling as the veils of night, ever thicker and faster, and converging in that dark Laconian aborigine who stands there, sepulchral and almost vegetable.

As the man of the worn out limb can speak no more, his companion speaks for him and explains,—like the keeper of some strange wild beast in an Olbian market place. He tells us that, in years gone by he himself was a member of one of the tribes of the interior and his companion was of one of the shore tribes, called Helots. When the Dorians invaded Peloponnesus, the Helots put up the strongest resistance and were overthrown and broken, trampled by the victors. And as the Helots were the more numerous—seven of them to one Spartan—there are certain great feasts, at which the numbers are regulated by mass slaughter. Only those who are necessary to carry on the work are kept alive for the warriors are not trained to labour. . . . They are the game on which the young nobles of Sparta practise the manly exercises of war, to break the neck or to pierce the throats,—the fine art of killing.

He lays a finger on the wretch's body, touches the hollow cavern from which the eye stares dully—a white

ring, hardly tinged with pink, surrounding a black pupil starting with fear and horror; he points out the scars of the lash on the mud of the loins. Eyes, mouth, belly, feet . . . they all are nothing but a dead weight, part of the earth itself, which the earth drags back in spite of him. He has survived. . . . He is alive, but alone with his own breath. . . . He has had to leave everything, save only life. And we too, we too, are at the bottom of this underworld which our masters have made for us. We are, each in his measure, the reflection of this man, the meanest of us all; and he, who lies in the mud before us is our ageless father.

Nothing can be worse!

All cries are summed up in that. . . . Even when we were nothing but the driving force behind the oars, those words were in our ears. It is the conviction born of the shadows, of the shadowy, clinging horrors of life, and it came to us as the voice of oracle. It is a beginning . . . a thing new-born, still formless and blind, still senseless, but which is to be our guide, to lift us up from ourselves. . . .

Nothing can be worse!

I open my eyes. There has been an extraordinary fracture; two worlds sway and revolve. A crowded, shrieking world of rebel slaves still dances, thickly, in my chest, in my depths. But higher up in me, at the height of my head, is today. The round roof of sky in the red, but cold, crater. And I am sitting there alone. The cavern is empty, motionless, perfect (absolute stillness is as near as we can get to perfection). I had advanced into the unknown: now is the dizzy return—the vast, vertiginous, gravitational return to the present.

I re-shut my eyes. . . . In the infinite spaces behind



my closed lids, there is a new and terrible voice—it rises living from out the images of my dream:

“Death! . . . Desolation! . . . The world is near its end. . . . Ah! . . . The time is fulfilled, the days are numbered!”

And the man of Hebron, the prophet of evil, cried out in the cavern in the midst of us all:

“Behold the days of wrath are come. The earth is drying up.”

He was there, with his lugubrious warnings, crouched even more wretchedly on the ground than the rest. His eyes, ever on the watch for ours, burnt up by some disease that reddened the lids and dried up the lashes; the incomprehensible curved line of the profile; the head with its bulbous forehead too heavy for the body; the black patches of hair and beard which, after long years of shorn servitude, now showed against the skin like pieces eaten away from the flesh; the mean body; the fragile hands. . . . Bent double, he was hugging his knees to his chest, and from the grey circle of his arms his knees poked up thinly.

Several times he had as if taken wing, stretching up his hands as if to take hold of space, and pull himself up by it as by some pendent chain, but he had swallowed the words on his lips and fallen back again to the ground. This time, however, he had succeeded in getting to his feet, and a thin trickle of saliva ran from the corner of his mouth.

The one-time Greek scribe and the one-time Egyptian priest, who were close beside the man of Judæa, the three still forming a group apart from the others—raised their learned eyes to turn on him a glare of hostility as he began to vociferate.

His cry frightened them, shook them; I saw more than one grimace, and from the deep shadows round

the cave walls, voices replied, violent and terror-stricken:

“It is true . . . the earth is drying up!”

“My country is drying up,” lamented a voice from the gloom—of the speaker one could see nothing but the gleam of his lips and his teeth. “Yonder, in the mountains, the fertile lands are shrinking fast. . . . What is to be done? My country lies on the fringe of the unknown. And it is a strait of the sea which has dried up. The land beyond this strait—you can walk across it now—was, in years gone by, the bottom of the sea. You can see that all these hollows, polished and worn, were once gulfs of the sea; and the higher crags, which stand out like trees, still have a surface like that of sea-reefs. The waves gave them their coloured ornamentation. And these hillocks were islands, for only the waves’ coming and going could have smoothed them thus, when the dark heavy mass of the ocean filled the valleys, and marked out the boundary of the land.

“It is dark; day is still drowned. The suspended line which the eye perceives yonder, over the slopes of the mountains, is as the margin of a port, and the boats in the harbour seem reflected as clouds in the sky.

“In my country the marshes are thick and heavy, full of the seas. Fresh salt is incrusting on all things, and leaves its high-water mark of burning frost on the walls of the houses.

“Everywhere the water is disappearing. In the wells is emptiness. Every year the rivers get lower and lower and retreat, and the rivulets disappear altogether. Men have fled from their banks, but those to whose lands they came in their flight, met them fully armed.

"The countryside stretching along the lake-sea of Quita is also in process of absorbing its rivers. The springs retreat into the ground, an inundation of sand submerges everything; the flying sea of death. Desiccation spreads out on every side, climbing ever upwards, and life escapes ever higher to the upper reaches of the mountains. In a journey of days and weeks through the countryside one meets only a few isolated oases which still live.

"And there are rivers too which try to silt up the cities. I have seen the great river which hates houses,—it brings down mountains of mud. It takes the towns, and buries them beneath masses of débris."

"The Meander destroys Miletus," says the Greek.

"The Hermos destroys Smyrna."

"And the Crathis, Sybaris!"

The Jew took up his cry again. He was strong because he held their attention, and by his emphatic gestures silenced them.

"The signs of the wrath to come!"

"Of wrath," repeated several mouths.

"Cities will not endure for long! It is the end of all things."

He was believed: "Yes"—they murmured.

"The world is being struck on every side, and it is well. You are getting your desserts, because you obeyed. All of you obeyed whatever casual adventurer chose to give you orders, instead of obeying him who was right. You bowed low before the altars of those who said: I am God.

"You have obeyed masters who used you to manufacture their own glory, their own beauty, and their own joy. And they themselves have proclaimed that their palaces, their crowned cities are cemented with your blood.

"You went out into the world and fought against one another, not for any great idea,—merely each man for himself, for his personal glory, for his family, for his wealth. The masters lived upon the death of the masses—the masses which till now have been immortal. These men have only reigned by force. Force becomes exhausted and dies, so they made use of ruse. And this has been the whole history of man since the deluge."

"Egypt!" says the Egyptian, as if this word summed up all that could ever be said. (His voice was as cold as stone.)

"Where is Egypt and all its grandeur? Cambyses marches upon it. And if you ask, where now is Thebes?—it is a few scattered villages around the old sanctuaries within the immense, deserted, city boundaries.

"After the Ethiopian and the Libyan, the Persian. The great conquerors, who, successively, have taken hold of Egypt as one takes up the reins of a chariot. . . . Egypt is exhausted and broken up even to the very subsoil by the weight and might of these overlords."

"Assur!" said a Syrian, whose eyes gleamed under their bushy brows.

"His history was the most marvellous of all! His prosperity was nourished upon all the sores of Asia. The Assyrian bull had never been so full of blood. The ancient, gigantic king was drunk with his victories! He no longer took the trouble to strike down new enemies. He built cities that were as vast as whole countries. But scarcely was he cold in his grave when Cyaxares, a petty chieftain of an overgrown Aryan village, which was under the jurisdiction of the governor of Kharkhar—(that same Cyaxares whose own father had left on the field of battle his rebel bones and

his slender forces), utterly destroyed the works of Assur. And not only did he destroy the great capital in the full ostentation of its glory, but he destroyed for ever this empire within which, since its first foundation, there has scarcely been a year without its season of war. He destroyed the dynasty of sovereigns who strode resplendent over ruins, and built new walls round conquered cities, and skinned their prisoners alive, and covered the ramparts with their skins, and impaled others upon them, and immured yet others within."

There was a brief silence, then: "When I was a soldier, I passed with the army near the ruins of Mespila and Larissa. And an old man said to me: Do not believe what they tell you: This is not Mespila and Larissa, this is Ninoua and Kalkhau, that Cyaxares destroyed seventy-five years ago.

"Nineveh and Kalak, the two cities whose massive walls have borne down oceans of men, that amassed all Assyria and all its Asiatic prey around the terrifying palace of a single ruler! The two colossi that rose above life. And sixty-five years afterwards they are unrecognisable, and men have given them false names! This frightful dynasty of conquerors has disappeared without leaving a single trace—Adasi, Oushpia, Shanshiadad, the pontiff-kings, Assurbelnishishu and Busurrassur, kings—who, a thousand years ago, treated as equals the lords of Chaldæa; Burlaburiyash, Kurigalzu and Kharakardash. All these disappeared in the person of Sinhariskhun, who, besieged in his palace by Cyaxares set fire to himself and his wives and all his treasure.

"Nineveh had often conquered Babylon from the day when Tugultininip entered it and seized the hands of the god Bel, as did so many of his descendants after

him. Later, Babylon, rebuilt around the temple of Egasilla by Assurakheiddin, the generous madman, overwhelmed the shade of Nineveh."

"Babylon, Sardanapalus!" said he who wished to show that he had been a soldier. "I saw near Tarsus the statue of a man with crossed fingers. Underneath, it was written: 'I, Sardanapalus, the son of Arakyn-daraxes, built Anshilus and Tarsus in one day, but now I am dead.'"

"You lie," said the Greek, "Sardanapalus never lived. You are only repeating what you have heard, you never saw it yourself." The other withdrew, muttering, "I have seen things all the same."

"Force is becoming exhausted, the empires are worth nothing, for they endure not. The Scythians and the Cimmerians who ravaged the world—the all-destroying Scythians whom God drew forth with his left hand—clothed in the skins of their enemies, their armour ornamented with mutilated hands, their houses tents on wheels,—were destroyed in their turn by the very succession of their victories. They came—and they departed. Cyaxares broke them, and forced back those that remained through the passes of the Caucasus.

"But this formidable Cyaxares and all his deeds endured less time than did the rest. All Media and all its glory fell to the race of Achemenes the Passargedan at one blow. Astyages counted for nothing in the hands of Cyrus. The King of Lydia was still important in Asia. Cyrus the Iranian seized Cræsus, and Cyrus the Iranian entered Babylon like the very Euphrates. And now, the great canal is a long valley, and in the midst of these hillocks and valleys of fallen stones, where there are scarcely any continuous lines of stone masonry still cemented together, one would imagine oneself among wild mountain crags. Glory spins round

and round like a madman. Riches come and go from one king to another. Only the dead stir not. The people are prolific, but now evening falls, vaster and blacker than all the previous winters of the world. This is what has ever happened. Masters who have built their happiness upon the unhappiness of millions. Why have the crowds obeyed them? It has been like a child's game on the sands of the sea-shore. But each grain of sand is a human heart in a human body—a thing of joy and of grief.

“And now the world is drawing to an end, vanquished by war, full of ruins. All roads lead to devastation. In every place there is nailed up like a malediction the name of some massacre, some destruction. Nothing remains of the ancient order. It has been impossible to reconstruct as much as has been destroyed. Men are only gods of destruction. The greatest memories decay. Whenever one goes in the world one meets with proofs that cry aloud the agony of victories. Mannai is no longer. . . . Ellibi? It has disappeared in agony. Where are the kingdoms of Curartou and of Heth and of Damascus? Their names are light, useless things. We are at the end of days. The escapements and torrential gorges that surround the look-out tower of Uru-Selim—Moriah, Millo, Zion—are visibly worn by the attrition of time and space. What matters it that the Achemenides should be master of the world, and that the Greek should be of one side the sea, and the patrician of Carthage of the other. What matters it? These are the personages who are the obverse of the desolation of the poor. It is for them that you make the wheat grow from the earth, that you gather in the fish from the sea, and that you raise up walled cities upon barren chaos. It is for them that you kill the men, and break open the

gates they point out to you. It is for them that you multiply life or death. By themselves they would be nothing in the world but a nightmare. You, you are the magicians that say: 'Let all your dream be accomplished!' *They* have willed the crime, but *you* have caused unhappiness. Ah, if only you had been able to live among yourselves in peace and joy. Why not? You do not know why. It is because you have permitted the voice of obedience to triumph within you. All of you from that moment, even to you, O calculating scribe, and even to you O priest, who has performed enigmas and hidden ceremonies: above your heads is learning and enchantment, but you are as dark as the basalt of Bashan with which Solomon paved the roads that led to Zion, four hundred years ago. All of you, with your obedience, have created fatality."

"You do not know of Harmodios and Aristogiton," said the Greek, who had a fine voice. "If you knew them, if you knew the hatred they swore towards the sons of Pisistratus, if you could see their daggers, you would no longer say that tyrants were surrounded only by obedient servitors."

"And you have never heard," said another, "of Collatinus and Lucius Junius, whom they called also Brutus, because he feigned madness to escape the minions of the king. The days of the potentate who has come from Tarquenas are numbered, and in place of the dynasty of the Thyrsena there shall be established the Roman Republic."

"Republic. . . . What is this new word? It is simple. It is the commonwealth. It is life that is released. It is the contrary of the magic rites of the master. Republic."

Every man was deeply impressed by the utterance of this great word. The Israelite strained to his utmost,



and with each response he strained yet more. Into his voice there came suddenly a low coughing sound, followed by shrill ridiculous cries that pierced the ears of those that heard him. His thin hand opened and closed.

"It is not true," he shouted hoarsely, "it is not true. No, your passion to change everything will take you even to murder. To the murder of what? Do those of whom you speak imagine they will destroy tyranny? Democracy does not take the place of autocracy because one man takes the place of another. What is the use of making republics if they are governed by kings?"

The Roman, who was forced to flee the banks of the Tiber because of the discovery of a conspiracy, lifted his arm in a great gesture, contenting himself with: "His days are numbered and Rome will be a Republic. . . . A Republic. The new law is ready, and we, the republicans, know it word for word in our hearts."

A diminutive man asked: "What does the new law ordain for those who have borrowed money and cannot repay it? Because in my own case that is the reason why I was whipped and sold into slavery by the islanders, by order of Polycrates."

But the other, his hand upon his heart, his eye as if inspired, recited, with the look of one who will not stop to understand what he is uttering: "Let the rich serve as surety for the rich; and whoever wants to for the poor. On the market day let the creditor repay himself with the flesh of his debtor. If he cuts too deeply, or not deeply enough, let him not be responsible."

The man grimaced while the laughter of the others fell upon him, and at that moment I felt my inmost thoughts disintegrate. I discerned the distinction be-

tween words and their meaning. One would say there are several truths,—and I thought of that amusement which Thespis, who was struck by the glory of unrolling liturgies, showed to the Athenians. To animate the fictions of the poets with real personages—gazed upon by a crowded assembly. Hypocrite actors! Yes, I saw the double face of the men of law.

The Jew growled like a dog, without words. Because he did not know what to say? Because he had too much to say, and because he was submerged by his own certitude. He stared before him as if he wished to seize hold of truth, which so drew him forward that at one moment he went down on all fours as if to get closer to it. One felt that he was surpassed by it in every direction, and that he was misshapen and battered by the grandeur which he sought. He had come forth from the forms, and the rules, and the modes of beauty and wisdom which had been recognised heretofore. He was drunk with divine yearning, with an exaggeration of thought which is not adapted to our stature, nor even to his, and which forced him to attempt impossible things.

The Greek turned his head saying: "What a madman."

A sound of thunder rumbled through the whole extent of space, shaking the walls of the mountains and our very bones and even the heavy dusk which lit the storm.

"We cannot disobey! The gods must be obeyed!"

It was the blind man enthroned and skulking behind his frozen eyeballs who uttered this desperate cry. We turned to him and in the vivid light that was suddenly spread about us, he seemed to be peering from the bloody apertures in his head. He was pointing to

invisible chains. His words struck us with fear and shuddering. The gods are that which is at the back of the wind's breath; that to which the most anguished cries cling.

"We are not free, since there are gods!"

"Ah," said he who was touching me, raising himself painfully out of the silence, "we are always trying to escape the gods. Not the great, veiled ones, *that* were vain indeed; but the little ones, the bands of evil spirits, who give chase to man, not only in the fields and the woods but in the very streets of Volsina and Cere. If once these hidden ones have marked you, you must not let them recognize you again. To put them off the track you can build your house anew or place the door on the other side, you can change your dress, your name, your language—and even then you will often be recognised."

"The evil spirits," says the Celt, "come out of their burrows at night and lead the belated traveller into the bog that sucks him down. And while the poor wretch is struggling and writhing and crying for help, the evil spirit takes on the semblance of some pensive traveller and walks close by past the soft snare of slime. He deliberately hears nothing and slowly passes out of sight, inflicting the torture of hope upon the dying man who is gasping out his life."

"I sacrificed my son. . . . Before the whole city I did it that men might see fortune changing like a capricious woman."

"So did I!"

"My gods are terrible," said the Hyperborean, who had described a little festive tree in the winter. "One can never escape them; the breath in our lungs and the blood in our veins is caught in the web woven by the gnomes. But one day our gods shall die, for so is

it written in the runes wherein our prophets and seers have sown their truths—writing on stones, on the trunks of forest trees, and on the fresh skin of human sacrifices.”

“And thou, whom dost thou obey, thou and thy people!”

The icy lips of the Egyptian uttered these words. He was a priest of Saïs who had been cast out of his sanctuary on a charge of sacrilege, and who had fallen on evil days. He appeared discoloured and dried up, moulded into one piece, and he seemed to move in a steadfast dream. One rarely heard him speak and he scarcely moved. Of all the rowers he was the most narrowly built and the worst fitted for it. When he bent and toiled in the anaphractian galley one could hear his meagre frame creak and groan like creaking boards. He lay flat on his stomach like some painted effigy with glassy eyes whence issued a voice saying to the man of Judæa:

“Whom hast thou obeyed? Thy one god Jahveh who was the god of the Canaanites when the Israelites adopted him, who left Sinai and Seir to bring to Hebron and Shechem the stones and serpents and oxen of wood or metal which were made in his image? Thy one god Jahveh who in the days of his power housed in his temple the goddess Astarte and all her priests as though he were married to her? And thought it fitting that beside his chief sanctuary on the Mount of Olives others should be raised to him at Chemosh and Amman. . . . Or is it he who, because of his silver ornaments, was stolen by the tribe of Dan, at the accustomed sanctuary of Micah, of Ephraim, and then installed in Laish of Sidonia after having seized and slaughtered the whole army in the midst of peace?

And what crowned heads hast thou obeyed? From Jephtha the robber to Jehu? Is it that just and clement king who first descended into Ophra, because he had terrorised all his neighbours by slaying the two Midianite chiefs? Is it the blameless Abimelech whose kingdom stretched from east to west and who held rich travellers in ransom? Is it the generous kings of those dynasties whose accession was always but the obverse of an assassination; those who slaughtered the whole male population of the Idumeans, and two out of every three Moabites; those who, when they had vanquished the Ammonites, hacked them to pieces with saws and hatchets and burnt them in brick-ovens. Of all the peoples, thine has been the most ignoble in the hour of its strength. But thou wilt not sink into the past nor hold thy peace. Thy only strength is thy grasp on life. Thou art no good for life, thou art good only for resurrection."

"Yes," said the Jew, "I have been the vilest and the most ignoble. I have been the worst of all. Let my race be wiped out if it must. Let that be done unto us that has been done unto others, as unto Baeska who slew Nadab son of Jeroboam and whose son Ela was slain by Zimri. Let it be extinguished as was in the time of the judges the whole tribe of Simeon, which passed no man knows whither, and the tribe of Reuben which was exhausted defending itself against the Syrians of Damascus, the wandering Amalekites, and those two grinding-mills Moab and Ammon. Or let the Lord destroy us with one stroke since he has said that he reserved a terrible end for his people. Let us depart, if he wishes it so. . . . And yet there were days in the beginning when all was pure. When the only holy places of our fathers were a mound of earth near Jericho, then, a pyramid at Bethel like those

of Chaldea, or else a hillock or a shelter in Shiloh. And now, after much earthly glory—great days have come to us again because of the anguish of exile. For in our days once more we see and suffer God, without intermediary. True, he had burnt of yore before Moses on the mountain, and Jacob had seen the Eternal the Lord himself face to face in Makhanaim. But after that we lost sight of him because of the priests, because of the royal household which fattened in the temples. We no longer saw him as he is, for man's task is not to create truth but to put it in its place, or rather, to say, if they can: It is there.

“It is harder than one thinks to put truth in its place. Jahveh entering the soul of a man once reasoned with himself: How can I know whether a prophet is a prophet of Jahveh? Well, if what he foretells comes to pass, we must believe and fear him. But if I have to decide and act before the future come about? When Saphan son of Acalijahu had read unto Josias the book which Hilquiah had found in the temple, the great king Josias raised up his voice and wept because at first he could not tell whether this book was indeed the law. The prophetess reassured him, and trembling he began to believe. To see God is a deep thing. When he draws near, the wind blows and shakes the mountain, but he is not in the wind; the thunder rolls and covers the mountain with a mountain of sound, but he is not in the thunder, nor in the fire. And Elias—stepping out on to his threshold and covering his face with his mantle hears the still small voice.

“His voice was never again lost. The prophets were his marching, war-like voice raised against the silence which each one of us hides within him. We saw that we had been very much mistaken about him, and that he was much more truly the one God than

had been thought. He was not he who had claimed mastery by force, but by truth. He said through the mouth of Amos, the first who found him anew, 'Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Assyrians from Kir? By this he showed that truth is not of one people nor of one land, but of the whole world. 'Far from me,' saith Jahveh, 'be the sound of your psalms, and let me not hear the voice of your lyres, and think not to have said all when ye have said Samaria or Ur-Salim. But let righteousness spring forth like a fountain and like a rushing stream.'

"True, this is a late day to disobey evil and to make the people turn from their idolatry and filth. Very late they rebuild the temple, and the rich remained to idle at their ease in exile when the great king threw open the barriers. And what have they done in these ten years, these who came back through the gates of Ur-Salim, that—alas!—are wide open not in greeting, but in destruction, or who settled at Anathot, at Gaba, at Bethlehem? How many stones have they placed one upon the other in ten years? And the new temple will be so small that the faithful tore their garments and covered their heads with ashes around Shesbazzar the son of Joakin when they saw how small was the space it would cover. But at least they refused, in their greatest need, the help of the people of Ephraim, of Korto, of Hamath and Sepharvahim, against whom the Lord sent lions in the olden days, and who were too new to the cult of God not to have the names of their idols still on their lips. They refused; and this is a great sign of the times. It means that they now have strength to build something new in time and

space—because those who can realise a mighty remorse can lay hold on the unknown. It is no longer a question of rebuilding a ruined temple; it is no longer a question of walking between Boaz and Yakin (for there are those for whom the temple of the true God is but the idol of its structure). It is, now, raising up truth with the help of stones. My God is not the king of the Jews, he is the lord and creator of life. To obey him is not to obey the Jewish people, it is to obey oneself, since he is the king of truth throughout the whole world, everywhere and always for ever and ever. This overthrows once and for all the Baalim and Asteroths, all the lords of the flesh who one after the other bring nothing but their littleness (a body, two eyes, two little hands). We must say: Yonder! and we must say: Tomorrow! and open our eyes and understand that God grows like those who come toward us, but are not yet with us. The fearful and the limited think that wisdom should crawl along the ground and they afflict her with slowness. But true wisdom is as glorious as madness!”

The odours of the earth breathe over the sea, and mingle with its perfume. The mystery of unknown lands comes to me, borne on the breeze, still keeping its secret. Were I to open my eyes, I would see upon the shore whereon I lie, all immensity, filled with light and walled in by the purple glow which plays about my head. Through my half-closed eyelids I see men against the glowing vault moving like a procession of black figures on the red curved surface of a Grecian vase.

“Far away,” he was saying to the slaves, “beyond the Pontus Euxinus which none has ever crossed, ten thousand miles from Iolchos, ten thousand miles



of Hellenic conquest!—there hung the marvellous fleece that was like the shield of the setting sun.

“The men standing one behind the other in the hollowed boat stood out clear and black against the glowing red sky, with their pointed beards, their helmeted profiles, their loins narrow as an hour-glass, their gleaming black arms with muscles outlined in red. Outlined in red also were the scenes of war embossed upon their shields. In the person of Jason were summed up all the heroes of the Mynoans, the Argives and the Pelasgians. The Argo sailed from adventure to adventure, accumulating all the wealth of the unexplored.

“The ship adopted the name of the powerful southern city of the Atrides—that cradle of Homer and of the Trojan war. But Jason comes from the country of the gods and of their predecessors, the Titans; from the land of Thessaly where stands the eponymous city of Hellas. And it is from the coast of Hemonig surmounted by Pelion that the Argonauts embarked one night while the stars shed their benign influence on the venture! It was Athene, the future protectress of the rival of Aegina who devised the ship so cunningly. The mast gives forth oracles, having been cut in the sacred forest of Dodona in Epirus—the country of the Graici and the Helli—where the oak trees speak and are understood. Heracles who is the son of earth like the Pelagian sailors, is the look-out forward, and on his shoulders are crossed the two flattened paws of the Nemean lion, whom defeat has for ever pacified. Here too are Peleus the father of Achilles, and Castor and of Pollux. Orpheus of Thrace sings with his lyre that the rowers may thrust and pull the better in unison; for music and *élan* are one and the same thing, and if Aphrodite arose from the sea, lusty

sailors at the oars gave birth to creative rhythm.”

“Rowing is a punishment,” said one of the men, raising himself on his elbow at the sound of the talk. He was one of those dark empty infernal rowers who try to drink in the sea with their arms.

The Greek paid no heed to him. As he related the history of that sunny voyage in his musical voice, a ray of sunshine followed in the wake of the storm, and spreading threads of gold among the rocks of the cavern. As he spoke—not for all of us, but for the few who surrounded him, leaving all the rest alone among the darkness of the stones.

He was young and eager, busy and loquacious. He had all the appearance of a scribe, but one could not say whence he came nor what he had done. He said that Pharaoh had sold him in exchange for a cunningly wrought ring, and his eyes shone when he described lovingly that golden bauble which in Amosis' eyes was of equal value with him.

He used all those gestures which the Greeks have made known to the world. There were other Greeks among us (for wherever one goes there are always Greeks) but he excelled them all in the art of praising his race, and in charming our ears with his praises. He would show in a manner that none could gainsay that the Greeks had caught beauty on the wing, that their gods were splendours rather than gods. On the Phœnician foundations, which they so easily surpassed, the Hellenes had embroidered the coasts of the Mediterranean with rich and mighty ornaments. The Ægean with his passion of luxurious curiosity and his magical power in practical work has brought a greater abundance of light into this earthly abode. He has lessened death which is now but a moment of life.

But he from Saïs muttered with relentless scorn:

"The family of Zeus!" And he added not without disgust that though the Jew may bark, the Greek is petty and vulgar, and fatuous as a *nouveau-riche*: that this parvenu can create nothing but objects and even his thought can be measured. And he said too that life was but a moment in death.

His sharp features were like the blade of his whole person. With his thin angular arms and shoulders, with his flat and hollow chest like an unrolled parchment and the piercing shaft of his fixed endless gaze, he seemed on another plane of existence; he seemed at once something more and something less than a living man. He raised his finger and looked at us each in turn with those strange, distant, cold eyes.

"Everything is beautiful!" said the Greek, as though to keep hold upon the world, while the Jew was groaning that everything ought to be begun anew, and the Egyptian was repeating . . . "Egypt!"

"They tried to rebuild Egypt, to rebuild it in the Greek manner; and then Egypt was emptied through the head like a body prepared for the embalming. Because Psammeticus loved the Ionians and the Carians overmuch, and smiled on them and opened his camps to them, two hundred and forty thousand soldiers of the old Egyptian army went into exile one day, wounded with an invisible wound. Such a thing had never been before. There was no battle. They went out in fighting formation to the place assigned, like conquerors of themselves. And this multitude settled and grew like a garden at Napata, and they shaped with their own the destiny of their hosts, like our gods when they wandered to other shores and brought divinity to other gods."

The aged priest spoke with such concentrated scorn

that it seemed to strike and arrest his own words. He sunk into silence. He bent his arm over his head, in a square frame around his face, his hand lying against his cheek like an attenuated leaf. Lying thus upon his back, his body looked like the body of Osiris, when he was slain by Sit and borne on the waters to the shore of Byblos, where this ship-wreck of the god brought to the cult of Adonis the added splendour of the great shroud of Memphis.

The Greek, the Egyptian and the Jew remained side by side because, with all their differences, they had something in common amongst all the others, as though each typified one of the three fundamental aspects of man. The Egyptian represented faith and the past; he was permeated with antiquity and his adoration was of surpassing depth. The Greek stood for moderation and the present; he was the creator of clear, luminous outlines. The Jew was for wrath and the future; and was the father of the time to come.

They did not accept each other. Each was too much himself to take the trouble sufficiently to penetrate into the other. The Greek reproaches the Egyptian with being asleep and with having only half awakened the stones to life in his gigantic statues and in his temples that are vast as mountains. He does not understand that the two outstretched arms of the worshipper form an infinite triangle, nor can he comprehend the endless falling into the abyss of prayer. And the Egyptian cannot permit that we dance with our gods. And neither one nor the other can understand what terrible things must be to create justice in the world, and how that imprecation and revolt are the creative principle of life, the power behind all human power.

For one moment I understood all three; and I can say truly that I contemplated together those three un-

fettered visionaries; the Greek who looks upon all that lives, the Egyptian who looks upon all that has lived, and the Jew who looks upon all that is not yet life.

And thinking on this, I marvelled that each was right despite that contradiction. All three. And then a sudden conviction possessed me. I saw that the greatest of the three was this wild, anguished beggar shaken to the roots of his being by remorse. It was this suppliant with eager hands for ever outstretched, this worshipper for ever shattered by the longed-for advent of a god who never comes. The greatest of the three was he whose heart was pierced with the eternally renewed wound of the messiah.

For my part I was born a freeman in the great country of the North. Galleon once taught me in Cumes, and though ill-fortune has made of me a slave, yet have I learning and did see as in a flash in this cavern things which others saw not. Therefore did I say to myself: "Between greatnesses there are ties which few can be sure of reaching. But consider well if thou art worthy to understand Egypt and its immeasurable vistas, if thou art capable of knowing deeply enough, before daring to speak of it. And as for the others, try to understand them or be silent, and do not say, like a child: 'Where is the perfection of the Egyptians, where the organisation of the Jews, where the fervour of the Greeks?' Seek not to find their creations elsewhere than along those paths where their genius was wholly absorbed in order to achieve.

"We can only understand what we respect. If thou encounterest the stranger with scorn or resentment, thou art but a blind fool. And who knows whether there be not some place where all extremes will one day meet?"

At this very moment I was among the vanquished and the trampled. . . . I am far from this human débris. . . . But am I really? No! I must enter in still more deeply. . . .

He who had given its first impetus to imprisoned truth cried out suddenly, rising on his toes.

"Who then am I that I should love myself more than another?"

And at that moment when his eyes and his mouth were full with love, he had no wish to depart from this poor herd of cripples; he came back strongly to take his part in it. He did not leave them in peace.

"You are men. Your only duty is to change evil into good. You are in millions. You could do everything if you wished. You would wish if you knew."

This revolted slave meant to force man to a rebirth, and he was strong because he himself *was* this rebirth, and his example was vivid before them.

He gathered us up and shook us in the dark, like a grave-digger, that macabre herdsman who is ever manipulating his lugubrious cattle.

"You have lived *against* yourselves. Enough of race-names and family names, enough of man assassinated by the words of man. Everything has culminated in war; and first of all the unequal war of the body that hurls itself upon work; the task that is ever to do, the task that is ever to be begun anew, that grows again during the night, and that is never finished. You can all remember how that the oar was a lance that searched you out, and yet you had with that lance to carve so hard into the wave that the water became as rock, and as an anvil on which to support and push forward the ship towards the goal chosen by your masters. Everything ended in the cudgel and the whip, in crucifixions, in human hearts thrown about

like worthless scraps, in human children crushed by soldiers at street corners of towns, in the utter destruction of the two gentle things of life—love and friendship.”

His voice brought us back to the misery of slavery, and in the extremity of our distress, we turned and repeated his words, like those whom grief makes mad.

And disordered truth once again rose wholly before our eyes in the Helot who, for some reason of his own, had seated himself right in the midst of us upon a rock, and was attempting grandiose movements, saying: “Look at me!”

He was less than a man; he was grotesque as an ape, and terrifying as an ape in his resemblance to man—the laughable and the fearful inextricably mixed.

This slave on the table of rock brings to us the taste of that death that man gives to man. He has been fashioned in another wise by the races and castes that have used him; he has been exhausted by them, sacrificed to vast strangers, to carnivorous kings. Before me these are the new creatures, that other species of man that injustice has manufactured in the great plains, on the highways, in the hiding-places of houses; the men-tools and the men-things which with their arms and with their flesh have produced the masses that use their own mass for self-destruction. Before me are the bleeding, immured victims of the ramparts of Shalmanazar and Sennacherib.

The man of the future, the benefactor, wanted to force us not to relax our hold on that which we had gained and to go yet further forward, like the horseman who forces his horse to believe that one road

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leads to another. And this is the idea that took shape in our heads:

Since, here and today, we are the masters; since we are about to begin in a new land; let us then perform the justice of God. Let there be something else to crown our laws than conflict; and happiness that wars on unhappiness. We must revise utterly and establish our rule totally otherwise; so that for each it shall mean exact justice and equality.

It needed only some small additional thing for the will that strove to find itself in the stormy mists of our words, to be accomplished; for each of us believed a little in the intangible proof that had been brought before us. In order that those who listen may *live* that which they have heard, in order that they may be united and suddenly carried away, there must have been the passage of tremendous events, tumultuous and shattering. Then, in that moment, it suffices that some other than he in whom silence resounds, that some man or other in the crowd shall pronounce a word, so that the meaning of the new truth shall be made visible. And then fell this drop of water around which the rest was to condense. A voice that had said nothing cried out:

“Justice.”

And such was the power of this word that it came right into us. Justice . . . the reign of justice. Suddenly, in a flash, we glimpsed a future world as lovely as a new firmament.

Justice comes forth from injustice. This I saw upon that evening. Its taste came upon our lips when they were wearied by reciting the injustices which we had suffered. The grandeur of religious cults was brought forth from the littleness of man that wandered mournfully from one day to another. And this is the same;



he who is struck without reason is the obscure source of justice, its inventor. The poor that succumb under the weight of evil have created good. Excess of desolation, the drunkenness of misery grow and pass beyond all bounds . . . and are continued into a calm harmony; sweet gentleness falls from tragic mouths—and it is thus that the true adventures into the real. Injustice is a visible thing in the world, but justice exists only in the spirit. Equity therefore is the human daughter of iniquity. Man is the same thing as God in that reason that has created the inner world.

Among men, the poor are always the creators. Since the hazard of nature and the mysteries of the body first existed, all that which has been discovered has come from the depths, for there is scarce aught else save the vast misery of the masses, the living earth of crowds, that is fecund. Not only have they made with their hands the walls of palaces, the ramparts of cities—and, too, all ruins:—they have made with their grief, poetry, and the science of hope, and they will make the monument of law.

And all these assurances are so simple that there is a breath of genesis. All these human outlines melt into one another in the evening, in the profound night, and they speak words that are as alike as their shadows.

The Greek pronounces the name of Pythagoras . . . the great Samian—(and I myself, once, at Agrigentum heard him speak from behind a veil)—gave to Justice a spiritual and human nature, analysing it so far that he demonstrated that it has the svelte perfection of the square and of the number four, that it subjects the centre of reason to the centre of life. And beyond all that has been said, beyond this formidable boundary, the simple musician of rea-

son foresaw the boundless immensity that the law of equilibrium and proportion dominate; the astral dance of events.

The Roman utters the new word, the magnificent, conquering, inexorable word: The Republic,—the Republic,—the Commonwealth.

The yellow wanderer of Heptapotamia, he who had seen Buddha, says: Sakia Muni.

The simplified man is moved. He stirs as if perceiving that here was an extraordinary hazard to attempt. He presents himself to himself as a grandiose object of religious worship; richness that gives breath and flesh to the lofty, distant affirmation of Pythagoras. (For all creation rises by divine law from the depths.) He repeats:

“Man equal to man. Man equal to man.”

The Israelite, intoxicated with straight lines, extends his two meagre arms towards this human sign, toward this naked depository.

“He is right,” he cries furiously. “He is right!”

And after an amazing, supernatural silence—during which nothing stirred—the prophet continued with a marvelling chanting voice, words that came to him as he needed them, or that perhaps he overheard, his two hands clasped tight together:

“The world is old; we are at the end of days. . . . And it shall come to pass at the end of days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be exalted at the top of the mountains.”

“I, the equal of this dog!”

The miserable Periœcos, the animated puppet of the Spartans, jumped up furious, and we saw his jerky movements, the three lines in his narrow forehead, and

his clenched hands. He turned and spat upon the Helot.

At the side of the Periæcos another form opened its mouth and exclaimed:

“The law of justice? No! Let there be no more law!”

And then, louder, came other words:

“Let us be avenged!”

And those words had a sudden echo; they materialised the will. All the lovely illusions were gone. . . . All was to be changed? Nothing would be changed: Nothing!

A red, warm, blood-red, glow fell over all. Elcho stirred his limbs, rose up, as if he had waited for this moment. We heard his peculiar harsh breathing: “Burn.” He himself had set fire to the countryside; of the mountain he had made a volcano and of the trees a forest of flame. . . . The fire and its mad beating wings. . . . It is an animal since it breathes and obeys—and now will not cease from its obedience. And the syllables that fall from Elcho’s mouth resound and are re-echoed from the walls of the grotto that cannot contain them:

“We have suffered. Well, then, let us now make others suffer!”

“They have defeated us, drawn our blood, burnt our houses, and bound us in chains. Let us do as they have done! We have been slaves: now let *us* have slaves!”

And the whole force of life that was formless in those creatures uttered a cry of joy. Yes, yes, it was that. In truth, the “great man” had given voice to the desire that was in each.

And just as, earlier, when they were groaning and

rumbling their unhappiness, signs of their different origins had disappeared from their skins; and just as, earlier, the more striking the outward difference the greater the inner resemblance; their desire is now to imitate and to begin anew. They have suffered too deeply from injustice, now they must inflict it in their turn.

To build anew! When all the rest has been cleared away, there remains the goal; to build anew!

That which has been done must be done over again. Since the happiness of some is the unhappiness of others, let us seek their unhappiness.

“We must have enemies!”

“We must conquer and have slaves!”

The Cretan—his face frightful in its blindness—arose, so suddenly that his displacement disturbed the air.

“To be Conquerors . . . to be Kings. To put their eyes out.”

The opaque skin of his face creased in a voluptuous smile; to kill other lights in their nesting places—the two lights whose sterile, bleeding, matrixes he shows us.

The Jew had gone back to his corner like a beaten dog, and begun the everlasting complaint of the Jew:—“What others have done since time began is only too visible; it is impossible not to imitate them. . . . If we were the first men, if we were not fascinated by the great contours of reality, by this resplendent canopy that the past has become to us . . . if only there were not glory! But now we must rebuild, rebuild! This first word which resounds is the first of all those that are interchained; order! Established order—the force of example, that second light.

“Man will last for ever. Then when will he have

the strength to shatter his own soul so that he may be recreated. When will he rise from out himself?"

"He wanted to stop me from passing, or at any rate I did not understand what he said to me; so I broke his bones."

"I,—I killed the goat-man."

They can scarcely fit their scattered memories piece by piece together. Now they are overflowing with words and cries, shouting one another down with the joy of men that have lost their way and are now safely returned.

From their tumult arose the great spectres of force that they evoked and acclaimed; first Heracles,—he who was the strongest of all, the giant vagabond; then Gilgamesh, who strangled a lion by crushing it with one arm against his stomach; and Ninip Adar the Assyrian; and Melkarth the Tyrian—("He came all alone into a certain land, and by himself alone, with the strength of a whole multitude, built Alesia.") And Deucalion whose will to rule brought forth men from stones; and even the singer Amphion who, by the strength of his mighty voice, ordered the very rocks into walls.

And it was the strongest of men who first mastered untamed Iron. Ah, these mighty smiths with their mighty blows that make one's very eyelids quiver! It is from Kyniras' furnace that are come the pitchfork and the hammer and, above all, the sharp weapon that thirsts for flesh. And these adventurers that are so colossal that they require the vast spaciousness of epics for their dwellings are not gone; they have remained somewhere on earth, seeking out further enormities. One finds their huge remains among so many Heraclides. Those of Lydia that are sprung from

the mighty Amphala:—Kambles was tormented by such intense hunger that, one night, he devoured the queen, and Meles' wife gave birth to a lion.

“Once upon a time, far from here, lived the Psyllæ. . . . Well, one day, they set forth to fight the Wind!”

“And the masters of the promontories,” says the Hyperboræan from the northern mists, from the lands where the high cliffs are cut only by their roofs of fog,—“they command great ships that have heads and that have hearts too, since prisoners of war are mingled with the rollers when they are launched.

“On the last campaign all the males were impaled. But the Persian torture is worth seeing! They remove the skin, stuff it full of straw and hang it to the wall by the teeth. It is easy to say: remove the skin, but it is nevertheless a difficult matter. They bind the victim, and flatten him against a column with his back turned, the weapon draws a line from one shoulder to the other, and that done, amidst all sorts of horrible cries, the hangman's hand enters in.”

“Tell us, did the king himself put your eyes out?”

We listened eagerly for the reply. He gathered himself up, and amidst ardent respect said:

“Yes, it was he. I was on my knees and held fast so that I could not withdraw. He had a javelin which had already served those who writhed in a corner—a moistened javelin, that shone at its extreme tip, and I saw him gazing upon me with a strange look, his eyes gleaming. I sensed his strong desire to do that which he was about to do. He was as near me as a wistful woman, since he was going to touch me in this wise. . . . I, two paces from the king of kings. That was the last thing I saw.

“As for Manyes, he always used his own fingers

for putting out eyes. And a certain nobleman did that to my own father, by order of the king."

"Who was it that, at the last, killed Cyrus the great king, and drowned his head in blood? They were the Massagetæan Scythians. The Massagetæans are warriors indeed! When the men and women of the tribe grow old, they are slaughtered."

"And thus did the Romans," the Roman exile boasts proudly. "Rivers dislike being crossed: so whenever a bridge was built the priestesses of Vesta threw down from it the old men to appease the waters."

"The Spartans are strong!" says the Periæcos. "They are thirty thousand men, and their whole life is, to be besieged by three hundred thousand, to pass swiftly from one side to another, and to vanquish and use for their own ends those who hate them. They have taken Ira, they have taken Ira!"

Another and then another followed, trying to paint for us a sort of beauty and grandeur that had the name of their hangmen.

And it was all summed up in Elcho. He became the treasure-house of ideas. There was a struggle; someone had crawled up behind him . . . but the other body was seen to sway and to double up, and amidst its shrieks we saw its neck smashed on the ground and its life depart. Elcho walked upon it. This rival's attempt had demonstrated the frightful allure of Elcho's strength. And we thought of Hylas who had sunk through the cold, colourless walls, with turning ribbons of red streaming from his crushed head.

We set Elcho in our midst, and all of us glorying in the victory that had made him master—smitten with the pride of obedience—neighed like mares around a stallion.

And now, in his shadow, we panted eagerly while a prisoner was being put to death. He was an aged man from the countryside that had been seized and brought in. He wept, and hid his face in his hands like a child.

But we had to wait. We had first to find a vessel for his blood. And then, we had to curb our impatience, and act with measured care, so that the sacrifice should be solemnly adjusted to events. There was profound joy in us all, we did our utmost to enhance the fête, and the life of each doubled in intensity around the sacred victim. In time of war, killing is done with anger, but in the elaborated ceremonies of peace, with love.

He was unarmed and yet he was tough to destroy. He resisted like a tree, with the single strength of *his* life that was attached to *all* life. But a tree is mute, and in this old man there were cries charged with life in its uttermost degree, the cries whereby the tortured hope against all hope to free themselves. He dragged to and fro the whole mass of us that had fallen upon him and that was rending him beyond recognition. At last his worn-out body ceased, and consented. He rolled into the midst of the sacrificers who suddenly drew back.

How easy it is to render motionless that which has never before ceased from movement. This setting forth, naked, of the inner being; this turning inside out of the body. A straight, accurate stroke—and the light penetrated between his bones and lit up the precious red liquid that is treasured by all.

And I—I cried out transported for a moment right into the fatal meaning of human sacrifice; and I laughed a carnal laugh.

Words may say what they will, and phrases dance



as they please. It is none the less true that to kill enriches the heart! When my own people were slain around me the murder of these dear ones made me sick unto death, an icy fear entered into me; but for him whose own hand sparkles with the weapon, there is the obverse of all this and the misfortune of others is a burning caress for him who devours. It is royal to kill. It is to be as sovereign as the sea in its immense ranges, or as fire that overthrows all that is solid! To say: "He was there, and I came, and I touched him, and I slew him, as if I were all-powerful as nature."

On the tiered mountain-sides above us we see the people of the countryside whom the forest fire has driven towards us. We cry out to them to come to us, and to see and to know what is to be! Terror urges them toward us and then away from us—and some are stupefied, and fall into ravines.

Standing upright in the midst of the mountain, the strongest and the greatest of us, he who both resembles and over-masters us makes a solemn, sweeping, circular gesture that yet further increases his magnitude.

The emblem, the dog's head, is near him, graven on the rock. He alone, after he had salvaged the great stone from the waves, has had the strength to bear it forth. And as he gazes upon it his laugh of pride falls like a cascade. Around the central treasure his great arm, that branch. . . . He is become an oak that turns on its base. The commencement of a circular gesture that impends the face of the world to trace a line across its life. The commencement of a great order that dominates the whole land with a

word, which externalises the dream that was revolved within him. The line—authority: lines around and afar. He says:

“Here is the boundary.”

And he says:

“The land of Elcho.”

The name! The whole extent of space stretched out before us is seized by this new thing. Sovereignty impregnates it, immanent and impalpable.

Then, taking hold of the motionless body at his feet, he cuts it into pieces and distributes them.

He,—from the river to the plateau: He,—from the plateau to the sea.

They take that which he gives them. Each in his turn approaches, receives, and is enlarged: Beyond their present being they share out the world below their feet, the forest, the field, the populous river-side. And already they are jealous, jealous in their dreams, computing and comparing the greatnesses they incarnate; they jostle one another and each tries to raise himself above his neighbour.

The little worlds imitate the great world. All becomes clear and precise and without any gap in the great adventure of the mass.

And I gazed upon this man standing in the midst of us. There is something of myself in him, and I gazed upon his lifted forehead and, half closing my eyes to see more clearly, (in my face I feel the tension of my concentration) I seize hold of this near-by rock with my hands. . . .

A diminutive lizard glides over the rock I am holding, passing in a flash from the bottom to the top. One would think it a shadow drawn after itself that some occult, straight line has attached to a flying insect

in the sky—so it disappears, going right into the stone—vanishing.

I am in the high Ligurian grotto. There is no one here. I rub my eyes.

I am alone, by myself. Strange and marvellous!

The stone wherein I had seen the lizard vanish is still near me, and I touch its rugged surface. When before had I seen this tiny animal, this fine point of life, through the interplaying light and shade of day that has replaced it by the void? I know not, and I shall never know to what reality it belongs. Was it a second ago, or two thousand years? And were they of today, or were they of two thousand years ago, these men streaming with blood or sweat, men as like one another as two waves in the sea, men whose one true flag is a drop of blood; the bas-relief of the mutilated that are chained arm to arm around the whole world—and who must ever be wild beasts or hangmen?

#### SHE

My destiny shall ever be, to attain to her,—she whom I had seen in the beginning at the edge of the promontory, with the screen of her changing face, and her rose robe that glowed warmly in the light of the setting sun. She whom I had seen on that fête day, clothed in rose cambric, she alone living,—she alone flaming in the crowd of men—two legged puppets, women in their hats, diminutive children—all in a whirl where joy and weariness streamed away in perspiration.

One day standing still on the road, Marthe watched my coming. She was dressed in shining white silk, and I saw her for the first time in this white silhouette.

And when I had come up to her, to the perfection of her dress, to her pure cheek and her immense, living eye, I trembled. And I thought of death, since it is death that, one day, will still her last movement and take her.

## VI

### ON THE SHORE OF TIME

I meet him sometimes at evening, after dinner, when I walk along the seashore, and he comes to make sure of the mooring of his boat that is drawn up on the pebbles at the foot of the cliff.

He is an ordinary man, just an Estere fisherman encountered one evening by the waves' margin. We talked together. He recounted to me—(and we could see opposite the point where we were standing, the triumphal shore full of electric signs that mingled with his words)—he recounted to me the labour of his life and its weariness, and how difficult it was to make both ends meet, and to go on until evening, and until morning. He explained to me that he is the centre of a family that surrounds him and whom he supports. He says that the law of laws is ill made—striking men without rhyme or reason—and that a new law must be established.

There are some men who, despite everything, would accomplish the simple and the comprehensible; who believe that tomorrow will not be like today, and who are against all other men.

And on this night I went forth from my room to see, engaged in his work, near his boat, that man compelled to work so strictly, and who yet sought a way in grandeur.

The sky is smudged with the coming storm, the moon is hidden, and the starry firmament and the happy shore are hidden too.

And I walk over the endless, black beach. Each step makes a noisy landslide and sinks a great hole in the sloping bank of pebbles. I am weighed down in my destructive progress, and as if enchained by the heavy stones. There is no more light. There is scarcely enough on high to show the two immense, bowed peaks that open up space.

Shadow that had waited beneath the colours of day now advances from the whole circumference of the horizon. But little by little, afar off, when I listened towards the sea, light was born again, perceived anew through the ear. I am submerged by the outstretched tumult of the waves; to my left still remain the last ruins of the radiance, and my eyes *create* the smooth water in the further distances where they cannot see it.

I perceive he whom I seek. He is a few paces in front of me, against the rock, at my height, a black form, seeming more hollow and black than a fissure. It is a man standing upright, at the foot of the everlasting barrier-wall which is a thousand times more upright than he, on the jagged edge of the universal sea.

"Yes,"—we thought together aloud, as on other evenings,—"scarce anyone profits from life. To do that one must be strong. If one cannot overcome one is oneself overcome. It would be so simple to establish the laws of life in such a way as to give to each his allotted place on earth, so that life should be an arrangement and not a battle."

"That," said the face from the shadows, "is what we have just begun to do on the shores of this lake."

On the shores of this lake? Who then is this man to whom I speak? Someone I do not know!

Then I was afraid—and as at that moment the shadow detached itself from the sombre mass of rock

and advanced straight on me, I uttered a cry of fright.

I saw his two moving legs, his complicated torso, and his arms that were capable of everything. It is human to be afraid of another man, of that which lies hidden in his head.

Here, on these night-bound shores, in this homeless land, in this land of passage and of flight, there are only lost or fugitive men, or those who, like myself, have fallen here from afar, or else passers-by who keep grim silence, whose hands pretend to innocence, who are pursued by the vengeance of judges.

But now he puts one hand on my shoulder, and with the other he makes a sign:—Silence!

Then I hear other steps approaching through the close darkness of the night. And on the striated pallor of the near-by foam I see the successive silhouettes of two soldiers outlined in black; their helmets, their bucklers, their short glaives. . . . They are looking for someone—they are looking for him,—him.

The legionaries do not halt; they plunge straight into the engulfing night, and the sound of their steps diminishes into the distance.

And I remain alone with the man who believes that tomorrow will not be like today, and with him I give rein to my hopes, though I am full of some obscure resistance that I have never tried to overcome. With him I give rein to my hopes. . . . A labourer, a bargee, a man, an ordinary man met one night on some shore—in some sort he is the epitome of all men.

Swiftly and easily I learn his life. He is a fisherman on this lake.

It is a wondrous thing to see the gentle fatality of events unroll. It is but natural that we two poor

heads of families who each fulfil our laborious duty, should have met on this shore. It is natural that we should have found one another before even we knew we were seeking one another, that our temerity and ignorance should fall from us, and that two men should tell one another what they are. It is natural that the eyes of a nocturnal figure turned towards your own should shine like twin stars.

How alike we are, at bottom! As alike as the sharp salty breaths that we inhale together, as alike as the dark that moulded our eyes and our lips, and that is drowned in blood. I had encountered my own resemblance standing over against me, as others have found—at some crossroads—some god.

He said that each here below must do what he can to help all others. He, with other fishermen, had formed a voluntary family that was open to all. These men shared out exactly the labour and the produce of their work, and they loved and cherished this exactitude. They gave their whole strength to right the injustice of fate which, if one allows it, always finds some means to exalt one at the expense of others. He, who was called Stephen, acted for the community in its relations with the merchants and officials. All were united, like the inclined branches of the sea—or like the branches of a tree that point to the sky. They could not have explained their affection for their neighbours. Duty had no name. It was not in their mouths but in their hearts, and it was a natural faculty, not a formula. We must not use words to prevent thought from growing to its full stature.

With its rule that mingled so completely sovereignty and slavery that there should never more be either the one or the other, the new family that they had created was as grand as it was small.



These men who were finding their true selves, who were doing what all other men might have done, seemed the first men. I had already perceived for myself that when one thinks aright, one begins everything anew.

And I gave myself up to exchanging confidences with him, and telling him all that I knew of myself. I heard my mouth declaring my name, that of my family, and even, the central hope around which all the rest of my life turned; to mount one step in the hierarchy of scribes in the brand new palace of the procurator—(and it seemed to me that all this had acquired more value for the future, because my companion had heard it). But what he said was more precious than what I said. In me, there was only the thought of myself. In him was the strength to discover things unknown.

“You are good. You are magnificent to be so right!”

“No, I am not magnificent. I am only a faithful follower of that which thought demands. My task is, to have sought out with my strength the differences that are not, and never to have found them. Let no man be ashamed to think of himself; it is his first duty. We should not try to kill the living egoism of man—(if we did that, what remained could not stand by itself)—but we must adapt it to the community. We must not try to satiate it by the impossible conquest of all else, as is the everlasting attempt of the senseless and the overpowerful. We must reconstruct the law in an other wise. Nothing is absurd, not even happiness.”

Questioned, he replied that he, certainly, had not invented all that. He was the depository of a word that had been spoken one evening at some crossroads, by some speaker whose name had been forgotten. But

he declared strongly that he and the others had only listened to this word because it pleased them, and because it seemed to them completely worthy of man; man, this thing, who is a head and a chest, with two legs that go, and two arms that do, the mask behind which is the world; the statue that suffers. At the last, man is the same body in all races, and the same sigh in all languages; he is many things, but above all, a response of suffering to misfortune.

His transparent voice shows me how the commandments of priests have distorted those of God, and that the holiness of the creature is, to dare to recapture that which falsehood has stolen from him. And looking upon him, I perceive that among men are some few that are simple, reasonable, intelligible and intelligent, not mechanical like all the rest. They are the men of peace, of the peace of nature, not that which kings capriciously intersperse with their wars. God is the consent of all nature. God is the body of reason; that which comes from reason comes also from on high. Reason and God are in revolt against men.

"And yet, friend, it is difficult to live as one would, without striking out on every side and at every moment, without being crushed by weariness; without giving back blow for blow, despite oneself, the malign ignorance that is all about one."

And I, who till now could only glimpse the child-truth in the eyes of dog or ass, read in his eyes a whole man.

Then it was he said:

"We, who are called Christians. . . ."

"Ah! . . . You are a Christian!"

And immediately he changes in my eyes—with this name upon him like a solid thing, like a disgusting

skin. Ah! now I understand why the soldiers were looking for him!

"Why didn't you tell me you were a Christian? You have betrayed me, deceived me."

In spite of myself I drew away from him whose heart I had, thus accidentally, seen before his name; the rebel, the agitator, the anarchist: he who hates the established order, who profanes the respect due to the law and to the temple, who foments a permanent conspiracy against the state, who exploits the rancorous jealousy of the lowest classes.

Between myself and this man who had duped me stood all that this single word, Christian, means to peaceable and honest citizens. I stopped short, brusquely, and he too stopped; near to me, very far off. . . .

Step by step . . . at some other moment? When? I don't know. (What is the use of asking myself what I cannot say!)—I became accustomed to the circle of execration surrounding this word, Christian. It was no longer between us, and I ended by repeating it as if it were an ordinary word! And yet . . . I was afraid of him, as when, at first, I did not yet know him.

"You are mad."

"Yes, I am wise."

We walked more quickly, bending double on the black cornice, as if struck by the whips of fate. And each of us despite his Helot's stoop, felt in him a free will and a high justice.

It was he who drew me along with him.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going over there."

What was he going to do? Out of the old world, he was going to build a new. . . . He, so puny, was going to throw himself on the whole city, on the multitude that is as hard as the walls of the houses! Truth comes slowly, and the individual man is fragile. Tomorrow he will conquer; but this evening he will be killed. At the last he will surpass the multitude—he has the majestic *élan* of a cloud—but first there will be a rain of stones. I did my utmost to prevent him going.

We passed along a street, through a suburb—the pavement stones with which necropolises and cities make hard the gentle earth.

It was twilight. Wasn't it, a little earlier on, night; and yet now it was evening? I don't know what it was before. I only know that in the suburb at that present moment, the day is scarce done, and one can still see clearly.

Grey hills paved with roofs: the squared cubes of houses intersperse everywhere ravines like sarcophagi; one would think oneself in Marseilles. No, these are rather the time-worn battlements and the surrounding space of the look-out tower of Jerusalem—Moriah, Millo, Zion. I am delirious. I am mixing up several realities. Am I sleeping or waking?

The wind drives mournful clouds over the hillside: is not this hillside the tawny elevation called Golgotha? I ask my companion, but I can't hear what he replies in the wind; and as I go along, I force myself, my arms clasped above my head, to separate out two destinies that are mixed up in me.

The streets stagnate heavily with the repose that, at the end of the day, comes out through the open doors of the houses. I see before their dwellings fat, greasy merchants. A camel pulls up and draws forward the

four round balls of his feet which seem as if hanging at the end of four braided cords. From here the narrow vaulted streets go up that are followed by the processions that have in their midst, radiant, he who is to die. He carries his own cross, and is a star in the crowd—like a single boat on a dark sea.

And now my companion is recognised, and called by his name. He seems to be called Stephen; and others seem to call him Sigilla; and these names are spat out with disgust from their mouths.

He goes for bread, his obol visible in his hand, to a baker who is also one of his relatives. But the shop-keeper reproaches him violently with having foresworn the faith of his fathers, and he says that he would prefer to sell nothing at all, and to go bankrupt, rather than to sell to him; and he orders him away.

Two houses further off, another shop-keeper jumps about on his door-step like an infuriated dog, and grimaces and shows his teeth in advance; and behind him, in the shadow, the row of half-opened sacks of corn is inaccessible.

And now he whom all must hate makes toward the shop-keeper who buys from the fishermen their fish, to discuss with him the disposal of the night's catch. But a man, shouting and gesticulating, has gathered a crowd in a corner of the square, and from the trestle whereon he is perched, he, who is a minor employé of the fiscal service, points out the man who does not resemble other men.

“He wants the poor to take away every scrap of property from those who possess anything, so that these should become beggars! He wants an equal community of goods, that is to say, if you have laboured hard all your life to secure your old age from penury,

this man will call on you, armed to the teeth, and will take away all that you have. His community means, the sharing in common of women!"

This speech had already gathered a murmuring crowd round the Christian. He thought of me; he must not drag me with him. I saw this thought in his eyes, and he pushed me away so that he should be alone. I was afraid (I first!) and I obeyed him, departing a few paces. The wind blew back his mantle over his head, and I saw his calm eyes and, too, the peaceful mark of a blow he had just received on his forehead. He was pushed out on to the square by the dense fury of the mob that would so soon fall on him.

All round the square were public buildings; one of each kind. There was a temple, and on its black threshold appeared a priest who, with a gesture like a stabbing weapon, pointed to him who wished to restore to all men a translucent belief.

"He is sacrilegious. He scoffs at the law and would destroy the temple and dismiss the priests."

This man covered in ornaments that he shared with God, added:

"He is capable of anything; he destroys children!"

"You have seen him?" shrilled a woman.

"Yes," said the priest, after saying to himself in a low voice (and his mouth was near my ear): "Since he is capable of anything."

An official came out of a vast public monument whose portico was scrupulously clean; he was followed by two slaves carrying tablets and all the other apparatus necessary for writing. His head bowed, he seemed as if reflecting.

This old man, the lines of whose face were austere and venerable as those one admires on the marble figures of the ancients, perceived the disorder in the

square and the man that was being harried there. He understood, and said:

“He will not render proper obedience unto Cæsar!”

This accusation raised the temperature of the crowd to boiling point. It had softened a little, and laughed because the communist had stumbled; but now, when Cæsar’s name had been evoked, it cried: Death!

“He wants to destroy order and sap the strength of the Empire. The imperial law consecrates justice, as all the world knows, and is large, tolerant, and generous for every honest, tranquil citizen. Look what fine, respectable monuments we have. We have imagined and built a Pantheon where all the most diverse gods meet gravely, officially. He is full of hate, and violent: he will not admit the existence either of the gods or of the philosophies of other men! He is the reckless demagogue who rouses hope in the eyes of the disinherited—and who, nevertheless, O good and honourable people, would suppress the circus-games which are your amusement.”

An old, disabled soldier—he had only the stump of his right arm—was sitting, as was his custom every evening, in front of the barracks doorway. He rose up pugnaciously. One could see his savage anger.

“He does not hate the enemy! He would have us all, all of us, throw away our weapons as if war were a shameful thing. He casts aspersions even on war! For him a Scythian or a Parthian soldier is as good as a Roman. It is the defeat of his own country that he seeks. It is because Rome’s enemies bring him gold, at night, in a cave.”

The old soldier’s invective sent a spasm of boldness through the crowd of artisans, petty merchants and humble workmen.

A thick-set, well-dressed man,—he had a vague

greasy look in his eye, and his jaw was pendulous—could not understand how anyone could be so obstinate as to resist public opinion.

“Wretch, are you not ashamed to have all honest men against you?”

Every grievance was flung up against him. All, prepared, massed together, spread over the earth like the stones that were now raised by furious hands. His face now lost all human resemblance. Stones showered upon him. And the fury of the crowd was still further increased because he was extremely weak, so that even a small stone thrown by a child near by made him sink yet further. It was evident that he had not eaten for a long time.

“Look how hungry he is, how thin he is, how ugly! Look at the mud that has been thrown at him, look how filthy he is!”

A low cavity opened near my feet, and from a sort of underground cellar there came out, crawling on his hands and knees, a slave whose trade was to mend leathern thongs. And as he crept out of his hole there came with him a disgusting smell. He crawled on all fours—having doubtless forgotten how to walk upright—towards the Christian who had fallen on his knees amidst the storm of stones and maledictions. Then, when he had come to him, this slave, who was as ungainly as a toad (he had revolting open sores on his shoulders and elbows and the marks of the lash on his back) turned round and gave him a backward kick. With what did this human débris, whose every breath was a groan, reproach the communist? He cried it aloud in an access of rage:

“He wants to change everything!”

The lips of the dying man moved, saying that the blood of the martyrs was as scattered seed, and the



reign of the poor should one day come. "All will be changed!" Then he moved no more, save with each new blow.

When they had made of him a motionless thing of ugliness and ordure, the crowd dispersed, and disappeared into their houses. And I heard a voice murmur—when a small group was lost within one of these houses:

"He was right."

A low, hunted, furtive word, which expands and goes out secretly into the gloom—like a seed in the earth.

He is right! The tiny glow of these words is of equal value with the sun. And I knew well enough that he was right. I had known it wholly and entirely when I had said to him: Where are you going?—when I tried to withhold by my words the man who with the whole force of his soul wished to suffer, and who went forth, the veritable master of his destiny. . . . Brother, in whom is all respect, Lord, where are you going, *quo vadis?*

And yet, I had remained silent by his side, and then I had departed from him. Between the crowd and the just man I had naturally, tranquilly, elected to be the accomplice of the crowd. I had participated in the bestial victory. And I had felt the crime committed by others live in my own hands and in my own entrails. By my passivity, by my baseness, I shared in all from beginning to end. For the sake of my own ignoble safety I, a coward, committed the falsehood which is silence, and the evil which is to do nothing; for Truth is invisible.

Each one of us knows well enough that he would say: He is right—and that he would not deny the truth, if he really wished. For all the strength of the world is

in the poor. And everything that is vanquished herebelow—an idea, a man, or a king—is vanquished only by them. As long as truth shall be unmated of the poor, she shall await, desolate, on the ever-increasing cemeteries of earth.

But now that man has found himself,—now comes his reign. Yes, all is to be changed since a new dawn has followed on the great evening of the world. The cross brings deliverance and joy. This much is certain; we are on the eve of change. Look, and ye shall see its coming heralded in the depths,—its reflection in firmaments of eyes.

## VII

### THE MAGICIAN

We came to the threshold of my darkened room. Marthe entered in, and I followed her.

All day, as we had done several times before, we had wandered through the countryside, gradually urged towards the sea by the slopes of the mountains. And as on other days we had scarcely spoken. There was between us a strange veil of silence. I was embarrassed by the tremendous fission in my mind: the present, the past. I was trying to conceal myself. . . . The immense hope that shone at the zenith of my last dream! . . .

This evening, my own fatigue made me think of hers,—made me feel hers;—as we came in I slipped my arm through her arm, and there was no more thought of parting.

She sat down in the seat beneath the little arched window, her back toward the light.

This room where I was being boarded by relatives differed only in its name from an ordinary hotel bedroom. Shut up almost the whole year round, it was cold and void and without any character: somehow, as it grew old the furniture still seemed uncomfortably new. I saw the detailed foot of the bed ugly with excessive tooling, and the chest of drawers, with its ill-made, stubborn fittings, and the clumsy table. I heard the tick-tack of the clock, and the dryer tick-tack, sometimes interrupted by a brush of wings, of the bird in its cage.

An anguished voice—I had never heard it before—:  
“My dear, I was once before very much in love with  
a man, who said he loved me.”

She had uttered this naked phrase so that she might show herself to me! We were close to one another—and I do not know which of us was the first to touch the other.

I clasped to myself this body that until then I had only contemplated—that as yet I did not know! The beauty of her cheek burnt into me, and her mouth revealed its form to mine. So for the first time I saw close up, crowning that body whose whole entirety came to me and filled me, her immense dilated pupils,—round, striated, and hollowed like a nocturnal sea, beneath a blond haze; and I saw, surrounded by the thick, black fringe of her eyelashes, the pale abyss wherein floated her sombre, fixed gaze.

She! This face moistened as if she had been weeping, this red mouth—the kiss like very blood—these two starry eyes, and the whole form that swelled beneath her flowing robe—the square-cut queen of my dream, and yet, still, also, the tall, silky statue of fashionable drawing-rooms! There is an unreasoning passion of sacrifice in the blind and dishevelled union of two creatures, that interpenetrate and are effaced. The two passers who formerly—yesterday,—conversed in all the embarrassment of conventional shame and ridicule—the polite man and woman of the world. . . . The fashionable comedy that cloaks each is torn aside, and suddenly, without words, there is closest complicity. In the mirror I see a naked body encircled by my arms.

I have not re-adjusted my thoughts to the massive, naked apparition that is myself,—unclothed by my own hands and that is yet—through the slender link of the

face—the same as the superficial little citizen of every day. I had no time to admire the distinctive lines, that yet were truly admirable, which at one and the same time united her with all women, and distinguished her from them. I am shaken by the pulsing, almost bleeding motor of joy. . . . Joy goes from us more swiftly than happiness, more swiftly even than life. Its discoloured mouth utters an agonised appeal. . . . And then it sings out loud in the room.

My head and my heart now voided by the immense flow, I look around me upon the changed universe like one awakened from the dead.

At first I dare not look at anything but what is nearest; the cage, the light brushing of the bird as he jumps from one perch to another: the row of books dog-eared by much reading (some are mere paper skeletons); the window that is the gate of the twilight.

She looks at me from the bed; she, this ikon that yesterday I only touched in my thought.

“You. . . . You. . . .”

She is a little ashamed, she is happy, she is sincere. She is my Woman; I am the Man, straightly proud that I am nothing but a man, and that we are side by side, our heavy bodies supported the one against the other by a line of fire—my arm gently crushed by the weight it encircles:

“For a long time I have been wanting to tell you. . . .”

“I too.” Gravely we laugh at our pretty, lost shyness.

And she spoke of herself and of her thoughts and feelings and the things that happened to her when she was a little girl.

I listened, I listened . . . and she entered into me.

My whole desire is, to be nought save the simple, ordinary man that I am at this moment, as I lie here.

But I cannot rid myself of the mad dreaming in my head. I cannot exorcise from myself the fatality; that is, to see and to know; nor even the fatality of seeking!

Alas, I am not made for this! Let there be an end of the supernatural; let some other have this unique grandeur thrust upon him! I want to be like other men. Enough of being he whose destiny opens out in vistas to the furthest depths, he who lives back through the ages to resurrect the dead, and who is surrounded by a crowd of dissociated images. Enough of this strange urge that makes me, alone of my species, pass the great barrier, and, in fragments, explore the past. What is the good of it! Nothing will be changed because one man among all other men bears the burden of a lost world.

I am full of sorrow for her sake and for my own.

"You are not cold?"

I would tear out part of my very life to save her from cold, and to fulfill the desire of her poor heart that is still rent like her body, and of her poor, unchained, wide-searching eyes.

But it was vain to wish. I felt a strange weight bearing down upon me. Alas, it is not I who am strongest! I tried to struggle free from this intangible confusion, from this cage of time and space that I drag after me. I struck against strong bars. . . . Walls and stones under my hand that seek an issue through my destiny—and behind me the eternal voice of Osiris that fraternises with the Adept and delivers its sacred promise: "I will give thee endless renewals." . . . Where am I? . . . Someone, I know not where, nor when, nor how, said: "*You are in the Magician's cell.*"

No! I resist the design traced out in space. . . . Then the method of attack is changed: an infinitely deep, sweet gentleness takes hold of me, saying: "Seek their joy!" and ordaining that the starry heart of the Cross should extend purposefully over the great evening of the world.

No! I pushed aside the heavy shadows that converged upon me. A tumultuous archangel, golden and radiant, touched me with its lovely flesh, and dissipated this other universe that had unfolded me. I lifted my heavy eyelids, I enlarged this window on to reality; I fought the memory, and forced it to relax its hold upon me.

On the bed, as near me as my own body, was the rippling blonde hair and naked white shoulder of Marthe. I had dozed; her movement in getting up awakened me. She knelt upon the bed, close to me, towering. She was still naked, and I saw her shoulder that shone like glistening marble, and the living rose of her breast. Shame no longer exists in this new world that we have created by our act: and this dissolved shame changes her, makes her a being of Charity: she sits on the edge of the bed, and then stands up. She dresses, untroubled and without haste, and watches me through the light whispering of the fragile tissues that caress her.

"You were almost asleep," she says. "Were you dreaming?" And I, whose dreams fill the long night to overflowing, cried out:

"No, I never dream. I am just an ordinary man like the rest!"

She laughed:

"But everyone dreams!" I, too, laughed, and once more, gaily, but clutching fast to my *idée fixe*, I denied the truth yet again:

"Well, then, I am not like all the rest. . . ." And now she is standing there, dressed, finished to the last little detail. I still hold her, and with the tip of my fingers I touch the warm roundness of her breast through her silken vestment. Once again I embrace, with tenderness and a little weariness, that angelic face that I have moistened with my own. She is going to go; and I don't want to be left to become myself again.

"Stay!"

To stay! That was so impossible that she laughed anew.

To stay with me . . . and to live together, despite public opinion. . . . That would mean a whole new destiny, a mass of new calculations . . . and at that moment neither of us thought of really undertaking them. Diminution. . . . I repeated, lower: "Stay!"—simply as a plaintive appeal.

And when she had gone forth into the moonless night in her shining silk robe which was fresh without and warm within,—when her first two or three steps had utterly effaced her into invisible and intangible blackness, I thought how all things too swiftly pass—All! So swiftly that even the greatest event, even the happiest, is only a flash. It is so swift that hope is worth nothing. How easy it is to go right to the heart of life, and to penetrate the simplicity of the dress that covers two naked limbs in the night. Loving is as simple as killing. Loving. . . . Was that Love? Do I know *how* to love. . . . I suffer. Is that a reply? I try, brusquely, to think of other things.

The Magician's cell. . . . I mutter these words over and over again. I impregnate myself with this fraction of the past, this fragment of my immortal suffering. . . . Dreaming has come back into my life



like a poison. I repulsed it, and it came back like a sublime temptation: "Seek their Joy!" I repulsed it. . . . I do not fear fatality!

But I do fear myself. . . . I am astonished and remorseful to have remained concealed. She, she spoke to me without any reserve. Now I know everything about her life; a poor, rich, society girl, over-refined and over-sensitive, who has momentarily escaped from it all. She spoke freely of her whole life: I kept my reserve.

Smiling and unwitting, she has received a wound. I have stolen her love. (A man, even in his utmost exaltation, would and does preserve his part.) Do I know how to love? I fear for us both!

She has gone: I am alone between the four walls, but I seek her and find her, since she exists. All of her is here, or she exists no longer. Reopening, with my eyes, the closed door, I summon up the image of her departure; her grey dress—curved like a pearl over her breast—disappearing round the angle of the wall.

I think of her. I gaze upon the night through the enormous, ogival windows, and by gazing steadfastly upon it I make less black the blackness of space.

In odd corners the twilight gives a new importance to the things scattered around; they swell, and crowd together; cleaved crystal, serpentine appearances, shining, suspended balls. . . . I think of her. The broad plain is petrified and, in the distance, covered with a luminous veil by the moon. In the midst of all the whiteness, in the midst of the harvested silver, she advances straight toward me. Between the black rocks that the water palely lustrates the illimitable presence

is revealed. Along her footsteps, freed of the tapestry of earth, black as an abyss, the waters of the marsh send a ruffled fragment of the moon.

The astral radiance delineates her. First it makes a silver crescent amidst the darkness with the roundness of her cheek. It cannot extinguish the blonde flame beneath which she walks, but it paints a whiteness like linen upon her shoulders, and a phosphorescent brilliance on the wax of her skin. It crystallises her hands, her neck, her rare face that is widened at the base. It renders more adorable and puissant in the distance this square-cut face of Our Lady, this formal structure which marks with a seal of splendour a creature among creatures. It shows up, even, the pale embroideries that charge the borders of her long dress—fluted rosily—deep rose and pale rose: on her jewels it sprinkles a jewelled dew.

As I saw her, my lips murmured: "Annette!"

And it is as if all nature is a profound and enchanted garden that encircles her. In the distance, in a bisected arc, are disposed the towers and castles of the pale blue city where dwells silence. Yonder, in the celestial heights, superposed cloud-grottos are piled layer upon layer in concentric crowns. In the centre of the Heaven's dome is a circled radiance, lunar misty snow and glaciers: and on the aerial slopes that swoop down to join the terrestrial horizon there float bluish walls, and rocky tapestries.

From its brown pillar a tree spreads wide three palms whose leaves are detailed, dark kernels of emerald.

I said: "Annette." And it is indeed—Annette. . . .

Only the flowered ogive of the stained glass separates me from her limpid image. But a little since we were together.

All of her is in this cell where she no longer is. . . . I can feel her departure in the swinging door. I see her again, going away, still near me, but already spacious in space, with her sweeping dress whose massed folds make cylinders and cones that are red and rose and milky.

How swiftly has destiny leapt forward this evening, after long waiting! These two creatures—we two who this evening entered together, linked close in sudden embrace; this face, till then angelically distant, that has lost its serenity for me, and rendered up its mouth; and this gaze, lowered beneath mine, that floats in a white orb pale as the sky! That was our first, our great day, that day of naked reality, the hour when we found each other. I searched and found in the darkness the silence and the flesh of her dress, I heard on my mouth words—come from her or from me—that sought to say all things, and all. Moistened lips . . . tongue . . . foam . . . murmur . . . and “I love you,” crushed like a fruit of the earth. . . . And the earthly joy of the blind, blind body!

My breath vibrates in my throat; my chest, my fists, my outstretched hands, come alive in the depths of the stony shadows. The whole convent is massed above me, like a mountain culminating in a Cross.

I sit down again, and my stool makes a dragging noise, for once more, in this peaceful nightfall, I have set in motion the apparatus of my dreaming. The lightning flashed, printing a vivid whiteness on my hand, and on the swelling cuff of my tunic. And then, suddenly, at the other end of the great, dusty monkish cell where I, a layman, lay . . . the flat apparition.

A ghostly radiance rises on the wall; the wall is be-

come a white page; the light trembles, and signs inscribe themselves.

Signs? That with which the light assails me as with sharp knives is not signs, but living reality. These are the infinitely tenuous particles that compose us, the atoms of our flesh in alveolas and cell-like figures; fragments of human chemistry and of destiny that I, first of all on earth, discern. Thus in the mystery of our littleness do we begin to stir.

The testimony of these profound events will never more be questioned. Henceforth, they stand firm and unassailable above and beyond superstition, and all the folly of crowds. Out of shadow, ignorance, black chaos, there emerges an ineffaceable spot of light. Still small and disputed, it yet exists, clear as day itself.

In the world's midst where remains my person, in the shadows, I discern my pale, clasped hands; I speak low, saying . . . "Beautiful is science, with its phantasms that are true."

And are we, who for so long have sought ourselves out, are we, men, at last discovered to our own eyes? I gaze upon my great creation, and I say . . . "Yes" . . . and I feel joy pulse in me, in my throat and in my heart.

Science is to see: and then to speak. To see is but to see, but to speak is to build!

To persevere in being, to persist and endure! The creatures raise their arms toward the sky. I know not why this great human gesture is instinctive in *my* frame. They raise their arms to the sky, but they shine forth by what they say, not by what they are. The evening will be longer or shorter, but tomorrow we shall all perish. Our ideas will die; they are already dead if they are mute. We are tombs of thought; but the word is salvation and light upon that which we im-

prison. We are lost more in the silence than in the darkness of the world, and to speak is grief and succour both. To speak to . . . whom? To none that can be named: to all—anyone. Let the word go where the wind listeth, to heal the ignorant. The truly wise man needs others who pass: he calls them to him: He calls! He calls—what puissance! It is a fragment of that creative cry with which, element by element, the god of light called forth the universe in the beginning.

I, who seem so little before my table whose edge I grip firmly, as if it were a boat that had been carried beneath the vaulted arches, *I* am to be the discoverer of reality: I shall be heard, repeated, shared out. *I* am to be he who shall speak!

Annette! If I am gone forth in this wise, detached, and further than all those about me—and so alien to the men of today that I have had to discover with the instruments and resources of light the very words I use—it is because of you. Alone I should never have had strength thus to obey my central self. Annette, Annette, with her creative loveliness! One day (one day that is already lost in the dissolving flux of days) I explained to her my dream of seeking, before I had *done* anything, and when it was still all before me; and she said, in advance: "It is beautiful!" And she even cared to add: "You will do this. You *must!*"

But she does not know what the dream has become. And today she has told me everything about herself, without reserve, freely. Her goodness was so pure that there was a moment when I desired nought else in the world, when all the rest frightened me—even this great urge that hurls me toward nature, toward totality: even glorious fame. By my salvation I swear

that there was a moment when I would have forsaken all, so only that I might be hers, with my arms and my eyes fast folded; and even, I said to her: "Stay," as if it were possible. And yet spoke not of the great labour of my life. My silence was as deep as on that day when I went to tell her everything.

By keeping silence I lied to her; and afterwards too, I lied:— "You were dreaming?" "No, I never dream. . . ."

Ah, man is a visage whose teeth are set firm upon some secret; and shame filled me when, her head inclined, she showed that she believed me. I have sinned toward her, and I fear for us both.

But the time of silence is accomplished.

Tomorrow . . . soon. . . . I will make known what is written there. Soon all shall see all that I have seen.

Already I see men turn toward me, and find increase from joy. Perhaps, even, the King will look on me from on high.

There is a mirror on the wall, hollow as the wind; there is a wind and chaos, and it seems to me that this silvered disc slowly coincides in a nebulous, stormy adjustment with the void of the cupboard's mirror. . . . *I am going to wake up.* . . . And yet the mirror is still here. . . . *If I pass before it, I shall see myself as I really am.* And just so, for a moment, I stirred within it in black and white fission. I saw the lined face, the grave, serious cheek, the forehead strangely bossed over the moist grotto of the eye. . . . A flash of light drew out lengthwise the temple, and dissolved the dead neck and the dead vestments that were upon my life. He, I. . . .



Regular soft echoes escape from the sepulchral depths; a tranquillised music, the sound of distant bells, whose vibration reaches right to me and fills my whole body. The bell of the convent, the bronze wind that flows through the stone where I am, and penetrates the interior earth. Each stroke takes to itself all breadth, and becomes a great plain. The sky earths itself; it is become flesh and clothes souls in its armoured cuirass.

Excepting the fault that until today was but hope, my life is pure. I practice my Christian duties and obey—like the rest.

“Ah!”

The low cry escapes me, because the door of my cell swings open and someone has come in.

Never had I been so terrified! No one is permitted to open this door. They must not enter yet! Then, slow and stiffened like a reconnoitring animal, I turned my head toward the danger.

. . . Panting breath . . . joyous exclamations . . . outstretched hands. . . . A man, who becomes distinct and cries:

“Clément, my dear friend!”

It is Méliodon, my faithful friend. At last he has come back—between his travels, and like a storm—into my life. A wandering poet, he has fared singing through far-off lands. His rough clothes are impregnated with the spacious winds of earth, with illimitable distance; he is full of the joy of adventure.

My fears are calmed but I glance toward the jumble of apparatus, the crucible of luminous radiance; the flattened apparition has faded from the wall. . . . But it was by this supernatural glow that our faces were lit up, by this I made out his large poet's eye, his obstinate, swelling forehead, his dishevelled hair beneath

his travelling cap, his enveloping mantle discoloured and made greenish by all the good and the bad weather of the world. At the instant when I cut short the torrent of light, his enormous profile, gaping like a black oriflamme that is first rolled, then unrolled, danced in shadow above the phosphorescent mosaic; he himself intercepted and held fast by the vivid white and the clear-cut black.

And in this brightness that dazzled and shook him he made (I had just time to see it) the sign of the Cross.

Nought remains save the tenacity of night . . . and silence. Useless to long to plunge deep into the rich intoxication. . . . Awakening. . . .

After the crowded night, the life of the day, of every day.

Sylvie descended upon Alican arrayed in mauve. In the brief space between one train and the next she hastened down to the sun-lit beach, a dazzling, laughing apparition, her beautiful teeth gleaming like diamonds. When she bent forward it was often possible to see the whole of those beautiful bare breasts that seemed to swell over the sides of her ripe body. In the hall of the palace where the great windows were curtained and yet flashing in their glittering frames, she stretched herself at her ease on a *chaise longue*. Her heavy eyelids were half-shut; her cheeks were as a fire that glows. All of a sudden she wanted to spread her frock more comfortably over her legs; she lifted it in both hands and shook it abruptly so that it looked like a huge mauve fan with the fine pale fringe appliquéd at the hem; and in that sway of wind my instan-



taneous glance glimpsed in a flash her rounded silken gold-clad legs and her two bare thighs above the golden silken sheaths. Her bare limbs were more rounded, the curves heavier than I had dared to imagine.

Earlier Sylvie had simply not existed for me, when Marthe was present. Now, both are here; and Marthe is surely still the same? And yet—she can no longer be the same, for I desire Sylvie. How weak a man is—and how strong!

Sylvie has gone, and nearly all my feeling about her has gone too. All the same, in the solitude of my own room, I revisualise this woman lying as chance would have it, by my side, and the rite—too brief to be either happy or sad—wherein my glance was united with her hidden whiteness. This beginning of the adventure of two bodies, so soon cut short. . . . There was a day in the vast receding perspective of the centuries, on the sterile sands, when I trembled in like fashion before a like contact with nothingness.

But how can I dream any longer of denying the concrete evidence which takes possession of me, demolishes my laborious subtleties, wrests from my mind, nay, from my very heart, its lie, and compels my glance towards the life of the mass. As each successive memory takes possession of me and stands out sharply in the surrounding darkness, more and more do I become like to that male form, to that ancestor who strove to weave with his own flesh a victory over time and space, living or dead; to him who from the first moment that he stood upright, turned towards the Moon-woman and the Sun, and built temples for them from the first day his hands became creative.

But the eternal feminine is divided into many fragments. Her name is—Another, Another! Beauty's

lines fade fast in women's loveliness, but man's desire fades faster still. Desire moves through a space which has another curve than that of feeling. She is acephalous, she is Venus, goddess-sister of the hard-bellied male. None the less, in each creature is the mysterious germ of a Heart.

Behold a heart in the midst of the dark blackness, in the midst of the church of dark, a heart alone, naked as upon an altar, a heart—like some body torn from the world, sexless, having the simplicity of a rose. A glimmering light as of resurrection wanders in a circle like a Milky Way. It is going to rest upon the overhanging draperies of the darkness. Here? Further on—yonder.

On the square table of a laboratory—on a day in the everlasting void, across the dormer window of oiled-paper, I could see the river, divided up like narrow stairways, and the arches of the curved bridge whereon noble lords and ladies disported themselves in fine curtained carriages whose weight made the transparent paper tremble.

On the dank altar in the laboratory I used my instruments to expose the interior of the corpse—to see! In that acrid incense I bent low over the viscera of a woman—over the liver, the intestines, the heart and its great blood-vessels. Once this thing bore fairylike vestment and a name. . . . It is incredible—and yet, it is verity—and this vision of the deep abyss chokes me. . . . My companions have gone, I found myself utterly alone with this thing of the infinite, this terrible, only thing—this heart. I gave a hoarse cry and fell on my knees.

The scene shifts and then settles anew. The stage represents another period. It is no longer a human

heart, it is less, and yet better—it is the heart of a dog. (The dog once gave me supreme love, utter devotion, and that helped me to grave upon the rocks a wondrous picture of tenderness.) I was using the still-living beast for my scientific observations. My experiment condemned him to die gradually. Suddenly he looked at me, and my look was in his, boundless. Then the sheet of paper on which I jotted down the results of my observations fell to the ground like a dead leaf. He lowered his head—and he licked my feet, as if his tongue were his heart's right hand.

Hence, I am for ever a man who flees. But is flight possible, can a man escape from the everlasting drama of the belly and the mind? Can he ever enter into the calm of universality, can he merge in Nature, in others, in the all? "*Seek their joy!*" No! seek not *their* joy, seek only thine own, the only thing thine to the end.

Annette's garden, whither, when I emerge from my cell, I sometimes go to see her. It is old, fallen into ruins! the square old house, tall as a tower, is all muffled in ivy. The stone staircase has softened with the flight of time, and is crumbling away. The paths are so worn in the middle that water gathers and the birds come to drink. There is a huge tree of immense age, gnarled with great knotty bosses. An ancient tomb in this old garden has been hidden by rank grasses. From time to time when these are thrust aside by men looking for the time-weathered name engraved on the slab, they see—*Déotte*—and the rest of the half-effaced inscription indicates that *Déotte* died on April the first of a far-off year, whose date has now vanished into the conquering stone.

Déotte. . . . The very word seems like a guardian-angel.

The square ivy-mantled house has suddenly become young again; the ivy has disappeared; the branches of the decaying tree are now smooth, slender, supple, and are lightly waving. The old gray staircase? It is white and all-new, the steps sharply edged in their newness, and Jehan Basque who has just finished it says that it is made of such hard stone that it will never wear away.

How different the tomb is now! No grasses now, it is shining white, new, wide open, the slab deposited on one side. . . . A black crowd of people, bending down and slowly moving like a string of "i's" round the slim, white, insentient corpse. . . . Déotte so newly dead under the pale gleam of April's early sun. An hour ago they enfolded her in a sheet, and the slender texture of that sheet measures the final limit of her earthly destiny.

Another hour, and there will be nothing of her above ground save this stone whose cold calm draws hot tears from the survivors. The heart's fate must needs be tragic, since all ends in the tomb. It is death that is the natural state, death that creates creation, that is truly the body. Save for those few supernatural years in which the present and the past intermingle, every being is dead during all the vast stretch of years before and after.

The days flow backward. There is no tomb. April, March, February, Déotte? She is there . . . anguished? No, laughing! She's bending down, standing erect, bending again and dressing herself, using, as did the ladies in Rome in the olden days, the shining rounded copper bowl for her mirror. She devotes, oh!—very much time to the care of her person, a large

part of every morning. And none the less, she's going to die so soon. Who thinks of death for her? *No one knows anything about it.* Who has made this picture of a tomb that I thrust in upon the actual scene? I just did it myself, somehow . . . but I lose my grasp of it and it fades away. She's laughing as she looks at herself, and as for me, why I filled this lovely morning with a great shout of laughter. But all the same, just for an instant I was outside and above what I was actually seeing, and in that moment of illumination there surged through me the realisation of the measureless value of this woman whom I once loved so well. I knew absolutely—as if I had seen it with my own eyes—that she would die. It is like that. In the rush of life we are led astray, we live blind and deaf, we cannot see the human beings close by us for what they really are.

And now, a night of my own amidst the stellar confusion of all my nights. I feel it is before . . . before what? I cannot tell. Before nothing, since it had become *now*.

The moonlight filters across the bed and I see us both, she and I, lying side by side. The sheet moulds our two bodies—torsos and forking limbs—in ivory and stone, reliefs fretted with dim folds. . . . Low-spoken words, like wings, pass between us.

I said, in words born from my heaviness of spirit:

"Venus tarries but a moment."

But the voice of her flesh replied, after a vehement silence:

"No!—for several moments."

Souls and faces, what do they signify in the passionate clasp?

No. The face first. Human beings greet each other,

explain themselves, through the face. Love's first step is the step towards a beloved face.

I said that the word "love" must be divided in twain, for desire and love are too unlike.

But she: "No!" She always says: "No."

Then she said that it is all inextricable, that desire and love are joined in a living knot that bleeds if cut, and that joy cannot be divided into parts. Nor can one analyse memory, and so long as one lives, one can neither understand nor pardon.

"In love," I cried, "it's all a matter of chance."

"Yes, but love exists!"—and afterwards she murmured: "Best to say nothing."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

We put vague questions to each other as if we were strangers. We agree or contradict indifferently. Yes. No. It is a dialogue murmured in the night, in our lair—our bed. The white sheet is over us like a mantle and reflects the heat of our bodies.

The voice to which my voice responds comes from the resilient, fresh, warm body of a woman whom I am caressing. She is naked, we are living together, but I know nothing about her. I talk to her in the same groping fashion as always to everyone. Between us there is an exchange of confused, indistinct words that serve but as a door to separate us the more—they are, as it were, chance blows falling on the outer shell of our personalities, revealing nothing! They only serve to make evident our unhallowed ignorance of one another. None the less, desperately anxious to talk, with panting breath we question and reply. In vain I try to pour all my strength into the hollow-sounding sigh: "Yes"; in vain I press my whole weight upon her soft body and interlace my fingers in her sweetness like a

juicy fruit, and inure her to voluptuousness. I am only upon the surface of this existence, I can never drown myself utterly therein.

And—I ought to love her; but I love her no longer. I tell her I love her, but I say rather what I desire should be than what is. Yet, when I say “I love you,” I believe it, for an instant, but later I realise I have lied. I *have* loved her . . . and so . . . of all the women living she it is whom I cannot more love. There is upon me the curse of clear-sightedness, of single-mindedness—and of anguish. Always two realities encompass me; there is the truth that wells out from my heart and there is the fabricated article consisting of ready-made *clichés*. But however it may be, the heart's fate is always a tragedy; it suffers today, it will suffer tomorrow, as surely as it suffered yesterday. Death comes so gently, so suddenly and we mortals are forced to acknowledge, death is just. And there remains this residue of love-talk, which is the residue of all the love-talk throughout all the planes of eternity; space, time, nothingness.

As in a dream, slowly, unwillingly, a form draws near, a vast form languid and yet athirst, its countenance irradiated by a mournful smile, half tears. She comes to me, she embraces me, and I am aware of her formless face, of perfume, and the murmur of her voice, *her voice that has never changed*. I remember distinctly that her approach made me mad. Away! Enough, enough!

Light. We are at the beginning of things, facing one another, astonished at each other. All my life rushes out to her. I am become naught, but my movements of joy. There is nothing, I swear it, in all the world save this union of her and me. This is Déotte,

this maiden so erect and stately in her timidity, close-covered to her very chin in her delicate, complicated garments. For the first time her lips pronounce my name, and as she speaks I behold the red warmth of her tongue. How exquisite is the surprise of two human beings standing face to face in their unseen urge towards one another!

Where am I? . . . Everywhere . . . but I am falling. . . . My hellish fall through the void of the impossible has thrust me back from satiety to desire, has allowed me to surprise, lying as it were side by side, those two creations of my heart which in real life can never be united. *Before*, she stands there, overflowing with the exquisite fragility of happiness. *After*, she is still the same, and yet—she is but the shadow of herself! One cannot love for long; one cannot love . . . and always and ever the same end begins anew.

Remains that man must free himself from these things of desire and death.

He must rise up against himself, rid himself of this heart that ever loves and loses, and see to it that his personal love embraces all mankind; he must fashion his very self into work, he must express himself. To express oneself is, to create something divine. . . . On a day the angelic stranger who was my companion uttered these words:

“It is more; it is to become divine oneself.”



## VIII

### THE MYSTERY OF ADAM

Day is about to break. A new sunrise will transcend all sunrises:—the sun rising upon the greatest of days—today.

I inhale piously. The heart of the cross glows. I am in a high, bleak place—a Calvary at a crossroads. The arms of Jesus Christ are stretched wide. The gentle wind, laden with blue colour, breathes on all men. Our Father, which art in Heaven. . . .

How many crosses rise up from the earth? There is this cross on the hill-top where the roads converge; there is that of the convent at Elcho, and that of the Church of St. Stephen and St. Trophimus. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, stoned at Jerusalem by the unbelieving mob, and Trophimus who long ago came hither:—“There are no more slaves. There is but one law for all men who have seen the light; it is, that each is the servant of all.” God is over all this country, right up to the red shore between the two bowed peaks.

My soul, in its astral passage (and I *saw* it during this hour!) came to earth near Calvary and the fragment of Christian land, and entered into a little abandoned being,—less than Man in stature—a being with large, tormented head, ever trembling in his creased and faded black garments, beneath the duress of wind and weather, and earth.

I crouch over a stone. My blue-veined, yellow hand

grasps my bony knee through cloth thin as dust. I see my hat lying on the ground, like some black cat with its tailing streamer.

I am Angelino. There never was, in life, a joy that resembled *me*. But I have an aim:—to obtain from fugitive lines and colours wherewith to make pictures of the world. I am but a point, but I am in the midst of all things. After me and over me, when I am dead, all will see, one day, what I have seen.

I never found anything more beautiful, or anything more evil, than what I could see in one day from my own doorstep, and I will paint the scene on the great window in the Church our lord Egbert is building at Elcho—so that the light may burn through it eternally. It will be, the Mystery of Man.

At the top of the stained-glass window, cut out in the stone like a great liquid skeleton, at the very summit with its great whorls of flame, shall be the cross. The cross, black against the light, having the height and width of the sky—higher than the outspread white cloud, higher than the sun, the moon and the stars.

And on the window there shall be several tableaux, divided by the magnificent lace-work of black, metallic bars. First the Valley of the Martyred. The Martyred? Workers, and their bodies; flesh drawn and stretched along the bones, the vast construction-yard of white stone, of white dust, of grinding and creaking iron, of the new church—and the trenches and cavities and ladders whereto Labour is bound fast.

They suffer, and their faces while they work are like the faces of the damned. The sweat stands out upon their bodies. The tale of the crafts is the tale of man's sufferings. The porter's neck is deeply chafed and his burdened back is as if it had been flayed; the smith batters perpetually his own fists and shoulders;

the stonebreaker crouching over his work, his knee-bone worn with the pebbles, dazzled by the sun-lit stone dust—even as, bit by bit, ever and again, he sets out to change the face of the earth, so he blinds and consumes himself. The breath of the glass-blower wars with the breath of the furnace, and is licked up and stifled.

The washerwoman takes the wet stuff saturated with water and forces it to sweat out its filth. With her hands, those slaves of her body, she twists and strangles the foulness in the warm, slippery entrails of the wash-tub.

All these shovelfuls of beings drag along the ground like foreshortened shadows.

At the day's end they are exhausted. By the evening, the mason carries the weight of the wall upon his back; the woodcutter the tree in his pierced hands; the fisherman is trembling, inert, drowned.

The labourer carries the dust of the dead. For into the tender fields as well as the hard stone there breaks the noise of iron, and man is riveted to the soil. The man of the border-lands tends his sparse crops among the stones of the foothills. Day by day the man of the plough and hoe covers the landscape with new colours, and prepares my picture.

They can do no more, and yet they toil on. Here also the tool is bewitched; it burns; it grips the hand with talons, and from morning until evening weighs it down more and more. It invades and infects the hand that holds it, the arm, the shoulder, the back.

Hardly can the man thus dominated, stop to look at his darkened hands—those two dumb beasts that earn his living. They are not his own and he must follow them. He has sold his soul to his work. . . . Sometimes he even loves his work.

I had been drawn by the sound of a wooden-handled, iron tool hollowing the soil—a very slow and separate “tick tack” with the space of a breath between each blow—that showed the task was too heavy; the intervals became longer and longer and lapsed ever nearer toward abiding peace.

“You are sowing, Telo,” I said.

He paused in his sowing and with a difficult gesture gave me to understand that he was not.

“Too many wars,” said he.

“But you are sowing seed.”

He stopped to look at what he had been doing, and shook his head in still stronger denial; then bent his ear to the galloping tumult of the wind.

“No,” he replied, “I am not sowing it; I am burying it.”

Right at the top of the picture of the world with its many parts divided by beautiful boundaries, all lit by the sun’s warm breath, there shall be traversed Telo, grave-digger to the wheat; his insignificant head seen against the distant road whence come war and pestilence, where happiness is torn in two.

I went on down the footpath. Little by little, and noiselessly, I came to that village of a bygone day.

Bygone? Reality is double. I was slowly awaking. I could see my thin and twisted legs, my feet, shod with wood, crushing the little clods to dust; my bony hand like the skeleton of a bird. I could feel my eyes blink as I fixed them on that far-away white pigeon, struggling and captive, which was the tower’s oriflamme . . . and I heard myself cough.

The face I bear—that so important, so unique countenance—had believed its eyes to be open; but I opened them and beheld—Marthe Uriel, asleep with her head on a rock. In the distance were the two radii

of the world; the delicate blue of the sky, and drowned and resonant, the heavy blue of the sea. She had gone to sleep smiling at me, stretched out upon that hill-top where now as heretofore, the destinies of the roads cross; where, if one searched in the earth, one would be sure to come across the square socket of a cross. A little while back that disturbing young woman had come up to me on her knees, and just brushing my forehead with her fingers, said: "I wish I knew what was going on behind there!" I laughed . . . and she believed I was only laughing.

Our love grew from day to day. She would wait for me in her room; her mouth. . . . Or I myself would be waiting for her, with so strong an expectation that when the hour struck that was to bring her to me, I would see, through the walls, her actual form moving somewhere, before reality and distance closed about me again; and then, when to my amazement I heard her coming, her footsteps on the stairs would seem to press upon my body. It was beautiful to see the sadness over her when the time came for parting. And every parting needed a strong effort. We would come back again, our eyes would battle against this incomprehensible tearing apart of our lives. Desperately we would hold each other's eyes in a last look. I was Man to her, and she was Woman. There are many definitions of "to love"; the only one is "to prefer".

She wanted to know. . . . Ah, yes, I too wanted to know—I listened to a voice that said, "*What are we here to do?*" The great questions returned, re-echoed, hovered, and very slowly, retreated. Hardly did I dare to lift my head, long sunk between my shoulders, towards the peak where dwell the greatness and the pitfalls of those words! What is the subject of the drama of Man?

She slept. Little by little, noiselessly, I came to the village of a bygone day.

"There, you see that Angelino is not dead. No tears, for I am not dead."

Clément Trachel, and Angelino. . . .

Then we *must* co-exist; there must be two concentric horizons one inside the other—strange wavering presences, or else how could Angelino's lips speak thus?

As I went on I caught myself saying: "How good it would be to remain in this home of quietness!" And here a valley, there a cottage, would arouse my enthusiasm. One loves what one has not, or what one has no longer,—never what one has. Well, then, I was not Angelino; there were two of us. And my charmed feeling for nature, and my sense of finding a refuge, were vanishing as fast as that other man, "the man of the future", disappeared, and I grew to be wholly Angelino. Nothing that is habitual to me will arouse desire in me any more—I had touched upon what lay at the bottom of the pit.

For before burying myself, I had had time to see habit in all its faded ugliness—to realise that feelings are but ephemeral emotions swift to die in any being; that the name of true wealth is "the first time"; and that to live in Paradise is to die there.

What can be done triumphantly here-below is the imitation of things with colours on a bare wall, or in glass, the very body of light.

Another fragment of the mystery of the sons of Adam to add to the great stone rainbow that will span the church from base to steeple—that of the passers from without.

In the round frame of night the dawn shakes out her

whispering folds. Soon the sun will rise. Why?—What are we here to do on earth?

These slopes which descend towards Elcho between those unchained wildernesses, the sea and the wild forest—this is the country where men hide; a fleeing tag of land belonging to the hunted, the fugitive and the condemned. Yesterday I watched an excommunicated man's back dwindle on the downward path, very swiftly like a pebble rolling down a slope. This remained to me of my sudden sensation:—One would have thought it the back of an ordinary man!

Among the world's vitrified treasure where all the solemn colours will be set forth nakedly, right at the bottom shall be seen the back of a man.

And, too, a skull upon the ground like an opal; someone who escaped from every-day life, a prisoner who blew out his brains in broad daylight, an outlaw, or perhaps a sick and possessed man, who could not drag himself any further, but died of sorcery or hunger here at the crossroads, after pleading with the God Thing upon the cross as if it were a man!

In the middle of the road one sees a kind of tree stump. It moves—and from it comes a clicking noise like a cricket. It is a leper; who, of all the world, may walk only in the middle of the road, and must not touch the ground with his bare feet. One sees, too, plague-stricken people fleeing from their disease, trying to cast off the sores which seem stuck to their bodies, and to rid themselves, by taking it unawares, of the death they carry with them. This sphere of bone may be the remains of a criminal or of a soldier—of an honest man laid low one night by someone stronger and more fortunate than he.

Those who die are accursed, and so are those who remain.

The frontier lies over there, a line encircling the lines of the roads. It has no form and is as if dead, frozen even in the sunlight. One cannot see it, yet one has knowledge of it and believes in it despite everything.

Impossible to put it into a picture, when you cannot see it on the ground, when it has no living shape and is nothing but a crowd-scar. At this point the stained glass of the window would have to be broken—this is Elcho, that is Rulamort. In a flash of folly misfortune yields a glimpse of happiness. War howls, "Peace!"—and nothing has ever given me a better image of resemblance than the two sides of the frontier.

Here, risen clear of night's limbo, a Franciscan, a man of the people, jovial, hairy and full-bearded: Laughing, and his voice ringing out under his cowl like bronze. A monk of the strict order of the Spaniard Dominic, a hound of God,—passes, hangman and judge in one. He said he came from Rome, the Throne of the World, and was going to Sainte-Baume, the Holy Grotto. An old hook-nosed beggar, the village idiot; heralded by the little tapping sound of his stick upon the ground; his body as he goes, complaining in all its reedy joints.

Three big men in buckram, their left breasts blazoned with a dog's head in yellow upon a blue ground, came in sight, glancing about them on all sides. Said they:

"Where is this fellow Dorilon who has killed a pheasant?"

A whiteness showed on the horizon. A breathing wind, the world's wide veil, brought with it the creak of the construction-yard of the church where they were clearing and tearing the stone.

I saw, too, Odon, and then Clairine, and then both



of them together. His hair was long and fair like hers. They strayed along for a little, blue against the rose-coloured morning. Seeing them entwine and shine upon each other, one knew them for lovers. One saw besides, the parting between Henri and Torise and so knew that they were lovers. He said, "Until tomorrow." He has power over the future!

They passed. . . . They were there—they are there no more; and I go down toward the houses.

All day the broad powerful sunlight set a living night between thing and thing, and snowed down beauty in the shape of butterflies that only need a day to melt. It was at day's crushing, overburdened end that I came into the village where dwelt inhuman life. This evening is more resplendent than other evenings. Piously I shall put in this rich and sombre nightfall in the clear shadow of the church wall, upon the gate of the infinite.

In front of the village there is the tree, that amazing foreigner the walnut, which rains down coolness in the summer heats. It is encircled by a round piece of its own northern country. It is the only one of its kind. It is the emblem of Elcho.

In a niche in its trunk lives the Virgin, blue and covered with stars, and further adorned with a child, a coronet and a bird, all three gilded. You would think she had just come out of the chapel at the end of the road.

Beside the tree is a square fountain whose slight spray makes a dark smear on the pale dry crust that surrounds it.

Beside those places where life is imprisoned, the apple-tree yields up its due fruit, the vine with clinging hands climbs high upon the wall, a tuft of violets scat-

ters its very heart's fragrance on all indiscriminately, and close by lies a pile of refuse, oozing with moisture. Peelings, cinders and shards, things hacked and twisted, things burnt and broken. These are the setting for eternal life.

A group of grimy children, their mouths encrusted with filth, buzzes about this smaller débris.

Yonder beyond the tree there is a straggling line of cabins. Nothing here has changed since the old days of the Romans and the Franks. Nothing will ever change round about the Sainte-Vierge of the walnut tree, the well and the chapel.

What period is this? No one here could tell you; really we belong to no age at all.

Exhausted and work-worn, these ghosts return into their walled dens to pray for the sleep that is a short-lived death.

The woodcutters labour to fill the fissures in their crazy branch-built roofs. It is as if they closed them with their own bodies; and some of them fall, even as their own faggots fall. You must stoop if you are to see men on all fours—whole families bowed under the yoke and straining at the tight-drawn harness.

In these huts where the light struggles in by the hole that serves for a doorway and there is nothing but a hearth and a pallet, their lives are passed in the effort to drive out the cold, hunger, solitude and dust which are always with them. It is the primeval lair paved with beaten earth, the cave, trodden and filthy, whence Man turns toward the sun or the rich poverty of fire—that grimy fragment of sun—and toward Woman and her heart and breasts.

In the mountain of the monument I shall light the pyre of light, I shall set up the splendid silhouette of life. Man and Woman taken straight from life, and

the smile that curves from their lips, and their poor, seeking eyes. . . . All that, by its mere resemblance, is recompense for weariness and suffering. The other that is support. One being *implies* another. Monstrance—figure, hearth-flame, that gives the tints of flesh to the wall.

Once upon a time (there never is but *one* time) there were people who loved each other. My life is sad because I am alone. I spend myself in talking to myself. And yet, high and afar off, is a strange vision. Upon the threshold of a dream, I yet have the feeling of awakening upon the topmost peak of reality, since everything around dissolves and disappears I see a delicious face; a woman sleeping, stretched out against a rock. Will this lovely dream of mine be realised some day? To be like no one else is to be great; but it is sweeter to be alike. The door which opens suddenly into the room, and through which one enters—window and bed lying in warm timorous shadow . . . dawn of night's beginning. . . . Joy itself is only an imitation.

In a corner stands the earthenware saucepan which the flames have clothed with soot. It does nothing, and says nothing; but so fragile is it and so much afraid of chance knocks, that it seems to be alive. A heap of vegetables colours the solid twilight of the room. Leeks, like bearded white bones; green swollen things shaped like closed fists; and to one side, pears with their broad bases; and round-cheeked apples. The little bodies of these things cover the spot one is so careful never to look at; the hole with the coins in it which I hide from God—God, who, from behind his carved wooden face, has often asked me to confess.

“Have you stolen the coins and buried them?”

It has not yet been seen by the men of power who

come among the poor to take their money—for no one has any money except what he takes from others.

In the walled recess a table is placed on rough branches (birch whose white silvery bark comes away and peels off in round strips).

A block of wood forms a seat. And I see two clumsy feet, naked, dirty, with a thick, horny covering,—the man. All his life up to now he has done nothing day by day, but toil, and eat and sleep in order to toil. His fate can be seen from beginning to end. He exists—upright, bent, lying down. That is all. He exists. From infancy to old age he does not advance—he falls. His toil is as endless as his breath. Nothing is left for him, how useless his life!

He lifts his arms to heaven. He, too, like all the rest, is determined not to die, to resist pursuing time, to endure.

He sees in himself the harvest which, up to this moment,—but only up to this moment—has continually increased. He sees the little child in the nest. He sees the rags which wrap a groaning mass—the aged woman who has lived overlong, whose exterior is dried up and dead, holding on to life by a blasted root, an example of how evilly life ends.

And to crown all, he desires to reign! In the poor fastness, threatened by, and so involved with the earth and the wind, the night, there is one stronger who is the conqueror of the others. The children, the old, the woman, are slaves—above all, woman, drudge of work and pleasure—to the dominating being who behind the shut door fills the house, shouts and terrorises. The law of the strongest, the law of all lands, the law of cold, becomes established in the interior of the hovel. And the hovels envy each other from behind their walls, each fiercely for itself. Neighbours detest each

other so bitterly that their faces become distorted. Victory or defeat? Here and there some brutal rejoicing over the suffering of others. Ah! nothing in this world could be explained did we not know that men are punished for sin.

The three men in buckram—gamekeepers, burst in.

“You have killed a pheasant; come to be hanged.”

“I did not kill it, sir.”

“You have confessed it.”

“The pheasant was dead.”

“Come, or you will be felled where you stand.”

It is a sickening encounter. On the one hand three hard, red-faced men bristling with weapons, on the other the flabby, grey, defenceless family in their stable, closed by a wooden bolt, a place in which only the walls are hard.

The living family with its marrow of women and children straggles round the father who is led to the end of the worn field which surrounds the enclosure. It is apparent that they all want to cry, but cannot. His presence was a cause of fear—but his absence is yet more fearful. The family group,—stricken—stand aghast at the void left by their strong stay. These people seem still to hold themselves erect, but they are going to fall to the ground.

Go out, explore space at the hour when day enters the earth?

I will show in the stained glass of the cross, the woven cloth of heaven, that evening itself is a kind of quiet storm which restrains and governs you. Something is everywhere ranged against mankind.

A gathering of children play by the fountain. The

idiot with the crooked nose appears and terrorises them. "It is forbidden to form a crowd. Did you not know that?"

Yes, they know well that they are forbidden to foregather. That is the ordinance learnt at birth, and resounds right to Hell.

To meet, to play together, to sup together, to think together, is forbidden, absolutely forbidden. Forbidden? Why? The poor are humble brothers who are not brotherly. They are too poor.

Several old men falter across the open space as slowly as if they were making their way through a crowd. Theirs is the malady of survival, which remoulds and gnaws away the bodily forms that cling about the bones. The women, all of them, even the young ones, are aged and made hideous by work and pain. Some of them have loved sinfully, they hang their heads as do these who have been bereft of great joy, and have nothing more to say. The multitude hate them, and in time their regret becomes shame.

There are other women who have seen love only through another's eyes. It has left them cold, or bruised them.

Then there are the ill-mated, sacrificed to profit or to Man, their hearts are broken;—and others whose hearts are worn out. "Too late!" is the universal cry.

John Hayseed says to Tom Turnip—"We shall get the harvest in by the third week of September." He thinks that the season will obey him! Below them in the fields left by the war, in the string of dwellings perched on the heights for fear of pirates, we never do more than make a beginning. The house goes up, and falls. The cultivated fields and the wilderness, like two cloaks which are disclosed in turn.

From the knoll where I stand can be seen all the roads of Elcho, diverging and retreating from it. This one intersects itself and forms hard lines, stony lines made of the forged bones of the earth.

These roads, long drawn out things, plunge the country into the scaffolding of the new church, then into the great world, drowning it everywhere. It is by the roads that labour absorbs men, as does war, and by the roads they return conquered, as in war. This way love goes, and misery comes.

No one is near me. Here the road begins with no sound of footsteps, with long open spaces. The beginning of the great descent is gentle; the setting-out. Those settings-out by which space is scarred; settings-out which begin in such a small way, because when we set out we are still together (it is the return which will matter!). They who set out do not return, or, which is exactly the same thing,—they come back too late; they are no longer They. A woman once wept and sang: "Roads always end in sorrow." This cry rings in my ears and will not cease.

It was by that road that Odon has just disappeared from sight. Between Odon and Clairine was a love which could be seen but not realised. They alone knew it. The face of each was pale and intent; to paint them one would have to take much joy, and probe one's heart, and oneself grow pale.

Armed men have taken him away to the war, or, haply, to help build in some distant land a church whose swollen dimensions are raised tumultuously in eternity.

His Clairine lived almost always shut close in, held prisoner by a dull task, giving her health and her fresh beauty to embroidery. One day she was sunning herself

on the doorstep, and had gone a step or two beyond. A cavalcade rode by. Clairine was fifteen. She shone in the sunlight, beautiful to behold. This is said to be why Odon was taken away.

Two women clung to him when they heard he was to be led forth. His mother said: "I will not let him go. For a second time he will have to be torn bodily from out my body." She hugged him tight like an aged sorceress of love. But she had to let him go when the men came for him. Those who had seen the world's ways said to her: "You cannot but obey"—and she drew in her claws and softened her rage. Subdued by this weight of wisdom she obeyed—and Clairine, the other half of unhappiness, obeyed also.

They saw Odon grow smaller along the road. Distance is some thick, thick thing; it is an implement of torture that dwarfs its victims. Step by step, distance effaces colour and pales all generous fires. Ten yards away, a living being becomes a thing, a little, intangible thing. So that even then, so near and so soon, love is vain, is idolatry.

Odon went singing down the road so that Clairine might go with him, in her heart, a little further. She listened until the voice had all but faded away, and it had become impossible to tell from whence it came. Then she cried aloud: "I will wait for you for ever." As she retraced her steps, she sobbed out these words, singing, and little by little they became a song of Clairine and of waiting. From her tears sprang that beautiful song which says that all roads lead to sorrow.

Before an hour had elapsed, the old mother had resumed her work, muttering the while. She went to the stable, where the bitch had pupped, to take away the unwanted puppies. But the bitch was not going to give in so easily. Her pure, animal refusal was uncorrupted



by words, or any sophistication, and the old woman had to retreat. She began to understand something, humbly. She said: "Angelino, if all mothers were but one Mother. . . ." She did not know how to finish the sentence. I saw that she was thinking of the incredible, the insane difference between the individual and the multitude. When they are all together, they do not mind and let things take their courses: but each alone *does* mind. These flashes of knowledge come only one at a time: they are the delirium of truth.

In the stained glass window—a garden of light cut out like a leaf—there shall be an entanglement of desiccated roads above the valleys of souls.

All this is revealed to me because it is Winter.

The plans of those strips of bruised and dead earth—called roads—which broadcast the warmth of the village to the four quarters of the heavens, is more easily visible in winter than in summer. It is in nature's chill ruins—the bare of reddened trees, the whitish-grey earth—that we are best able to discern the main lines of misfortune.

But what am I saying! There is no winter in that country whose red promontories, large as those wonders of the world, the pyramids of Egypt, plunge into the blue beneath and the blue above; where the shining elasticity of the sea ever and again smashes itself like glass against the same barriers. The pines are red merely because they are dead; the black trees are those which have been burnt: the snowy grey which bemantles the earth is but ashes. A glance reveals that this winter of thought is man-made; it has come more swiftly than that of God, and will endure longer.

I shall set this magnificent wanness in the chute of heaven, those roads down which men have dived fleeing from war (comparable to a storm because it rolls

along, one knows not why), fleeing fire, famine and the pestilence that kills bees on the wing, and draws forth poison from medicinal plants—fleeing, as if one were fleeing from the mountain slopes, the deathly cold fleeing from the roof of the world. (What a tremendous fugitive is there on winter's slope.)

I shall grope amid the treasures of grey and white. I shall make the glass cold as frost and snow, and the threshold of winter, a rocky reef of the north wind. And the north wind that makes the water shiver, will also make the glass to tremble. They have gone so far that if one asks where it was, the merchants and the pilgrims point to the stars in answer. It is more powerful than I thought, it is more beautiful than I. It is so great that one day I shall proclaim everywhere that the multitude has the shape of flight.

. . .

Where is he?

At first it is a weak cry, full of complaint and disappointment, that begins to learn pain. . . . Where is Henri? Torise droops and ages rapidly, and is sad that she has lost her name. Every evening she goes to bed with cold, and every night, alas, but adds to her sorrow.

Where is he? *I know.*

I was wandering secretly one day in the newly-dug vaults. The earth trembled in its depths, as it sometimes does, and shook the crypt violently. A stone detached itself from the vaulted roof and plunged heavily into the heavier earth. I saw a gaping skull which had been masked by this stone, and its fence of teeth and the ringed column entering the base of the head. In its stone grimace I recognised—Henri. His body was bent, curving like an arch, and he leant over like one

of the damned about to plunge into hell. That was a little while back—the hole was still saturated with red, still shining with blood.

He had been forced to work at the erection of the new castle. Deep down beneath it is a cellar, the approach to which lies through brushwood and subterranean passages, and where, by some artifice of construction, whispered secrets are re-echoed. Six men were employed on the task of arranging and hiding this cellar, where voices from the great hall trickle through and gather together like subterranean waters. Henri had entrusted this secret to me; this terrible secret which would have meant death if my participation in it were discovered. None of the six ever came back into the light of day. They disappeared the day after he had said: "Till tomorrow."

I could just see the six mounds made by their bodies—the six victims of the disaster—their bodies flung forward and pinned down. I saw one whose naked, twisted shoulders seemed to support the whole weight of this great building; who became the cornerstone, the eternal caryatid, bearing with all his life and death's might, this temporal edifice here-below, and all mankind's scarlet sins that are displayed in the upper levels of the world.

Henri! He was a man with a long neck and shining eyes. Torise and he were desperately in love with one another and their passion knew no rest. For Torise did not come from Elcho but from Rulamort, and so they were always menaced by a great danger. They could only snatch broken remnants of happiness. Sometimes madness possessed them. One night, forced by the hazard of a violent thunderstorm to take the road along which they were walking, I heard a low voice exclaim:

"You wonder, Torise, why I wished to meet you this stormy night. It is because I hoped it would frighten you, and make you understand the greatness of my dream."

Whither go these doubled dreams that begin? We begin but we do not finish. All of us, always, are interrupted. For all of us, our days of hope are born to end in failure. We do not continue our way together till the end. One does not see the ear of corn ripen, nor the child mature. Our destiny is wrested untimely from us. And even those, whom fortune at first favours, end in ruin.

The cross has remedied nothing. Creatures suffer despite all God can do. How, then, must He suffer?

. . .

Misfortune cannot be directly combated. On the Calvary-mound where I stand, the wind which brings to my ear the grating sounds of the birth of a new church, swings some object close to my face; two feet. A side-glance shows me the gallows. I raise my eyes to the horror hanging there. The silence of the dead is more alive than that of the living. Above the spare garments which hang about him loose as drifting leaves, the rebel's head shows itself—crusted with pitchy skin and dirty, shaggy hair, the eyes like pools of slime in two pits. At one place the skull is bare; hard as a flint: and the bones of the feet are visible in their tissues of torn flesh. The other morning, when the golden dawn set fire to the soot with which the round world was filled to its edges, two black fellows took him down and hung him up again—to have some rope to sell. I do not happen to possess the wherewithal to

buy talismans—nor even the good fortune to believe in them.

I have remained so small and puny that they could crucify me on the cross of a tombstone. There is for me but one way of escaping the curse—to build the form of what I see. I must draw the pure colours out of the mixture in which they lie hidden; I must choose out the truth with my eyes, and make it known with my hands. This is the only possible destiny for sorrowful supernatural humanity.

Misfortune cannot be directly combated.

He who had resisted hangs on the gallows, a sign-board that says: "Do nothing." Up to that moment he had been careful and quiet: then, suddenly he could contain himself no longer—small and helpless and lonely though he was, he had dared to cry "no," and he had been hanged for it in the presence of the rejoicing crowd.

As when the soul of a blasphemer is hurled from his body, there arose that evening from the bowels of the earth, and from the waters under the earth, a deeper and a hollower groan. His father and mother heard and bowed their heads in shame. He had said: "I will change all this misfortune, I will alter things, I will turn stones into bread." But he himself had become a stone, the unfortunate first corner-stone of something that does not yet exist, in a world of stones. . . . There he hangs, in a corner of the stained window, like a swallow between earth and sky. I cannot help but blazon that across the coloured glass.

The fool came several times to disport himself in front of the gibbet which, in the dusk of the evening gave one the illusion of a great crucifix. Once I heard him say that the gallows is but the cross which quickens

new life. And again (when the wind shook the hanging body, turning it round first in one direction, then in the other to the sound of dried bark, there fell on me from time to time his stony gaze), he spoke aloud of the blood of the martyrs. He cried to the winds: "Listen, oh listen, from this blood will come things more true than ours."

But, whilst waiting for those things, keep silence! Say nothing. One must not even say: "It is day, and presently it will be evening, then night!"

That was said the day there was no evening nor night, because of the fire!

One day—one brief-luminous day lost in the succession of days—I perceived she was suffering. Her dear face was convulsed by the tightening of the nerves; her mouth—open, uncontrolled, groaned and sobbed . . . in her distress she even approached, for a moment, unthinkable, infamous ugliness. Trembling in all my parts, I said: "Would that I might suffer in your stead!"

There was a transposition; for one moment *I* was in *her*. Yes, for one moment I was inside this assaulted, moaning face that saw, confronting it, someone else who was pain-free, and an onlooker.

Then, with all the fibres of my being twisted and wrung,—suffocated,—overwrought by grief and injustice, I bellowed out as I sought to struggle free, to flee her identity!

The suffering of the flesh exhumed in life. . . . This broken thing, this gasping mass of weakness, and tenderness, is—my father. His hands are closed and broken, fast clenched from within; I can recognise them as little as his face that is horribly destroyed before

my eyes by tormenting illness. The thin wall of his chest is first lifted up, then drawn down, by the disordered rhythm of his shattered organs. He gives me a hideous smile, that is as if plastered into the mask of his face. His incurable lips murmur. What can this moribund, condemned from within his own vitals, be saying—he who lives and stirs only through a few isolated points in his man's frame—whose pain makes him a god of egoism?

He is speaking words so pure that they are as a living light:

“The torturing pain that it is utterly impossible for us to avoid, the pain that really does arise from our own entrails, doesn't count at all, for it is the mere contrary of life. One's own intimate, internal suffering is nothing, *since one cannot suffer*, and since this horrible secret thing in each man's life makes all else senseless—even truth.”

And he, who is incurable, thinks of the only ills that *can* be cured; those that men have themselves imposed upon mankind.

I know not what wooded landscape, what portion of space and time was about me when this noble adjuration reached me. It was so dazzlingly luminous that for a moment it blinded me—before it made me clairvoyant. . . .

What was I then? I know not. Of all that I was in that fold of time, of a whole destiny—childhood, youth, as universal and unique,—nought remains save this melancholy débris of our two selves.

#### THE WRITING

After dinner had been cleared away the little dining-room looked even uglier in its tidiness.

The copper chandelier was a kind of fetish which seemed to epitomise all the tawdry taste of France—the horrid, red, wrinkled tablecloth, the firelight falling upon the poker in the middle of the fender, and upon my hands.

There we sat; my uncle Raphard, opposite me, talked of the wonderful researches he wanted to undertake in the neighbourhood and of the fruitless efforts he had made to obtain support, for twenty years, from successive governments.

The same old subject long ruminated and exhausted! The archæologist went on with his interminable lecture, his eyes flashed, he ladled out laments, he scattered sarcasm at governmental departments; he deplored the apathy of the public; he damned the dilatory methods and waste of time; he cursed the circumlocutionary committees; he raved about red tape—I could hardly refrain from yawning. He took off his pince-nez and waved them about;—the dents which it had made on each side of his nose made it look as if it had been clumsily stuck on to his face.

I did not listen to him. I could only see the dancing shadows, the white head of the venerable speaker, the hideous symmetry of the wall paper, and the curious figure sitting there with pointed nose, pointed shoulders and insipid face touched with two spots of light from the pince-nez, now replaced in their accustomed niches.

The babbling, pedantic grotesque seemed drawn out and distended against the jiggling pattern of the wall paper.

The dancing shadows on the white wall were almost frightening. There were footsteps outside in the night.



They suddenly stopped. There was a knock at the door. Lord! I did not want anyone to come in! The door was opened and shut. I awoke from my trance.

I could hear laughter which came in out of the twilight, coarse, hearty laughter.

A sudden light threw the thick shadow of the traveller on to the hard wall of my lodging. His greeting reverberated in the air:

“Clément, my dear friend!”

I swept up the hearth. Night was falling and it was nearly dark. The man in the great-coat stood, upright, massive, leaning against the window, whose top reached his shoulders, and I was at my table in the little cell that was dimly lit by the fading light of heaven. The soothing sound of a bell seemed half-human.

Then, in the depths of this cemetery of living monks, the reaper of adventure in the outer world discharged his harvest of stories. A torrent of words rushed out in a cascade.

“It is nothing less than a miracle that I am back here alive, my dear Clément. I was captured by pirates of Barbary—but their frigate was wrecked on the shores of savage Numidia—near the kingdom of Saba—where the air is laden with a perfume so rich that the inhabitants can only avoid perpetual headache by continual fumigations of asphalt, and by wearing collars made of goats’ beards:—and I was taken by a guard to the negro king, who, seeing me so lusty and well, bared his teeth and made me understand that he would risk indigestion by feeding on the fat of my body. I was protected by the favour of a lady of high degree, whose barbarous name escapes my memory—but her eyes were enchanting, and her heart susceptible to romance. This mistress of mine intended to make me

no less than the king of that pagan isle where the miners—I saw it with my own eyes—are helped in their excavations by ants as big as dogs, and where the plantations of cinnamon are guarded by bats.”

We both listened to the astounding stories which the wandering poet’s genius imagined—and completed in fullest ornamentation, within himself,—before reciting aloud.

“Clément, my friend, there are men who have only one leg—in the middle of the body! And others who have no head. And again others who have no eyes in the head but, instead, an eye in each shoulder. Believe me, Master Clément, it is glorious to be taken seriously by people created like that! And I also saw beasts who do not figure in any of the illuminated manuscripts or decorated tomes, devoted to animals by learned monks, monks who were directly inspired by God, but who never left their monasteries at all.

“Is it not true that Thomas de Catimpie can count fifty kinds of reptiles including the frog? Why, I can count more than seventy; and sometimes by my physical strength, and sometimes by luck, I have escaped from unicorns and dragons, which are quite common out there, and the lion who covers his tracks by wiping out the spoor with his tail when he is hunted—also the hyena who can call the shepherds by name—and then again the heretic Saracens who in Spain openly commit the sin of cleanliness, and force good people to bathe in holy water (and do not these heathens, with their evil science, snatch the cure of maladies from the hands of the saints? And did they not invent, besides the nine numerals, the figure 0 which means nothing and which is the height of error?) A bird as big as a cathedral swept our ship far from its course by the wind fanned by the force of its mighty wings. We had the horror

of seeing our helmsman fall from the prow of the ship like Misenus of old (the pilot of pious Æneas), to be shamelessly swallowed by a bishop of the sea, who, according to the custom of these monsters, blessed him before eating him.

“I was the only member of the crew to escape from the plague. An old friend of mine, who was skilled in the use of herbs, could cure the plague by injecting some of the poison into people with the point of a needle, and claimed that by giving them a slight dose of the plague, he could save them from catching it badly. This cure wrought marvels in Arragon, until one day, on the denunciation of a wise and pious surgeon, the doctors were warned that it presumed nothing less than to put itself in opposition to the Almighty. They hanged my friend (then my friend no longer), and even burned him to make quite sure that they had hanged him. Every one of his heterodox formulas and writings were burned with him, so that the future generations might be saved from inventions so sacrilegious.”

Warming to his subject, Méliodon talked about the philosopher's stone, the philosopher's water of the first degree, the second, third and fourth degree, or magic vinegar, living waters, and about the stuff which cured pigs but killed men, especially men of a religious order, hence its name: “antimony” (*antimoine* against monks).

Crossing his arms, he solidifies in the dusk. He asserts, he affirms, he attests, he conjures. Then his head droops, and he breathes in a thick, low voice:

“The chaos of nature is astounding.”

But there is something watching over us, something which intrudes, and ends by taking possession of the whole place: the luminous signs that were on the wall

when he entered my cell in the heart of the monastery. He is forced to think of it, and then to speak:

"I saw your Mene Thekel Phares."

And there is a sweetness of friendship in the cell where I had so laboured among interminable silent things: the numbers of Pythagoras and the lines of Euclid.

As my work is nearly done, and the time now come, I feel that I must speak to him. I decide after great hesitation. To the wealth of adventurous narrative which he has showered on me, I will reply with a marvellous adventure of the soul. . . . I hesitated in the toils of a great shyness before the first words which had to be said:

"It is not nature which is chaotic, Méliodon, it is the conception we have of it. . . . Listen; adjusted mirrors multiply human vision a hundred-fold; we have penetrated the depths of living nature in our endless quest. We have reached the very atoms of life. Other apparatus, animated by a spark which I will explain (and which has been waiting, ready, since the creation of the world) reconstitutes and enlarges these atoms, before our eyes, and paints on the plain background what seems to you to be magic writing.

"It is under these conditions that subjects endued with life are distinguished from dead matter. Thus, down in the depths of us, right in the beginning, in the very centre, life begins to stir. Thus have I begun to separate natural science from vain imaginings, to put things in their proper order, and to see Nature itself, free from all superstition and error." That sparkling soul, the traveller still tinted by the colour of tropical islands, listened to what I revealed.

"H'm," said he, "necromancy, black art, metaphysics,

botany, spiritual science. . . . I know, I know, I am not an ignorant man, God knows. I understand that you are always working away at physical science, human medicines, crystal-gazing, clairvoyance and hypnotism. I know that you explore the mysteries of endless space. My dear friend, all this enriches your intellect."

Stirred by loving emotion, I cried:  
"Nothing is less cabalistic."

I longed to convince this large-hearted and open-minded man. He entered into everything, and made strenuous efforts to understand the new ideas which he was hearing.

"From the tiniest atoms right up to the stars, born of light itself, the whole of nature obeys unalterable laws. The revelations of wisdom depend upon the success of those who search its depths, but the wealth of wisdom itself is infinite. There are no scientific *inventions*, only *discoveries* always waiting to be unfolded. To find wisdom you must unceasingly ponder cause and effect, the seen and the unseen, the evidence of things not seen.

"Chance has no part in this solemn search for truth. As you draw near to these wonders, you see, as in a glass darkly, the measured movements of machinery.

"If you listen, you can hear the gentle breathing of the lamp, the pure and simple lamp whose very breath is light. Everything is born of light. True theory is in accord with fact, and of these is born reality.

"It is our duty to enquire into nature from its very beginning. We must understand and set in their proper order those parts which, together, unconsciously form the whole."

Such were the ideas which I brought forth that eve-

ning, children of my innermost soul, born of meditation in the essential hush of my cell.

(The white friars and black friars walking dimly in the dusk of vespers, like rows of columns or avenues of cypress were more eloquent than I!)

The figure of my friend emerged from the shadow of the wall and advanced towards me. With joyous laughter he held out his hands to me and said: "Before me is a solemn messenger breathing fresh tidings, swaying, staggering and heralding forth—wonders!"

"God spake the word," he quoted, and went on. "Truth is established for everlasting in books, in letters of light on the firmament, on tables of stone on Mount Sinai, in the thesis of Aristotle, and the two torches of St. Augustine; love and thanksgiving—the height of human understanding. *Summum collegi*, as the Italian monk says. I myself have seen the angel of wisdom—once, in a congregation of holy friars; the name was called: *Thomas!* and he appeared in the midst of them. He did not seem more than thirty years old, and he spoke divinely. The *rara avis* of Christendom; *rara avis numido simillima cycno*. . . . He who seeks to simplify the teachings of Euclid, I am always saying, must be one, who in the course of time will be another Euclid. Never let us fall into the error of worshipping the accomplished fact; it is divine force which should be worshipped.

"Ha, my worthy Clément, so you're a magician now! Science inflates, says the Apostle, and, says the other, the vain spirit of man must be preserved in an eternal childhood."

"The spirit of man, Méliodon, is the *obverse of things*, the grand, re-entrant, reflection of reality. Reason is an interior docility, but a sovereign docility, that obeys only the universal. It discovers nothing. Its

function is to reconstruct the world—without changing one point in one line—within the brain.

“But Truth is not what one first sees when one’s eyes are opened. Sensible appearance is, disorder; reason is, order. The human element stands over against the elements, thought against things.”

And now he opens wide his eyes upon some immense panorama that he glimpses,—as if he at last understood what I said.

“You think of confronting orthodoxy with self-sufficing knowledge! You are attempting, within creation a second creation. You intend, as if you were God Himself, to build up the inner world!”

Yes, that indeed is the intention!

But the man among men leaps up, and cries out: “Be on your guard!”

For centuries—I know it, for I am no ignoramus—there was controversy, discussion, the confusion of tongues.

He recalls and enumerates with his fore-finger, the famous debates, and the councils and the errors, and the renewed councils, and the statutes of parliaments, and kings, and popes.

“And now, over all the disorders of the past, our thirteenth century rises like a wall of certitude. The number thirteen is the summation of the centuries. The twelfth century said the same of their number, and the eleventh of theirs, but they didn’t really know what they were saying.”

“All Wisdom is not accomplished in us.”

“It is, it is.”

The strokes of the hour resound through our words. Their even rhythm lifts me up from the abyss where this vast beginning was just showing forth.

I am in another universe of throbbing sound, near by—above me—floats the formless halo of a phantom dining-room.

"Eight o'clock! It is late," proclaims my uncle Raphard.

And he takes up the thread of his dissertation to conclude it, in view of the lateness of the hour.

Confusedly, I remember that I have been listening to his endless ratiocinations upon the subtle and precarious solutions of our present social problems—infernal complication.

"Truly, nephew Clément, we are barbarians. . . . Every man for himself, whether individuals or nations. The State keeps apart—which is the least absurd thing in it all—and society is a ludicrous edifice, whose only finished part is the roof. Superstition, folly! From the earliest times that history records, down to the present mode of life that it is good manners among those who profit by it to call civilisation-established disorder shines forth imperturbably. . . ."

He winds his scarf about his neck. He has got up and, standing stiffly, exhales prolonged sighs: "Humanity is a strange chaos."

*"It is not humanity that is chaos."*

I proclaimed these words in spite of myself, seized by an illimitable simplicity, by an urge of infinite imitation, while my eyes rested on the vast nightmare.

"It is not men, Uncle, it is that which has been done with them. It is this established disorder that you speak of. Ought we not, therefore, to make *tabula rasa* once and for all of this ill-constructed social artifice that all men of any intelligence see through? Ought we not, Uncle, to go out to do battle with the superstition and the follies of life, and to recommence (or commence) building up the community from the



base, not from the roof; to give to each his proper place in the world, according to the laws of common sense?"

Immediately an excited figure gesticulates before me:

"These are chimeras, utopias, madness, nephew Clément!"

Am I waking or dreaming?

I am on my feet, unsteadily, and I seem to be smiling mechanically and performing the customary gestures of polite society. But it is, really, a grand moment of simplicity and harmony.

I perceive and hear a white-haired old man—a papered skeleton—proclaiming that the great statesmen and economists have had time, thanks to God, to think out all the problems of our world; that the twentieth century—he traces out the figures in the air with his fore-finger—is the summation of all the centuries; that the social magicians are a nuisance, or worse. . . .

Ah, Clément, some of them say:—Perhaps one day what has never been done, will be done. . . . They say:—All Frontiers will be abolished, and the world organised as a whole. . . . They say:—The peoples will cease to devour one another . . . !"

A little apart—in the gulf—a man dressed in the same fashion grumbles in the same voice:

"Ah, Clément, some of them say:—Perhaps one day what has never been done, will be done. . . . They say:—Men will be able to perceive light through solid walls; they will speak to one another from one country to another; cities will be lighted up, at night, by the movement of one finger. They say that men will one day travel on sea and on land by boats without sails and chariots without horses. . . . They say, even, that one day the very clouds shall be ploughed by vessels . . . !"

Both of them roar with laughter. Their two faces, softened and spreading out flat like a paste that a cook stirs and stirs, melt into one another. They laugh with the whole breadth and strength of the present; one with his twentieth century, the other with his thirteenth; each of them in the central point of time.

They interpenetrate one another—a pell-mell phantasmagoria of similitude. They are the same and I knock against their over-near enormity.

I do not give way to them. Stiffened, I object. Then they change before my eyes. They become evil. The disfiguring hideousness of anger stamps the same family resemblance upon each. They menace,—and they are several, many, all the world!

“To put nature, society in order! To follow thought to its extreme limit, and revolt against authority and tradition! Very well then. . . . Hell, the police!”

He speaks to me, standing beside me, doubled up like a gargoyle.

“I have understood nothing of what you have just been saying. I could swear by my hope of salvation that I understood nothing, and I am an ordinary man like all the rest, thanks be to God. It is a frightful thing to say, but you belong to another epoch. People are beginning to repeat: ‘Clément Nourrit *seems* to live among us: in reality, he is elsewhere. . . .’ Take care!”

The strokes of the bell fall from on high like meteors, like the other side of the noise of thunder, and the brazen seed is sewn—backward and forth—through all things; through our bones that are shaken like wind instruments, through the walls that are shaken in the thick, thick shadows. It is the cross itself speaking, the cross that is written in black among the cloud-oriflammes above the mountains of stone. . . . Temporal truth; the fearful truth of metal, and

bones, and writing. Head and ears are as if stoned by the sudden, rending voice of the church, by the syllabled strokes of the bell. And the cranium wherein trembles soft thought is itself a bell.

My head vibrates, while my feet cross the sinister vestibule of the little house on the Square, and conduct to the door a diminutive, shaking shadow that is horribly swathed in a pachydermatous overcoat.

## IX

### THE CAUSE

No one is aware of this shattering of my life. No one surprises me when I emerge above the present. All that concerns myself alone; and I am weary.

This evening, in the solitude of my room, a cage of wood and iron that is shaken by the mistral, I buried my head between my arms. My eyes were fixed on an ancient pack of cards which I had unearthed from the depths of an old shop in Alican. I spread them out, and the worn and garish figures seemed to grow bigger. Among the series of common cards lying slantwise and partly covering one another, the four Kings stand out arrestingly. They haunt me—gigantic, rectangular—coloured public façades rising above the swarming cities, with their deep-sunk names: David, Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne. Their archaic colourings—black as magic, red as wine, their twi-coloured cloaks—take me back to that epoch from which I have just emerged. But it is more than that. They disturb something vaster, round which I revolve; something upstanding,—a personage: He. . . . He has moved, as once before, along the nave of the museum, the patesi of Zirpurla, whose immobility has been shattered by the invisible attrition of the worn stone.

At certain moments I oscillate toward these Kings, I enter into one of them, into his breath and the surge of his blood, and I am sure that I, even I, have a sparkling crown which encircles my head like the sun.

I make an effort to remain weighty in my throne-

room. I, Egbert, Sovereign Baron of Elcho, I wish to remain here, walking alone on these stone flags—I *wish* it!

I want to look down from the pointed window—without leaning over so as to escape all pressure on my belly—right down, beyond the statuesque, decorated sentries, upon some of my human flies, or, perhaps a great angle of granite, or a pyramidal flying buttress of my granite cuirass.

Who can go from end to end . . . ?

I!

I am spread wide above the crowd. I am of those who have taken unto themselves power, and space like a flowing mantle . . . and who fulfill all their dominant Man's destiny.

I, a King! O marvel of marvels! The raising of a finger, a frown, a word dropped casually from my lips—and all changes. I mow down ranks of men—the low cards—by my mere appearance before them. Resist me, would they? Ha! Ha! would you like to see me angry? My war-cry is painted on the Asiatic rock: "I am the King of Kings, who takes the peoples by the throat!"

Do I know, I who hold in the cavern of my brain so many secrets, how far I have spread my unfolded wings over the populations? I reconstruct myself piece by piece. The King! Parts of me and parts of other Kings. I find this wish in my mind: Would that all the men of my empire had but one head, so that I might abase it at one blow, that all the women had but one body whereon I might debauch my own. What hosts of children and slaves passed beneath my litter, above all when I was swollen with disease,—what young fresh bodies relieved me of my pain! Nero, my

ancestor, tell me, when the heavy air of delights entered through the drawn curtains into the pestilence of thy Emperor's chamber, did there not also enter a gust of pure air, from the blue sky?

At the banquet which I have arranged to celebrate the birth of my heir, all the guests, at the last, were drunk. A coarse fellow, round and sleek, said:

"I could drink up the sea."

"I could burn up the whole earth," thundered the captain.

And I see again a squinting young man, green and sickly, stooping (one saw the weakness of his soul), who mouthed out:

"I, I would slay."

Thus they showed their natures and vomited their dreams.

There have been men who have attained the drunken desires hidden in their breasts. But they have not yet seized the whole sea, nor burnt the whole earth, nor slaughtered all mankind. The time is not yet ripe.

There have been Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian palaces where the eye has lost itself in vast distances. Around the fabulous treasures, barred from the people by the massed bulwarks of Artaxerxes the strong-handed, of Darius Coloman, of Ptolemy Philadelphus, is a bewildering number of things, too many rulers, too many gardens with leaves that are emerald, or that have each its own ear-ring. Luscious plants, jade clusters, ingots of roses, ruby viscera, solid water that breaks into points of light in the basins. Roofs of silver and roofs of gold, trees of gold with moving golden birds, in the palace of Cairo. Under the palaces are such vast grottoes of riches that if one tried to explore them all one would die of hunger.

On that day when, at the height of a feast, their foreheads were smashed in with hammers, their teeth drawn, and their eyes—first filled with the vision of their slaughtered children—gouged out; when their joints were disarticulated, with sharp blades—then my eyes wept for joy, my cheerful arms expanded my throne, and sweet, gentle sleep wrapped me round.

I have imitated the almost miraculous tortures of the ancients. Fat, marrowy, warm-coloured cement. . . . On the rising walls, an alphabet of vertebrae. And when I had to throw them in immense crowds into a volcano!

I have changed, in one day, the colour of a hillside, as Charlemagne changed that of the Aller by the axe. "Rivers red with blood,"—is, thanks to the Kings who say: "We!" a rigmarole fit only to amaze little children.

I have laughed the same laugh as William the Bastard, who scoffed at his enemies and sent them grotesque prisoners whose eyes had been gouged out, and their noses, ears and hands cut off. And nausea seizes me at the memory of one of them who, stumbling unwittingly, pressed his hot, hideous-oozing corpse right against me. Always now, when I awaken suddenly in the night, he seems beside me; Angus the golden-haired, at the moment when he threw his javelin over the enemy host, signifying that of the conquered army there would remain nothing, nothing; that it would be given wholly, men and gear, to Odin, the gallows-master, and thrown into Valhalla, the palace of the slain—after inscriptions had been incised on the moribund, yet still sentient, corpses that would be both hanged and stabbed.

After the siege of Samarkand there were slaughtered with the greatest pomp, first, the hundred and forty

thousand defenders—gathered together in procession—and then a healthy flock of four hundred thousand peaceable citizens. What a task! And at the end, the soft throats must have seemed to the executioners as hard as lead. And when Delhi, the sunlit city, was destroyed by the mounted men as completely as by the darkness of night—when the bodies of a hundred thousand captives quenched the steel that has always been tempered in blood—I felt anew that anger of joy that overcame me before the three hills, each of thirty thousand human heads, constructed from the people of Bagdad. Ah, *then* was the promise almost fulfilled: “I shall burn the earth!” It *will* be by the kings of the future, more evil and more powerful.

Thus, there have been amongst men, some few who have been themselves; outside them, everything has shrunk and vanished into dust; *they* realised in material form the fantastic drama of the inner eye.

All alone, I repeat for my own delight: Kadesiyeh. The greatest of all names. There were two radiating empires in the world—the Persian and the Greek. The poor Arab shepherds said: “What if we seized them!” They collected provisions, and set out along the naked sands. They overthrew empires as they passed and extended over the earth; Kadesiyeh, the most terrible of place names, the battle of battles, which lasted four days and eclipsed all the longest battles of the past. Was not the great battle of Quodshou as rich in the number of the dead? No. And Marathon? No. And Granicus? No. And the Catalan plain, where was swept away half of the whole inhabited world—and Soissons, where was cast to the wind the last remnant of western Roman sway? Syagrius? No, nor none of these.

It is true that Charles Martel, that heavy, stupid



knight of the north, that fine Frankish brute, stemmed at Poitiers the tide of Arab civilisation. Were the Franks, then, greater? Which was the greater? . . . I want to put a mark against the greatest.

The two shocks of humanity against humanity that, by the double skill of chieftains, took place in the high plains of Serbia, were so terrific that I gaped, stupefied. . . . When King Lazarus was vanquished at Kossovo, and beheaded in Murad's tent, a great part of the Slav power disappeared—and the eastern empire was utterly denuded of all bulwark. And it was at the same place—the field of blackbirds—that the Turks, during two days in Holy Week crushed what remained of the Serbs and the Pindon Albanians, and the Hungarians of the Danube.

The other battles of mankind have not equalled these; not even Hastings, not even Ourica, not even Bannockburn, each of which placed a kingdom in the hands of some personage. The long series of battles, one aspect bright, the other dark, has never ceased to trouble the frontiers—even the Roman threshold, even the Great Wall of China. The limits of Lotharingia, of Flanders, advance and retreat like lines of dancers, like the tidal sea, and yonder, in a vaster, more grandiose religious rhythm the tossing backwards and forth of the capital of ancient Armenia, the wreck of events and of centuries; Nakhitchewan, the venerable daughter of Noe and mother of cities: then Armavir, whose vales whispered oracles. Then, between the two, at the foot of Ararat, Artaxarta, whose fortifications were built according to the anti-Roman plans of Hannibal. Then the wandering capital went as far as Armenian Tigranocerta, to dominate the battlefields of Mesopotamia. Afterwards, Nisib. After Nisib, Edessa. And then came the period when the

Haikans, driven back to the north, were forced to rebuild their capital where it had been at the beginning. There is no wine, howsoever heady and stimulating, which is the equal of proper names!

I pass over my face my hand that wrapped in linen, exhales the aromatic odour of balm—and also, the strong odour of game. If I am called Egbert, it is because my great-uncle, Remi Martel, was enamoured of that Saxon king, the first of the seven English kingdoms before Ethelwulf, and persuaded my mother to baptize me thus. Otherwise I should have been named Ramon, like almost all the Cornudets (and the counts of Toulouse).

I am dazzled by the royal names. Their form passes into my mouth and into my body. I stir the charnel-house where their names are piled. Harold and Canute the Great and Magnus of Norway, first kings of Denmark. Samo and Croc, first dukes of Bohemia, and the Premysls, descendants of the spouse of Libussa. Halfdan the Black, first sceptre-bearer of Norway, Olaüs, of the race of Lodbrog Sugurson, ancestor of the kings of Sweden. The three viking brothers, the three rowers, Rurik, Sineus and Truvor, whose line reigned without break, afterwards, at Novgorod the great and at Kiev, over a region so vast that Byzantium faded away into it. Those of Hungary; the dukes Arpad Soltan, Toxus, Geysa, and the King, Saint Stephen. The legendary Poles who preceded the Piast dynasty; Leck, Vanda, Cracus. And if Kenneth II was first king, both of the motley Picts and of the Scots, there had been before him sixty-six kings of Scotland, beginning with Fergus.

Those whose names resound and soar in the immensity of the past, like celestial signs above those that are

lost and drowned, have cut and pruned and hacked the living countries of earth—each one of their upheavals carrying away with it vast, living masses. The people, whence all comes, gives them its own strength, and, too, their Names that it tears from itself; the “Great”, the “Fair”, the “Hammer”, and, above all, from its very essence the “Good”, and the “Bad”.

The masses are scrawled over with strong, inter-resembling images henceforth as familiar as the huge writing of the mountains: Boceslas the Crooked-Mouth, Albert the Bear, Suenon of the Forked Beard, Leck the White, Leck the Black, Sigurd Black-tooth, Harald War-Fang, Eric Blink-eye, Amadeus of Savoy the Green Count, Amadeus of Savoy the Red Count, Francis Dandolo the Dog, William Tow-head, Fulk the Simpleton, Albert the Achilles and Ulysses, Wenceslas the Drunkard, Emperor of Germany.

I have stumbled in my dreams. Which were the greatest: I must know, I, Ramon XII, the mighty king, the living successor of all kings. I grope over their greatnesses. My whole passion is to know which was the greatest amongst these rare beings who, alone amidst the fading generations, are eternally visible.

Despite Darius son of Hystaspes, despite the Macedonian, despite Rome the endless, and Ermaneric of the stainless hundred years and Theodoric who, alone of the great leaders, in the height of his triumph, sheathed his sword, and Kaled, sword of Allah; despite Charlemagne, and the Vikings, whose ships drank up the rivers from their estuaries and despite the Porphyrogenetes of Byzantium—it is the race of Turan that reigned most greatly.

I have seen the rocks of Euyuk where the Prince of these Turanian Khatis—whose back Rameses Miamoun Ousour-Mari (also called Sesostris) broke—I

have seen the living rock whence he brought forth the two-headed eagle. Euyuk whence the Austrian crusaders took that badge, Euyuk near Ancyre where the Turk was vanquished by the Mongol, Turanian by Turanian.

The greatest realms were those that stretched around the kings with the large heads and veiled eyes and faces like hammered shields, of whom Mahomet prophesied. But the terrible talisman of supremacy keeps passing from hand to different hand. There are the Hing-Mu, set in motion by a convulsion of nature, that reduced the possibilities of life on the Asian plateaux, who began the first general migration of the Barbarians, wave following close upon wave. Bleda; Attila, in whose footsteps the grass ceased to grow, who in the midst of continents created for himself an empty continent whose frontiers were defined by long armies of crucified deserters. The vast imperial glory of the sons of the she-wolf stretched to the limits of Asia, then came the Ouigour in their place, and after them the Black Khitans, the Kara Khitans and the Grass Lands. All, all, even the legend of their existence, even the dream, was swept away by that blue banner of Timoudjine the Supreme Khan, Gengiskhan at the head of his Mongols and their countless horses whose blood they drank at times to keep themselves alive. These hordes—a line of blood—who swam to seize their enemy's boats, their coming announced three days ahead by clouds of dust and by pestilence, issued out from the Grass Lands by the gate of Dsungaro, and from Asia by the gaps in the Urals. They destroyed everything in their path, from China to Hungary. At inordinate speed, they swallowed up the vast spaces of this new empire which it would take a rider at least a year to traverse at full gallop. They

drove whole towns before them as if they were the shepherds of another world.

And yet Timoudjine himself whose succession could only be secured by the triple ferocity of his three sons, Ogotai, Djaggatai, Tontchi,—tempest, terror and carnage,—who became the three controllers of the destinies of the world-empire—united by their greatness as the Huns by hideousness and men's horror of them,—even he had to be overcome by a greater.

Give me your hand. Wretched man, I will deign to guide you. Plunge with me into this alley of old Samarkand. This way—here! Go through this porch whose only barrier is the darkness; go through this door. Stoop down, it is low. In the vault the ghastly light filters only through a vent-hole and illumines no more than a pale visage. In the arched crypt vague spaces of day and darkness alternate, woven by the play of the arcs and nerves of light. Flat slabs black as coal. There, at your feet a flattened shape like a tombstone with its four corners—like to the black square graved upon closed eyelids when you have gazed too long at a square of light. It is in truth a sepulchre lit by a smoky lamp on an iron pedestal which sheds a pale glimmer, thin as a cord. Upon it lies the unclean encrustation of centuries. You see this little larval heap which conceals and yet discloses a human body? Ah, well! Measure a man according to the size of that which he has held between his two hands and he who lies there crumbled into dust was the greatest, yet the worst of all men on earth, the man who should be placed in isolation above the list of all other kings. He is the timid, lame, one-armed child of a little Bactrian chieftain, he is Timon-Leng. To his conquering band has fallen the fifth part of all the

lands of the globe, all the dry surfaces of the earth, reckoning even the unexplored and even the unknown. He would have seized the whole world. He did seize it, but he is dead—as miserably as any other man.

When Timoudjine the arch-monarch, God of the Earth, departed from life, forty virgins were slain for his harem in the world beyond, before the bed on which his corpse reposed.

And to serve as his cortège in that world, they sacrificed every man who passed the funeral procession, so that he was followed by twenty thousand newly slain soldiers—and yet, he was utterly alone.

Alone he descended into that mysterious spot which a forest sprang up to hide from view in the space of a day. Alone he lies hidden there, like Attila beneath the river's wave, like Cheops black, bituminous, terrible, in the trap of the Pyramid which the great Caliph Al-Mamoun, son of the coarse Haroun al Raschid violated fifty centuries after Cheops!

The rest of us, ordinary mortals whom thrones dominate, we are naught but the accomplished nightmare of a man; but our will, our passion, germinates in the human fields, we are reproduced, we use the unknown human creature as our instrument; so that we are there where we are not! And yet, what cause for fears! . . . Power exhausts itself. Victory grows old like a living creature, and soon or late becomes defeat; always, inevitably glory burns itself out. It is as with male desire; mortal tremblings, desire followed by satiety—this makes up the sum of life.

They have all died as miserably as other men. In the end there is a resemblance between them and other men. At the beginning too; sometimes 'tis but a chance that serves to consecrate terrestrial divinities. Any

soldier may become a king, any priest, the Pope; and often the all-highest power has been promoted from the lowliest earth. What was he, Romain Diogenes, but a man condemned to death when Eudoxia saw and fell in love with him and made of him an Emperor—as Queen Catherine saw and married the obscure Welshman Owen Tudor. In that richest palace in the world at Ecbatana it was said to a certain man, “You are like Bardiya!” That was enough; resolutely he stretched forth his hand, he seized power as though he were truly the vanished son of Cyrus and became master of all Persia. And the slaves purchased in Turkestan to form the guard of the Caliphs of Bagdad soon broke the power of those Caliphs because they were near them, and disposed of the throne. . . . Power is as a thing ready-made, which a man seizes like any other thing—and drops again. But it is at the end that the common human likeness is fully unfolded. There comes a moment, like God in its approach, wherein the most awe-inspiring monarch has no longer even the little strength to utter a command, and at that instant the King’s tragedy is so mighty that to himself alone can it belong!

Death ends all. The death of others, that’s well and good. When Caracalla slaughtered his brother Géta in their mother’s arms, with that one blow he doubled his empire. . . . But my death, my own death! To be interred, to become part of the insentient earth. That is what my kingly mind cannot conceive as possible.

Sometimes I can for a moment forget the thought that I also must die; with what a frightful shock does the idea of this inevitable return to earth come back to me! I, King of Kings—since I command and since I

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am in the heart of life, placed there by some force which is above my will.

I fix my eyes upon the boundless surface, soiled by the tracks of ants, above which I seem to rise to the height of my castle's tower. That is my real stature, I am standing erect on my own domain which reaches from land to sea—although it also happens that I can see my long, pointed feet protruding from under my surcoat of fine black cloth, as if I were just any ordinary man, as if,—ha-ha!—I were one of my own subjects!

I recover myself with a hiccough. I am Egbert the Grandiose. I banish the idea of death and I promenade the hall, which is decorated from roof to floor with the dog's head blazoned in gold on azure. The white thing which keeps coming before my eyes is my hand, bound up in linen because I have burnt it.

That little Clairine—zounds! What a lovely belly! How her dainty little form trembled all over in that black marble hall when she realised that she must immediately be paired with me.

When my sex troubles me I descend, as if invisibly drawn, to the bottom of the great staircase, dark and polished as the sides of a well, where I must hold on by the great granite knobs. The room where they put them for me curves down into the middle like a funnel, like the hole of an ant-lion (or like, they say, the great engulfing spiral in hell), so that you are pushed into the middle and, if there are two of you, pushed against one another. Many of them, as soon as they understand, lower their heads,—and sometimes with tears, they don't try any longer to hide their trembling forms but lie down covering their eyes with hands or arms.

There is always a new one waiting for me. Now that I have done with Clairine I am gloating over the



thought of another, of whom for the moment I take no notice, though she makes me tremble. And when I am ready I shall go and pluck and wound this little bird, to my heart's content.

But at the moment my body is tired and quivering. The child had been waiting wearily for a long time. When I appeared she fell on her knees and clasped her hands, no doubt as a sign of her adoration. I showed her my royal body. . . . Zounds! what a sweet belly she has and her breasts are as firm as her cheeks. She's fit not only for my body but also for my secret thoughts during the few minutes in which my love flows away. She was so docile, so clinging that I had to put her outside (or perhaps she wanted to make a request on behalf of someone else that I had no intention of hearing).

I came upstairs very slowly, with cautious step, with an empty sensation inside me, and feeling as if blows from a mallet were raining on my head. Now what stabs me to the heart is, the mad longing to swallow up in fancy the entire country.

At my feet, as it were in some far-off crucible of a diabolic magic, I behold the shrouded verdure of the fields, my barony, my kingdom, all belonging to Me who have vassals, and am myself the vassal of none; a portion of this terrestrial rind which we have shared out with a few others.

I see the network of my roads traversed by my soldiers—insects glittering with the sharp flash of weapons. My new troop made up of thick-set Flamands, rusty-faced and weather-beaten, with apparently three full-blown noses apiece, and tall devils of Spaniards tanned black in the sun, thin as a scrawled line. When this company was brought before me, before me who has the right to think aloud, I said: "Ha—Ha!

how hideous they are!" but from these hideous men has been made my beautiful army, for an army is not made up of men, it is a *thing*.

The roads by which my coffers are re-filled, by which my might returns,—whose limits are defined by the dog's head—my thought goes out as far to all these boundaries. The roads by which I dominate men. The white structure of the church rises down there like foam. Creatures strive there like mad things. Seen so many together they are like waves of the sea. In the fields are males or females, some standing, but mostly crouching or on all fours. How can they manage to remain so long in the sun? They must be animals, ennobled solely by my name written on their collars.

What would they say if suddenly I were to follow that road and appear before them—I, Egbert, sovereign lord of Elcho! They would fall on their knees. They would tremble as a leaf. And 'twould be the same if I went down and appeared like a thunderbolt in the guard-room where all these ruffians are crowded together! I have only to appear—I am a miracle. I transform all whom I meet into creatures with bent or bending knees, I fill them with terror right to their open mouths when I present myself before them, their sire-baron in flesh and blood. Often do I take advantage of my greatness to strike men's hearts with awe.

I have had my great name inscribed upon the stained glass window which heaps up its cold wall of fire in the new nave. And I have had it inscribed with a red-hot dagger upon the skin of the infamous scribe who finally died from my tortures:—he was not able to prove to the assembly of bishops at Fréjus that I am descended from the Romans. So much was I within my rights

that although the rascal was a clerk in holy orders neither the bishop nor the legate remonstrated with me in any way.

I return indoors to the gloomy emptiness of my halls.

I pace the hall painted all over with the golden dog's head on a field of azure. I lower my eyes. I see my shoes with their long, supple grey toes peeping out from under the fur edging of my black robe, tapping on the stone slabs. And on the ground I see too my son, dragging himself along.

I myself am of noble stature, but this child is feeble and undersized, and I often think about his puniness when I am alone, deep within myself, when there is none to behold me. My son, my heir, is sluggish, soft, dull-witted; his body must be lead and his soul sick and venomous. The child is livid, with huge eyes, worn-out bones, flabby arms, a face all creased and crumpled like an ear, with a skull which bulges like a pouch—when I smile at him he is afraid. But I know what he loves;—I open a coffer and I put him away among the gold where he crawls and wallows—a louse, a louse!

I raise the lid of the other coffer. I bend down and put my head inside. I lean my forehead on the golden pieces, my legs stretched out behind me with the long stiff point of my shoe folded under on the flag-stones, whilst my eyes are, as it were, all bespattered with gold. This glimmer of gold is so beautiful, because gold is all things in one.

Then I snuff up a strange smell, the smell of a beast, the smell of vengeance. I will go and see what *he* is doing. I lift up the hangings covered with the dog's head. I restrain my laughter whilst I hazard a glance into that little, ill-lit room. In a very small cage there crouches a big monkey; the six iron railings press close

upon his sides. It is no monkey, it is handsome Gauthier—scion of the Houses of Courthenay and Lascaris! The four years that he has been shut up in this narrow cage have given him an evil smell and a kind of mat of hair has sprouted up all over him. He plays with a round thing, rolling it between his hands, close up to his eyes. It's a skull—the skull of the lovely Mélisinde who was my wife and his mistress. One day I came upon them, holding hands and smiling at each other. I made use of my marvellous power of dissimulation and pretended to have seen nothing. He, that very night, was placed in the cage which ever since has formed part of my baggage; and she, that very night, her blood splashed into the washing bowl, and her head still warm, was put between her lover's hands, in his cage, that he might gaze upon it to the end—and after. That head, once so fair, has become all black and filthy from its handling by this monstrosity with the stinking fleece. The skin has fallen away from this thing that is as a detached wound, and in its turn, the rounded bone has been dirtied and blackened.

Strange to think that I am the master of masters and that all I do is good; to say: Whatever comes forth from me is royal, is kingly. This chair is a throne! When my hand, wrapped up now on account of my illness, moves in front of me, I marvel at this lordly hand that has none but God for its suzerain—and always I am more than beautiful.

I bend over the dizzy height and my eye is caught by the enormous block of battlement which forms part of my baronial armour and, as it were, of my breadth of shoulder, for I am as the head—infected with dizziness—of this castle whose carcass, heavy enough to

crush Hell itself, falls in a huge mass below me, down, down to my colossus feet. This wall, plunging downward for ever, and, on the horizon, the Church white as morning in its scaffolding as they work upon it. . . . I, I alone have made it all.

I spoke kingly-wise. I said: "Let there be built for us a great castle and a beautiful church." The mass flung themselves upon the task and raised the castle and the church from the ground to the skies. Each man by himself is nothing, even should he work himself to the bone, and what each single one brings can scarce be seen; yet there comes a day when my desire will be accomplished.

They make *me* with the work of their strong arms. My castle is the magnificent and joyous creation that survives the makers who have worked in pain and—even worse—without joy. Their joy, which *they* have never known, is in *me*, heaped up out of sight. They are everything—and nothing. Multitudes, their skins, their very blood—I know not what. . . . The top-most height of the scaffolding proclaims Egbert, baron regnant of Elcho.

Sometimes when there is a storm, and mighty thunder and lightning, and the wind hurls itself upon us, I have a great desire to tell them everything and say: "Borne upon your naked shoulders, above you all, is my great, isolated crown."

And then I bend over, like a gibbet, nearly breaking my back in the endeavour to see the base of the tower whose supports almost dwindle away and become hollow in my magnificent presence, and I eulogise my own wisdom: that is where (I find the exact spot again with my pointing finger) I had the six workman walled up, the six rascals who knew about the workings of the

underground passages. It was essential to prevent such a secret of power, such a means of dominating the great nobles, from being known to anyone save the ruler himself. It was said: "They might be exiled." I remained obdurate: "No—just kill them." Faced with this exhibition of ill-will, in which I scented treason, my eyes began to start out of my head with rage—and then—absolute silence from everyone. Inwardly still raging, I smiled within myself—for this abrupt silence of one's servitors is truly a thing to smile at! What I do—I do cleverly. I am a very politic and prudent person; for instance, that ruffian who had snatched Torise, I had the bright idea—when I decided to have her for myself (and as no one else had the wit to think of it)—of putting him along with the six who had to disappear. It's as well to avoid enemies.

I have committed sins enough and I should be damned, if it were not for the aid of religion. At a pinch I shall do like Foulques. But there are special dispensations for us great ones. Charlemagne confessed to St. Gilles all his sins save one. And God sent an angel to place a little note on the altar to tell St. Gilles that he must give him absolution all the same because he was Charlemagne.

All my people will pray for my soul. I love them so much! Ermelin de Rulamort delights in torturing his subjects, but mine, why, their suffering is my own. They know it is so, since I tell them. My good souls in Elcho would be mighty unhappy if they knew how our enemies bestir themselves to make themselves masters of my possessions.

Rulamort hankers after Elcho because Ermelin III is the nephew of my ancestor Ramon IV. I trace my descent in the direct line from Ramon IV through my

mother. Ermelin dares to say that the claim of a nephew in the male line, supersedes that of a grandson in the female, and he dares to aspire to add the barony of Elcho to his own.

And Rulamort's disloyal attack on my rights is all the blacker and more dangerous because it would be to the advantage of both our peoples to be united under one lord, instead of separated up, as now. But for *my* cause there is at stake the honour of my house and my royal title, and those are supreme over everything. If I must go to war and hurl the Dog against Rulamort's Unicorn, well, we will wage war magnificently!

Ha! these robbers talk of the Salic Law. But this Salic Law has no importance when examined more closely, and explained, as Massard explained it for me—he's a vile cringing creature, but subtler than I—and he served me well, too, when I needed to make a royal monopoly of the sale of alcohol—(I need his help but I don't let him see that). And the chroniclers are useful too, and come out of their cells to reconcile my claims. Besides, Otho, the Great, the first emperor of Germany, disposed of this question of nephew and grandson once and for all by the judgment of God; the grandson's champion was the victor, and the question is settled.

My people are with me—and since he wants war, I will engage, despite my great compassionateness.

Hom, Rome, Mahom. . . . My royal mouth feels all clammy. I know not what I am saying. . . . I am drunk with love and glory. Yes! The Roman emperor Maximinus Daia abandoned himself to drunkenness—and at the same time he decided that his orders should never be carried out until the day after they

had been given. What wisdom!—what a model of virtue was this Roman ancestor!

What did I say? This Roman ancestor. . . . Yes. It is not my wish that men should combine in my realm. In vain I have issued my orders, they do it in my despite. Let them beware. Listen! No more combinations—never—you hear me, you! The Emperor Trajan, my ancestor, would never allow the artisans of Nicodemia to form an association for putting out fires. He used to say that he would rather see a quarter, nay, a whole town burned down, than sensible men uniting themselves together in word and thought. My ancestor Trajan had good reasons for such maxims!

It is not my will that my subjects should combine together. It is not my will! I am almost choking with my intense refusal of it. I feel myself turn ghastly livid, and I know I spread horror and terror all about me.

The bony royal personage, with arms like bars of cast iron, was walking along, completely enveloped from his long legs to his hat in black, with a roll of linen at the wrists and at his neck the white strands of a fur collar. His face was thin, blanched and pointed and his nose as long as a foot. *I* was the two eyes fixed riveted upon him, the eyes of Master Massard. I—Massard.

I bowed very low to the Seigneur, so low that my hat was pressed against the nape of my neck, brushing against my hair. He gazed at me out of the corner of his anxious eye. He needs me. Egbert, the reigning Baron of Elcho and Alfet, the decaying, weak-headed sire has need of *me*, Massard, and I measured him with my eye.



Presently, he is surrounded by the Council. He runs and pushes himself into the middle, talks to himself and addresses, now one person now another, in sentences which he does not complete. One can see, bobbing up from behind the sculptured wall by the niche, his hat, his sharp nose, his lip which hangs like a cowl over his stained teeth, his pasty face which is as bloodless as if it had been cut off, and then replaced. The only red one can see is his vulture-like neck, scratched and protruding from the bit of white fur which trims the collar of his black cloak.

The brilliantly dressed personages who surround him are eager to please him.

Says one of them:

"What is to be done to Dorilon, Sire?"

"Let him be hanged," says the Baron.

He turned his wrinkled face towards us. It looked as if it were cut into pieces. The portion of his face around his mouth seemed to be a network of armour-plating. He moved his bandaged hand with its festering, dripping wound, the hand which could never write the letters of his name without spreading over the margin or damaging the paper.

He rose, sniffed and opened his mouth:

"Messires," he said, "the insolence of Rulamort. . . ."

"Monseigneur," interposed the bailiff, bowing low, "this Dorilon, even though filled with water to bursting point and with both his hands crushed, maintains, as he swore in his confession, that the beast had already been killed."

"It is not true!" exclaimed Egbert, stamping his foot. "My right of the chase is the most precious of my rights. He must be hanged to serve as an example and for the edification of others. His son is to be

present at the execution. And I forbid anyone to talk to me again about this rascal," he added with flashing eyes.

As he was striding up and down the room, his deformed back was for a few moments lost to sight among the others. I could no longer distinguish among the people present the man who, by some weird chance, was so much more powerful than anyone else, and could do as he wished. . . . It was something of a shock to me, as he suddenly turned his face round,—his pale face with the nail-like teeth, to note that he belonged to the same species as other men.

Outside, Doon le Réchin, the vassal baron of Rulamort, who had been captured on the night before, was brought to the threshold of the door. Stubby, crook-kneed, his shoulders and arms twisted and broken, his eyes burning and keen like those of a lynx, his thick hair fell to his eyebrows. He spoke scoldingly, in a gruff voice, gnashing his teeth between the sentences and balancing himself on his powerful twisted legs.

"There you are," cried Egbert, above the people who seemed petrified. "How many times have you not devastated my lands, hanged and tortured my serfs and my cattle! Well, then, I shall deal fairly with you; I shall pardon you, Baron, because you are of gentle birth. We have need of noble enemies."

Le Réchin stretched his neck and turned his head to one side like a dog, listening and snorting. The courtiers remained dumb. The master suspected a certain disapproval in this silence and he flared up into an incontinent rage that beggared description. His distorted face, scratched and pitted, grew still paler, then turned purple, alternately blanching and darkening.

All his wrinkles creased into deep shadows. He trembled and turned on his heel, muttering the words: "Scoundrels, cowards, dogs!"

Méliodon, then hastily intervened, in order to avert a calamity, saying:

"What clemency, what magnanimity! How noble a master! Why, even Cæsar Augustus in his palace at Rome did not act more graciously towards Cinna. Surely, our Baron is the true successor of this Augustus!"

Baron Egbert, calmed by the utterances of the base minstrel, who had been so quick to take the words of flattery from our mouths, said:

"We must declare war. Our shield, emblazoned with the dog's head, the most beautiful and the most ancient of all, has received an affront from Rulamort in his blind hatred. I will wage war, even though I alone may survive, even though I myself may have to devastate all the crops of my poor people of Elcho in order to starve the enemy. We shall say that one of our subjects has disappeared. We shall find a reason."

Saying this, he turned towards me, pointing to me with that sickly thing at the end of his arm.

"Monseigneur," said I, "God created the world, but it is left for princes to create reasons of state."

He then waved his swollen hand, which was like a tongue, at Méliodon. He, starting up, re-echoed:

"Monseigneur," he cried, "the war of justice."

"By God," exclaimed the Baron, "I pity the sufferings my people will have to endure, but my right is above everything. The war for my right, the just war, eh?"

One could hear him chuckling in his throat. He gazed closely at the dog's head painted on the wall.

His triumphant laughter fell like a cascade. This unhappy man who even in his paroxysm of laughter was still muttering the word: "War." He brandished a crucifix threateningly.

But at last he wearied of speaking. . . . The sentences became entangled like threads in his brain and his mouth. His tongue, his eyes protruded somewhat from his head. "Take away," he said, in a distressed tone, "this dog which gazes at me with its child-like eyes."

Then his spine bent. He wanted to go down into the vault of debauchery. They pretended not to notice it, and he turned, tottering, toward the lower door. A dull, subdued noise, as of something falling, was heard; his hand let drop the crucifix it had clutched tightly, taking up in its stead a piece of hard wood, which he carried with him to help him destroy yet another virginity.

His bent, disappearing form humped on the left side,—the slash in his arm,—the bandage of his crushed and wounded hand, . . . and all else around me became white, vaporous.

A storm was raging; thunder! Below, along the network of roads, one could see in the gushing stream a poor peasant, swept off his feet, his coat inflated by the water. From the clouds lit up by the flashes of lightning to the chequered course of the two-legged being floundering along in the squall the gigantic pivot of catastrophe showed forth.

If only one of the terrible flashes which unite heaven and earth would show, how that misfortune that falls so heavily upon all, is due to the caprice and the covetousness of the few! The very movement of the clouds shadows forth—wielding its magic wand,—the cause! If, below, nothing is completed, or if every-

thing ends badly, if the roads stream with blood and sorrow, it is the fault of those who are above.

I, Massard, who have come from below, I want to be among those who are above, to trample underfoot the poor,—those great masses of enemies from whom all joy has been uprooted.

## X

### COMMUNION

Amidst a splendid array of waving flags, brilliant in the light, surrounded by an army of lances ranged in thick ranks on the hillside, abounding in turrets, parapets and bell-towers—was cut and split up and tied in a bundle of tapering tongues, the whole top of a fair green hill. This newly-built town with its shining ramparts, its base moulded in one great rock, surrounded by fresh pasture land—this town, white as the summit of the Alps, is the Castle.

High up on one of the great platforms on the side of the fortress, on the ridge of a steep rock, stately in resplendent costumes, the court was being held. The great coloured tapestries affixed to the ramparts were flapping in the breeze, the dais was covered by a blue cloth creased by cords which held it down by the four corners, and plentifully decorated with golden dogs' heads encircled by golden halos.

I, Squire Massard, one of the principal people in Elcho, am important among the wealthy assembly in the heart of the castle itself. For long, like other passers-by, I had only seen the outer walls of huge dimensions.

At the ceremony of the presentation of the heir of Elcho to the people, not far from the place reserved for the Counts, palatines and vidames, was the place assigned to me and my wife—whom I had raised from nothing.

Through the great recesses in the wall, in immeasur-

able vistas, I could see squares of green valleys and multitudes of serfs, huntsmen and foresters. Far away below the level of our feet surged the human gathering, that henceforth I was to view from above. On bunches of shoulders squashed together, shoulders crushed in, shoulders widening down to the elbow, shoulders glued together, were white faces straining with all their might, peering snouts pierced with double-eyed curiosity, tops of heads hairy as poodles or bunches of thatch stuck on skulls. Heavy hands hung from bodies like stumps of wood uprooted from the soil for the duration of the festival. And I could see here and there, still struggling among the poor and worthless, some clerk pale from indulgence in science, or some struggling merchant already too well-dressed, but whose schemes had not yet brought him up to my level. The smile of gladness shone on all, a solemn sound of murmuring rose and fell. All were staring and blinking at the sovereign baron, Egbert, seated on the throne, and his noble son established over the people, reflecting the authority of his father.

Egbert was set up high on the throne, framed by a dark doorway. Pale and blue under his crown, he sat motionless. Ah! I could see from where I was placed—my gaze pierced between the colours and strings of pearls pouring stiffly down each side of the ladies' robes—I could see the cords behind the Seigneur binding him to his mighty seat, a few paces from the door where arms had lately lifted him above the view of the people assembled below.

Ah! Our Seigneur was dead! Egbert had already appeared before his judge while they were lifting him up there. His crown had sunk on his head almost down to his jaw. His sceptre was fastened to his arm; the hand of justice fixed by the surgeon into the

yellow talon of a bird, clutched and clawed at the bones of his breast, on the blue silk embroidered with the golden dog's head.

Although these things seemed to move, the people near him knew that they were lifeless and that the wind whistled through them. They knew that his inanimate hand, like hanging entrails, was swaying slowly on his breast. But to the multitude he was alive. The movement of the two spread banners which proudly encompassed him, the shimmering glimmer from the rays of the sun shining on the gilt of his shoes—these things lent him life.

Vested with light, his eyes appeared to be open, but it was only the moisture of death which glistened in them. Egbert was as empty and hollow as his name. The worms were at him. The only thing alive in him was the stink, and his flabby, unwieldy carcass forced us to grin even more hollowly before the mob, overjoyed with pleasure at the presence of their lord and master.

They have made the seven-year-old child stand by the side of the King's throne, that child who so loves to paddle about in the full coffers of gold. Men and women have taken him, all crumpled and creased, from his golden cot and put him down just as he is, still but half-awake. He is clad in a garment striped in dull blue and gold. He gazes about without any understanding. His eyes are enfolded round with wrinkles,—they look more like two navels. On his skin are dark stains which cannot be washed off, and little bubbles keep coming at the corners of his mouth. They are giving fictitious life to his father's immobility, in order that the hereditary transmission of sovereignty may take place under his ægis, inspired by the terror of his presence. The clergy, with all their oriental pomp of



crosses, mitres and stoles, must declare the male child invested with sovereign power *during the lifetime* of his father. This is the surpassing moment in the life of kings; their royal name triumphs even over death, that makes empty space before and after the life of every man. Their dynasty though cut in two, reunites again and again, to remain for ever a single, stubborn stem.

Were it known that he, the vulture of Elcho, were as he is, frozen in death, nailed to his chair, danger would swoop down upon his house. The claims and rights of that great nephew of Ramon IV, Ermelin of Rulamort (standing solid within his square of four sons), might perhaps serve to return to earth the abortive heir also—and this conjecture is the more to be feared since it would be to the advantage of the two peoples.

The people have shouted their acclamation. Feebleness and incapacity will reign. All is laughter, festivity, stamping, movement. My keen sight very distinctly distinguishes these folk with whom I formerly jostled shoulders. There is Clairine, red-eyed but amazed and glad; there the yielding Torise stands on tiptoe to get a better view and just for that moment Odon's mother forgets she is a mother. Even she, like every other soul on the plain, has but one thought—to bless Egbert and curse Ermelin.

The Fool got himself beaten by some youths athirst for glory, because he cried out that men are fools who let themselves be led by a miserable man.

They push back the throne—an open coffin! The lordly mummy poisons our nostrils with the smell of his corruption as he is moved back within the walls with a hollow-sounding noise; just the apparition of him, dead, has given him power to make the supreme move upon the stone chess-board. The flabby little heir has

drooped and bent and at last sunk down upon the ground; he lies there among the moving feet, flat on his stomach, covered with his salamander's stripes.

I can no longer resist the horror of the thing and I utter a long, dull cry as does a man clinging fast to sleep when they come to rouse him. But I cannot away with the image of that kingly carcass, with its sunken eyes, flourished before the populace. I break down under it. Once before there was a like affrighting scene, to enable the kingly name to triumph over death, over the gap of corruption, and as it were again the reality, as it were flesh and blood, I re-live it all.

One day, from the round crater of the red grotto of Liguria there flowed out, like another pinnacle, the enormous body of the first potentate. He was dead. We who were near could see the ropes deep in the broken royal body they hoisted up, could see how the swollen arms embraced the sceptre with the dog's head, and with it obliterated its crumbling face. When the crowd saw him, dazzled with fantastic terror, they imagined him alive and swore obedience to this other corpse, his descendant! A defiant challenge rang out at the dim birth of great happenings—no man dares now to seek to understand its meaning.

After the solemn ceremony, they proceeded rejoicing toward the hill, ablaze with the scintillating colors of churchmen and men-at-arms—where the villain was to be hanged.

By the generosity of the Castle, the execution was purposely delayed, to enable all this crowd to enjoy it as part of the day's ceremony.

As Dorilon had both his hands crushed and his elbows disjointed by the torture to which he had been subjected, the bishop, of his goodness, exempted him from the duty of digging the grave into which, after he had suffered the supreme punishment, his dead carcass was to be thrown.

Naked, save for a shirt, with the rope round his neck, he had humbly begged forgiveness for having offended his God and his Seigneur by the theft of a pheasant.

Little Sergile, his son, followed him step by step, as he had been ordered to do. He is four years old. The little fellow is proud of seeing so many people concerned with his father. No one dares to speak to the child, nor to go near him; even the old folk hold timidly aloof.

Standing all alone on the ground, the child was seized with terror when Dorilon was drawn up and dangled in midair, his legs waving as though trying to walk or leap in space, and afterwards when the hangman climbed up the body and put his foot on the two tied hands in order to break the neck, by weighing down his shoulders. The five ladies in the very noble audience could be seen eagerly pressing forward, as if striving to touch the victim.

The condemned wretch seemed so small in the midst of the great multitude, to whom his long drawn-out death was given as a spectacle. (Was it necessary that his death should be so grand in order that everybody might have a part in it!) Just now, in the subterranean vault, to which the Fool with the assistance of two old soldiers had carried the corpse, after having stolen it (calling me in a low voice: "Angelino!"); just now, lying rigid as the gibbet itself, he is vast, he is enormous! His head stained by a black frightful grimace,

was propped against the wall. His two legs, drawn up towards the empty space below, pointing straight ahead like the head of a lance, touched the other wall.

This powerful mass of humanity is all too still. The father is but the plaything of the child squatting by his side. But Sergile endeavours to lift up one arm which is, oh, so heavy; its weight one with that of the entire corpse is extraordinary, horrible. Yes, a man is very big, very big, very heavy.

I am no longer capable of speaking or of thinking. I see before me only one thing—this defiled and hollowed head, that has contained everything, this heart that has been staunch. I see increasingly the importance of the single human being. As yet this importance is not understood on earth.

Much later, during the night, an old woman, grey as a mouse, arrived. She wept bitterly, and it seemed almost as the miracle of a fountain in a desert. Seated on the ground, she told stories, pretty and true stories, to the little boy, to comfort him: "Once upon a time, long before Our Lord, there was a rich and handsome baron called Elcho who had landed here from a ship the sails of which were woven in purple and gold. With him were companions and counsellors who, like himself, were handsome, rich, generous and clad in furs and brocades, with long shoes made of fine cloth. It was the friend of the famous Prince Hercule who had just returned from Spain with him. Overjoyed, the inhabitants of the town,—which was the finest and the most ancient of all the towns—caused the highway to be paved with fine silver for the reception of these lords. There was a great feast, at which pheasants with gilded feathers were served. . . ." *Such* stories comforted Sergile, who was like any other child

in the world; and he fell asleep with a smile on his face.

The Fool waylaid me in a corner to say:

"It will be better some day. But the day of simple honesty has not yet come. It is still the day of obedience. The witless multitude obeys. If there were nothing above itself to obey, all the same it would go on obeying—nothing!

"When will it dawn, the morning of this night? When will the cry resound, and prove of power and light, the human cry of victory and salvation, the supreme cry already born in the spirit, but hidden as yet in a dungeon, not yet emerged into life."

What cry is this? We are close to each other; and alone. The old man looked at me with a tenseness that almost became terror; then, the beacon-lights of his eyes staring into mine, he opened wide his wrinkled, thick-lipped mouth, and in a hoarse whisper, he told me the cry of power:

"No!"

I saw him, that wasted old beggar—did I really see him? He unfolded two rustling, fleshy wings and like a vampire took flight into the west.

And at night when he whom they hanged (is that the death-rattle in his throat?—No! becomes just like Him whom they crucified, hope, the one happiness of the unhappy, extends her dominions.

There was no night that night save in caverns. Fire! The fantastic carapace of fire and destruction, whelmed and reddened all things save the castle, the

church and the convent. The cross of the Calvary became blood-red in the darkness.

It was Réchin's *ruse de guerre*. Taking advantage of the festival, in the evening he descended upon the peaceful countryside with firebrands, and Ermelius' four sons hidden in their armour. Men saw the four mail-clad striplings spreading the flames of their torches over fields and barns. They galloped their horses amidst stacks and cottages all too brilliantly lit up, and many a man heard their young laughter and their gambols. They descended upon the people whom the fire drove from their groaning houses, and slew them with three or four blows of the mace.

The archers surrounded them and were about to take them prisoner when the knights of Elcho at last arrived on the scene. Unwilling that the honour of such a capture should go to foot-soldiers, they advanced at a gallop upon the archers, and rode down the rabble, quite in accordance with the illustrious tradition of the kings of France. Thanks to this *mêlée* of nobles and archers Rulamort was able to recover and after an encounter the knights of Elcho gave way (and their hearts, proud as war-chargers, preferred to be vanquished by a noble enemy than victorious with the help of base-born villeins) and the sons of Rulamort roared with laughter, the glow of the flames ruffling them like cocks, tawny and scarlet.

Away! Away! Some other fate, no matter what; since nothing could be worse.

Men throw themselves blindly upon the roads that ever begin anew. They take possession of the roads that are the ways of escape, the roads that are the petrified furrows of untrammelled space, the opening

doors. There is a hunger for the unknown. The rage of despair, which is as the first step of hope, makes men capable of unheard of efforts. Despair will discover a new world. A paradise somewhere in the unknown. There breathes a breath of creation not the love of adventure or the desire for knowledge that inspired Jason or Hanns, Scylax or Eric the Red, Pytheas of ancient Marseilles and Ottar the Viking. No; *this* is the vehement hatred of the now and the here. These are not world-explorers urged on by the sting of a prodigal and insatiable curiosity; these are men who are simply fleeing, these are rebels who say "No!" deep within their own hearts and who obey their own spirit by taking to flight. The achievement of flight—the war of flight. Fly, all ye damned souls of earth.

Here one, there another, falls out and departs. The song comes from farther and farther away, you can no longer tell . . . from which direction. . . .

Odon has come back but Clairine had gone. He set forth once more and they sought each other through the world. It is told that once they caught a distant sight of one another, he on a boat that had left the shore, she standing on the jetty—each at the edge of an abyss that tore at their hearts,—both with their whole souls in their eyes. . . . They were very far apart when they had sight of one another but the space between could not prevent their exchanging a promise to wait for ever. They seek each other throughout all the world, above the world, more patient than life, like two giants—nay, more—like two sad songs.

In this northern town the crowd, beating as one heart in the spirit of festival, draws me with it towards the

church, from the alleys to the precincts. They laugh continually; are they then so happy?

The grand interior of the church mounts on high as if a whole village, tier upon tier, had been turned into one lone, empty mountain. Above is a sky in stone, the night enchained.

It is also a sonorous city; all its grand structure of muted clamour, of muttering silence that the dregs of the populace raise up to the high and vaulted roof of the Cathedral.

And now in the chancel there takes place the unique, miracle-working rite, which more than anything else subdues the populace—behold the eighth sacrament, the consecration of the king.

What joy to behold him! You get a glimpse of him for a moment above a swaying sea of heads. In the midst of banners, railed off by the pikes of his guards, very small by the side of his mother and his servitors, you behold the royal child with his smooth gold hair framing his face as if in a gilded reliquary.

He recites the sacred obligations of a king in his weak little voice which, at moments, seems nothing more than the voice of a child.

The golden-cuirassed archbishop clothes the descendant of the Dukes of France in the subdeacon's dalmatic, and when by this symbolic act he has imbued him with Catholicism and the dignitaries of the church and the feudal lords, as custom ordains, publicly proclaimed their acceptance of their lord, the charters require that the commonalty also should approve. Near me I saw a hairy hand, protruding from a stained and patched sleeve, remind the rogue next to him with a sharp blow, and he in his turn jostled his neighbour fiercely with his elbow,—and the band of miserable boys who had just



roughly shoved their way in, suddenly shouted three times: "We will it!"

The voice of the People having been heard, they proceeded to anoint the person of the unique and sacred child with the nine unctions of the holy ampulla. And all that multitude, to the remotest, darkest corners of the abyss, were seized with a sort of terrible joy when they beheld the sceptre, the crown and the hand of justice grasped by the little human child whose earthly affairs were henceforth directly united with those of God.

All those at the other end of the earthly scale, the bent-backed toilers to whom the world owes bread and all things necessary, are they then so happy?

They suffer! They suffer immeasurably, their despair is plain to view and behold! It is the despair of all other men, everywhere, always.

It is plain to view in the stained glass-window, a column of gold and azure, a tree of space upheld on either side by tall pale trees of curved stone. The window is a blazing monument framed in flowing violet and red, and in vehement gold gilding, in milky moonlight and blinding flashes of lightning. Up, up it leads to the dome with its streaming rays, where sits enthroned the blue-clad Virgin.

The peoples are the artists who have created this chasm of glowing colour, this poignant stab of light. It derives from their agony of suffering, their lowly passions. Not only because there is depicted the sun-illumined image of the Toiler crucified in the midst of his toil, vilified, degraded: the toiler who shall ever fail and fall until the end of days. Hanging there in the leaden grip of the stained glass, whelmed in light, the resemblance, in death, is terrifying. Nailed to right and left, pale and mournful as two guardian angels, the

man with the sickle and the man with the hammer. Not alone for that; but because only from the genius of despair could such a wondrous flood of light flow forth, because only in the full human heart is loveliness perfected.

In the gloom that is cast by mighty things there suddenly shines out the unforgettable splendour of the window depicting the tree of Jesse with its glorious foliage: crimson and purple, mother-of-pearl and honey-tinted. It is as a monument captured and carried off by a conqueror, a thought-monument, a star in the broad day! And the blue Madonna who floats above in a celestial rift of light, shining out in the cloud-vast, dark cathedral,—she, too, was created by suffering inexpressible, by passionate regret for happiness denied. The artisan who painted this virgin, his breast bared before her,—who lapped her in the pomp of azure, held his brush tight in his bleeding hand as if it were a heavenly nail. She is surrounded by hunger, and thirst, and inconsolable gentleness.

*The survivors from the wreck gather round the column, and the tree of heaven. . . .* What can be said more truly to test man, that mournful thief of non-existent treasure, is: "This thing, that is unchanging."

Despair makes the child hope grope towards the child king; it is despair that has created faith; injustice calls into existence the fair form of justice, brings her into one concrete harmony of works, and makes divine the breaches in the walls.

But despair, too, crawls upon the earth.

In the night, on the mountainous heights of the cathedral, there appears an enveloping multitude. The final act of created beings, the serried ranks of the last judgment, superposed, arc upon arc, heads and limbs, in the niches above the portal. At the sound of the

angel's trump the surging soul seeks again its cast-off body; creatures emerge gently from their graves. There they stand, side by side, grave, simple. They stand upright, their bare black feet seeming to dissolve into the ground, or they are seated, or on horseback. Some awkwardly extricate their legs from the enfolding shroud, others throw aside the winding sheet or put it over their shoulders like a cloak. Through the blinding folds of stuff a jaw can be seen moving, taking hold once more of life; another, still entirely hidden beneath the folds that are heavy as any stone, drags himself on all fours on to the hollow tomb-stone.

In the night they have risen from their tumbled litters or from the hard bare ground. They have dragged themselves from the dusty, muddy darkness, have raised themselves from beneath the ranked tomb-stones where sleep has wearied them, where nightmares have fought with them, where insomnia has held up to them its horrible quiet mirror. They seize me and lead me along with them. They form an assembly. That is forbidden—and they do it because it is forbidden. They assemble in a glade to worship the devil and try to bargain with him.

In this attempt to confront the monster whose limbs are blotted out in smoke, whose eyes are horizontal, yellow, this being who is the complete adversary, there is the same desperate revolt that sufficed to draw from the depths of gloom the tender beauty of the stained window, to gather all that the wide night may harvest of light, to transport, hither, thither, mountains of stone.

But *this* time the refusal crawls like a worm into the ground; it withdraws into night, that shroud of crowds; this timid, feeble sabbath tries only to live on the other side of reality.

*This* manner of combat, the war of weapons thrown down, of fleeing backs, is the sickness of revolt. It fills me with shame.

Even so am I filled with shame by the mockeries and blasphemies that men hide from the light of day but put slyly into some of those details of Church sculpture which so scandalised St. Bernard's riotous, shattering naïveté but which in truth, have been of but little consequence.

There will not be taken one single step forward toward earthly salvation so long as men content themselves with putting into the winds of night, the mournful human cries of man.



*Pages 1-8 that appear at the beginning of Vol. 2 in the two-volume edition are omitted here as unnecessary.*



# CHAINS

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GREEN ISLE

#### ODON



Alone, far above an immense tossing expanse, in the midst of an empty universe, I cling to this wooden box that itself clings to the long swaying stalk which moves back and forth, dips and recovers, grating me harshly the while in the teeth of the wind; it seems to vibrate right to the roots of the world. Below, at a vast distance below, on every side, waves, and yet more waves. Immediately below, beneath the dizziness which extends my belly and my legs, there is some clearly defined moving object, upon which I am perched high as a mountain; the end of the plank into which the huge mast, sharpened to a point like an inverted steeple, is driven.

I see myself—the look-out of the pitching boat, suspended aloft on a windy October day, poised above the beamed scaffolding with its powerful ropes, at the top of the new Sainte Chapelle, where all my strength is harnessed. Its great height seemed to focus upon me and incorporate into my very flesh the whole city of Paris—but I could not love it; it was too new.

There comes to replace me a man climbing spider-wise up the fine lines of the rigging. I go down. I lean over the edge of the poop that is weighted with the huge nest of blackened ropes, I watch the heaving keel cleave its way through the water that swells away



on both sides; its rising and falling drag me backward. My eyes are drenched in the sea's green, in the liquid hills of the wind; the sea scatters the ship's oblique black shadows into a thousand black crescents, and makes a dancing iridescence of colour.

The accustomed ceremony is celebrated on the bridge, for the vessel has already put half a day's reckoning between herself and the port of departure—half a day from Clairine! Captain Noster summons together all those on board the *Sainte Baume*, pronounces the sacramental words that are uttered by the captains of many Christian ventures in such circumstances:

*"We are encompassed by storms, by great waves, by pirates and all manner of dangers. Since we are at the mercy of God and the waters, each man must be the equal of every other. . . . We must pray and, as is the law of sea-service, elect judges of equality."*

*Equality. . . .* There are resonances of sound at which I never cease to tremble. These words are great because they burst forth from a group as soon as they are beyond the range of the laws that wall in towns and imprison the very prisons—great because they free into the winds of space, the cries of living beings. But for this very cause they are strange and they are in vain. They are but the brief, fugitive invocation of a divinity who is not recognised here below. They are but a dream's redressing of ills, but the vengeance of words, but an order that endures only while it echoes from one bank to the other. They could never be true unless the ship could make a new world, or unless henceforth, set free on the ocean of the universe, like the moon, it sailed forever outside the earth. But it is going to put in to the first convenient port.

. . .

The boat, full of salt and tar, was climbing to the north of the world with the wind in its sails. In its course it skirted Portugal and Spain, it doubled the Breton coast, and still it climbed, and saw the outline of England flit by: still it steered on, further, more northerly.

The land which stood out slowly to meet us, which grew bigger without moving, was the Emerald Isle, the Western granite of the Celts. At dawn a violent wind rustled our garments. The air was thick, and still heavy with the night. The magnified shore was black as a piled storm, and all around there shone a glittering circle of tin-coloured light.

The wind drove him forward, blew his monachal robe against his meagre body, hurried his steps on to the crest of one of the rocks that were spattered over with hard salt. I could scarce stand upright in the teeth of the dazzling spray from the surge in that wavering mist. There were other men of the mist around us, and all heard the Gallic monk say to me:

“This land which lays hold upon you is the only isle that still exists.”

He waved his thin arms toward all the corners of earth.

“Everywhere else the ancient law of violence and spoliation has seized everything, taken and twisted everything to its own uses. Everywhere else the happiness of the few is made of the unhappiness of the many, and that is true of the relations of nations, and also of the rulers and the ruled of each nation; to be poor is to be vanquished.”

The sky was a mirage in granite; the rain rebounded from the sea; we could see flat stones placed there for a seat by some Solitary. He who spoke was endued

with the peace that belongs only to those who have emerged from the dark night of sorrow, who have found consolation. I saw how one cheek was marked by a healed scar. He bade us, who must again leave that shore, carry thence the certitude that never in all the earth had there been ought save the act of the first strong man who seized the weaker's possessions: that act that has extended, has been organised and become very perfect; that has learnt how to over-ride everything—even Death; that has drawn a vicious circle of hellishness from which nothing can ever, now, escape.

“From our shores you can behold the strength of strength, established order. You can behold that from here alone, because the Emerald Isle alone has remained pure. Knowst thou the marvellous virginity of the soil we tread? Remember that Erin is farther than the farthest-faring roads, that Rome never came here, that nothing Roman has ever touched us.”

He beats the air with his empty arms like a great skeleton bird, thrusts forward his granite-grey face: the chin's curve is cut by square slashings, and on his cheek one sees the rugged fracture of that rock: he half closes his eyes in which one seems to see the shimmer of the sea, and snuffs up the air.

“'Tis strange! There is no smell here of Roman right, no odour of the Imperial system, the Imperial model. Thou canst indeed see that Ireland is the unique isle. Here Freedom still wanders, winging her lovely, spacious way. All who survive of the original folk, the Britons, are their own masters, they obey only Senchus Môr, that system of law that is unlike other laws, but is the likeness of Man himself. Here the lips' contract is the only one admitted and the arbitrator's decisions are never sustained by force. But yon-

der, over there, the leading captive of man by man, the oppression of the many by the few, has taken on for ever and ever the forms of Roman law. Rome! name of authority enthroned, that haunts all who shepherd humanity. All mad desire for greatness is Roman, and so it will ever be."

"But, brother, the Barbarians destroyed the Roman Empire."

Round him, in that iron landscape, were grouped dim presences as if in a choir, side by side, standing tall and slender like ruined statues on the rocks of the shore. There came a lull in the grey man's wrath when there resounded through the air the affirmation that the Barbarians destroyed the Roman Empire; those words fell upon my ears syllable by syllable amidst the wet, fleshy smell of the sea.

"Only to endow it with new life, brother. Dazzled by Rome's glory her conquerors gave a new, splendid youth to the Roman idea—Alaric and Genseric and Herulius Odovakar who in the year 1228 of the Roman era deposed Augustulus, that statuette who came at the end of a row of vast statues. And in later times all of them—Clodwig and Charles and Otho and Barbarossa—all of them built up with the aid of Latin scraps and Teutonic scraps an apish imitation of Augustus Cæsar and Arcadius: for Byzantium was but a worse Rome, and it was there that Thracian Justinian robed in purple by the westering sun, definitively codified Roman Law. Every one of them bowed himself down, an assiduous scholar, over the tables of Roman script, spelling them out with such greedy avidity that the sagacious Burgundian even adopted legislative clauses positively injurious to himself! Directly the Franks, the Vandals or the Goths tramped through the ruins of the Roman palaces and over the bones of her

roads they began to act in Roman-wise and to glean and pilfer here and there from among the heap of Rome's imperial titles. In the West power simply changed hands—just as with the Persian Empire, which Alexander, in truth, restored when he seemed to destroy. To remake, to remake all that has ever been, for humanity moves beneath the fatality of eternal resemblance. Above the aspirations of nations and the ostentatious dreams of potentates that are breathed upon the peoples, there is example, that second sun."

"But brother, brother! In the beginning was not Rome herself the mother of liberty and the republic? . . ."

Another of these strange monks—he was pale and small and carried a manuscript as if it were a white staff, said:

"Never! Those words that spring ready-made to your lips, oh stranger, have been propagated, will ever be propagated, by the *bearers of the torches of darkness*, the ignorant populace and the sophisticated ignoramuses who read books. The Romans simply elaborated the logic of obedience to masters, and created a language,—perfect, solid—which for them usurped the place of great ideas. Was there ever a moment during her prosperous reign when Rome forebore to use the plebs to enslave foreign peoples, and afterwards to crush the plebs themselves? Was there ever a moment when the miserable fate of the masses could not be summed up as an agrarian revolt stifled by the slaying of its spokesman, and conscription? What conquest of liberty have they to show save that temple which Tiberius Gracchus raised to the goddess on the Aventine? These makers of laws—artists in grammar and oratory, those gods of inscription—deal with reality only in consecrations and ceremonies.

“Thou murmurest beneath thy breath: The popular sympathies of Marius or Pompey. . . . Political manœuvres in order to adapt ambition to circumstance: glaringly evident, indecently obvious. For a man who can stand aside from the clamours of demagogy, Roman law (which began its sway by intruding a kind of brutal fetishism into the gentleness of family life) is neither more nor less than the ensemble of measures most admirably devised for safeguarding and reconciling the privileges of inequality, all the while loudly proclaiming the noblest principles. The multitude are by it at one and the same time united and divided, they are at the mercy of the decrees of palaces. Republic changed into Empire when Octavius changed his name.

“Would that have been possible if it had been republican in its essence? Since the same political formulas will continue to exist what is there to prevent some victorious soldier, even a thousand years hence, from proclaiming himself emperor of the proudest republic on earth. . . . The play of appearance tempts men to say that Rome established liberty, but a true, deep-pondered sense of reality will one day force them to admit that she has worked it irreparable harm, for she has formulated and attached it. Oh, cloistered reader of high-sounding texts, nowhere on earth but here wilt thou hear men speak thus. Here we study truth and we have no fear of it. Elsewhere thou wilt hear the words austerity, morality, virtue, tacked on to Rome’s devouring rapacity: thou wilt hear this Latin mediocrity, that legend has puffed out around its narrowly beautiful formulas and statuary, celebrated in the composed infallibility of its legists, in the serenity of its jurisprudence, in the consecrated dignity of its Senate. Then, then say unto thyself how that authority

has numbered the high and mighty words of men among its prisoners."

We found ourselves in a room where loose sheets of paper, and rolls and piles of manuscript lay heaped up on a large table, and overflowed from all manner of boxes. And the men who had revolted against the new law, that divorced authority from the ancient religion, stood there, plunged in serious thought.

Suddenly, their souls' desolation was made clear . . . their complaint became vocal. . . . Authority had enslaved the new religion also . . . and thereby riveted new chains on the hope of the world.

No authority, no earthly power could have created that prayer, for living prayer springs direct from the heart of man, and no earthly power can create life; but when it saw this new force rising up among the people, authority must lay hands upon it and turn it into a religion—like any other. So the faith implanted by love and suffering in the minds of unhappy men is changed into a weapon, a machine, to be used against them. The whole shameful tale will never be told of how religion was stolen from the poor, its creators.

There they stood in their long robes, calm and sanctified. Their eyes, more used to print than to faces, strayed away from the faces of their guests to gaze beyond them into space; the sound of voices disturbed them, for they were accustomed only to the faint scratching of the pen; their fingers, no longer at their usual task, made delicate and precise gestures in the air, as though still engaged in embroidering with fine phrases the fringes of thought.

"Listen. Here, as much as everywhere else there dwelt the bestiality of the first ages of man. This was

the country of those mighty warriors who never turned their backs to the foe, and who, after death, were buried upright; whose women served with the army and fought with scythes. Conaoll, son of Amorgan of the Fiery Hair, never let a day pass without killing two of the men of Connaught, and slept rightly with a severed head upon his knee. Men came straight from Asia—not from Rome—to evangelise the isle and did indeed evangelise it. Because we are a virgin land in the world, Christianity, here, really remained Christianity. . . . Patrick, that true Father: Columba that very dove—he did no violence, persecuted no man; he was loved for himself alone, and remained ever as the pure soul of the Galilean sent him forth. In the Emerald Isle was no violence of destruction. Gradually, with patience, was Druidism replaced by Christianity, and, in accordance with the expressed wish of Columba, the bardic orders were respected. The good seed was sown simply and naturally by a long line of saints, and by congregations of the people.

“Whereas in other places . . . everywhere! The Jews were infamous while they were strong. The Christians became infamous as soon as they were strong enough. They hurled themselves against men, against the labours of men, against books. They destroyed statues, monuments, destroyed living thought, the written word, . . . ever hammering men back into ignorance. Because of Christianity, of all Greek literature (and Mark Antony gave to Cleopatra two hundred thousand different manuscripts) only fifty or sixty works have come down to us—and those through Persian hands; because of Christianity the whole of surviving Latin verse makes no more than a small pile of writings that one can cover with one hand. The



monasteries were workshops of destruction for ancient letters. . . . We have been slaves . . . let us now make others slaves in our turn! We have suffered . . . let us now make others suffer! People have known nothing of us . . . let us see now that they know nothing at all!"

The little monk shook furiously.

"Not one of the forty prelates at the Council of Chalcedon knew how to write his own name. Gregory the Great severely reprimanded one of our bishops for having—incredibly shameless—studied grammar."

"Lycurgus and Jupiter shared the same cradle,—or so at least one is forced to believe"—said a voice from the shadows. The speaker's white and studious forehead seemed yet to reflect the texts he loved.

"That commandment set up once in Sparta has since been set up all over the world: God in the service of the State, religion becoming the handmaid of authority . . . kings sunning themselves in its rays. Even there, the incoming ships bring tidings of the squabbles between Pope and Emperor . . . but we are too far away to be deceived. If the Pope and the Emperor are at war, it is not, as the learned doctors would fain have us believe, because each is the guardian of a different arm of the law: one of the spiritual and the other of the temporal. It is, on the contrary, because their ambitions are fundamentally the same, their desires identical, and because they are clasped fast to one another: two royal brutes. . . . Authority owes to religion her inspiration, an outward and visible sign of unity, a banner under which to marshal her forces . . . but religion owes even more to authority, whether authority persecutes or incorporates. Without authority, religion would be nothing but a marvelling gluttoness, a shy desire, scattered in isolated houses, in isolated

hearts, perhaps, and reaching up hands in secret to the clouds. Authority has given her form, and power, and above all, a battle-cry.

“But, of the two Romes—of the Cæsars, and of the Popes—it is the Rome of the Cæsars that is always victorious. On this circular stage we call the world, it is politics that play the part of fate. We laugh at those who take pretexts for causes, and think that the great schism between east and west was based on reasons of doctrine: the real reason was, that Constantinople, through the desires and prestiges of her Patriarch, was a rival to the supremacy of Rome, and Antioch to that of Constantinople.

“So they set the cross deep in the globe—an amazing fetish. . . . They welded together a Holy Roman Empire. The greatest swindle of all time is that which placed struggling humanity in the talons of this word orthodoxy! . . . all that grisly pharmacopœia of the Fathers of the Church who in the kennels of Alexandria travestied every religion of antiquity, from the Greek to the Druid, and changed the names of the Gods. Let us say, my brethren, since truth still falls from heaven, the greatest swindle of all time was, to incorporate the New Testament in the Old, the religion of Christ in the Mosaic law, and through that law, the ancient rites of Egypt.

“They might have made it a kind of duality, as was the religion of the Persians. Indeed, we know from the evidence we have collected here how nearly that happened, for man, with his rigid mind, undoubtedly inclines to the Manichean scheme. But whatever might have been the combination produced and sanctified by a gathering of sages, this Christianity which was to destroy everything, started by compassing its own destruction during the years of confusion in which its

laws were codified, and today we find the Catholic Church as anti-Christ . . . it stands for cruelty, ambition, corruption and simony—the dead body of Christ, even Anti-Christ, whom the sellers in the temple, and they who shed innocent blood, are wont to show to the people.

“And so the word, the very incarnation of truth, serves also for truth’s shroud. The religion contained within itself the germ of its own decay—the ‘letter that killeth’—and it is dead. The strength of Christianity has conquered, but not its truth. The true Christianity, my brother, has made few converts . . . it has had no success on earth.”

Such was the decision reached by these solitaries in their island, by these whose righteousness dated from Jesus Christ. I would never have dreamed that men could go so far and so recklessly in the search after truth.

The curses of these Christians rise up, with a sound as of rushing wings, against the monks who are bidden to write the history of mankind, to make epitaphs on events, and to re-create the past as the rulers desire it to appear.

Taking as their example flights of poetic imagination, or the inventions of a Ctesias of Knidos, the fabricator of a whole list of kings, the monastic scribes secretly caused to be inserted into the text of Flavius Josephus the lines regarding Our Lord; invented the foundation of the papacy by St. Peter, the homage paid by Constantine to the Bishop of Rome, and the temporal cession of Ravenna . . . and impudently increased the age of the Decretals dealing with papal rights—just like the Egyptian priests who defaced statues, recarving the names on the cartouches

with their own hands, correcting the dates upon the monoliths of Khonsou with a chisel.

“Two truths: that which is, and that one must confess: this latter is an illusion? But can one call illusion that which possesses all the apparatus of earthly strength?”

And the more the ghostly denouncers repeated that, the more brightly the haloes of sanctity glowed around them. But they added:

“It is impossible to be alone of one’s kind on earth. Since everywhere in the world the conduct of affairs is devoted toward ferocity, and hellish subtlety, we shall be punished.”

They pointed out in the distance the line of the English coast. The people of that land had been crushed in succession by Romans, Angles, Saxons, Frisians and Danes . . . army upon army from the sea. In the language of those conquerors, the word *Briton* means, *slave*. The Roman hell will never die. For they, by themselves, will ensure its survival in the world.

“From that quarter will come our death-blow. As yet that island has brought forth only the son of the serf: the one-time beggar who has crowned himself, and although all the doctors of Bologna declared it heretical to deny to the Emperor possession of the terrestrial orb, Frederick of Hohenstaufen bent his imperial knee to hold the stirrup of the English Pope. . . .”

The soft flutter of many wings whispered over the sea shore. Clear cut and delicate against the sky the white curves of the gulls’ wings swept over our heads, white as hawthorn flowers. The wind and the light caressed these seraphim of labour and of truth, and the warm salt water, and the blue, snowy light of day.

. . . And they repeat, over and over again, loud and insistent:

"Nothing has ever been in any way changed!"

I fear these words. They are proclaimed by men serenely calm, but they are the same that the unhappy, the wretched of our lands use as opiates.

They give the world over as the prey of men. Its echoes will spread far and wide. They are spoken of one island, but words have power to walk upon the sea. And it is this awful indictment that will one day rouse the masses to fury.

On and away! The ship's prow dips deep into the waves, as a plough into the earth, and leaves a furrow of white in its wake.

And clinging with one hand to the ropes, I forced myself to say over and again, "There is no hope,"— I said it so gently and so often that I ended by chanting it in hope.

The *Holy Balm* has returned whence she came, passing, but in the distance only, the red shore and the two bowed peaks. They look very small against their background of roaring gulf . . . against the cold blue-green of the sea.

A sudden stop that checks the steady flow of landscape in perspectived lines, and the keen wind in my face.

The two bowed peaks are there, but absolutely still . . . with a telegraph pole between them. From a near-by thicket comes a chorus of metallic whistles; and I see, fling past in a blue-black whirl, three, then four little, feathery motors . . . and on the edge of everything there remains myself . . . the summit of myself in the cold light of day, my legs stretched out in front of me on the grass and reddish stone, and my brown leather shoes with their toes pointing upwards.

My eyes see my own shape reflected round me . . . stretched across the annals of men in Gulliver enormity.

Once more, once more, the last dream was so much more lovely than the others.

It really did exist, then, this stretch of seashore with its race of upright men. I am homesick for the Briton's isle, a circle of brightness melting into mists. . . .

I long for the ceaseless wash of the waves on the shore, whence the rain is drawn up, for the foam that gilds with dazzling whiteness the black rocks, as clouds gild the summits of the eternal hills, and for the hard profile lined with a bluish, holy line, of that thinking statue that truly perceived the domination of Roman law over the world!

Or again, I am impelled to flee, to take flight and leave this place far behind. To flee away to the realms of the impossible, of the absurd, like this driven fugitive, this Odon, through whom I saw, and heard for a few seconds of the eternal day!

I shut my eyes, *will* determinedly, and urge myself forward whithersoever, like a boat adrift, striving to drown my mind in all that exists. The extraordinary credulity of sleep. . . . How easy it is to believe anything on the borderland of sleep!

The pitching of the boat, the sharp tang of the sea, the thick smell of seaweed and tar. A mast to which tapers a bunch of ropes and rigging. At the centre of this hollow pyramid the mast supports a black nest, and a dark cloud of sail. The wind blows fresher on the Ancient Southern Sea. The bowed peaks have sunk below the horizon, and we have even put in to a port of call since we saw them. The *Holy Balm* sets sail for the East, plunging and rising powerfully.

I saw Clairine once more. But I did not recognise

her until I had departed without her. If I had seen her first from a little way off, I should have recognised her unique, individual grace, the poise that, among all other creatures, is the own gift of herself. But I saw her suddenly, when she was already right close to me. Grief and suffering had furrowed her, and my eyes saw her not. She, as she passed, did not glance my way. Only now I perceive it was she, and so once more we go a-begging, an impassable gulf between.

For a whole day I wandered in that great island that would become part of Syria if it were not securely anchored to the bottom of the sea. There you will find churches like those of the west, but unroofed. Indeed, they seem nearer to heaven than ours, these deep gulfs of purity, wherein religion lies open to the sky, where the gold on the altar reflects the green of the trees, and the choir sparkles in the silent night with the reflections of a thousand stars. In Famagusta and in Nicosia I saw angels, carved in stones, brothers of those to whom I weep. Then, I was afar on the formless paths of the sea.

Between the blue depths of the sky and the enamels of the Mediterranean, lies that ancient shore that has engulfed so many men. Patches of bright colours stand out upon it: the faint blue-green of palm trees on their rocky soil, bulbous towers on reedy stems and the white crescent of Astarté and Artemis. The crescent: all that remains of those white temples that time has worn away to their very foundations. (In the spreading night of forgetfulness, how many of these shining oval crescents yet remain, that women offered to their goddesses, how many of the lamps that were as the stars for number!)

Launched from the Pisan ship, a long boat full of

bright colours lies low upon the glassy, lozenged sea: a boat-load of Crusaders!

Above the light circles of red and blue, silver and gold of the shields, show the round or pointed shells of the helmets, and sometimes the spiky mass of weapons; higher still flutter the ribbons of their banners,—red, black and white,—clean-cut against the dark blue back-cloth of the sky.

Below the rows of shields the oars with their scarlet blades project, to throw their red reflections on the green transparent waters of the bay.

The ship and her armed company are animated by a fiery and exalted gaiety. Those who are on board her are of kingly fibre, and after the hated confinement of the voyage, they expand bodily.

Their blazoned shields are displayed all along the ship like the Sacred Heart displayed in pictures of Our Lord; for their escutcheons are all in all to these men, who cannot read nor scarcely speak,—who are mere machines of war. What you can see is one side of their heads, and of their broad chests, where you can read, writ fair in clear colours, the noble lineage of which they come . . . born of the union and division of great estates, of the high chivalry of Champagne and Lorraine, descended from the Knights of Rome. There are four distinct compartments in each of these steel-clad heads: the merit of killing, the sacredness of loot, the glory of honour, and the sweetness of love. These knights—the fine flower of the western world,—have journeyed hither to become rulers and kings in Jerusalem, to be dukes and lords and overlords, to be worshipped, decorated and bowed down to, in this land which grows precious stones and fine fabrics as other lands grow fruit-trees, and where pearls fall as easily as tears: Ophir, the Kingdom of Saba, of Prester



John, of Sardanapalus, and of all the kneeling lines of poets; for are not those who go forth upon this feast of arms worthy of everything in the world?

There is always a huge crowd to do their will.

As I made my way towards one of the open spaces where a part of this crowd swayed and muttered I met a dark and haggard shape. All I could see of him was a big nose, and the lump that moved continually up and down his long throat. . . . A man of rank who is no longer rich! The knight without a fief . . . with no possessions but his knightly honour and his Christian faith. . . . The knight of the romance of chivalry! . . . vowed to defend the oppressed, the widow, and the fatherless against the world. What does he hope to achieve here, with his azure device on the tarnished gold of his shield and his face of infinite sadness? On this true Knight, on this spectre, there fall all kinds of misadventures. Around him rises a barrier of pointing fingers—coarse, and twisted, as if in the contortions of mocking laughter.

I have seen the army that was called forth from such distant lands.

Those that survive from the radiant setting-out—one in three—pass over the evening-heavy plains: their weight hollows the endless expanse.

From the margin of this twilight district that the mournful hearse of the army razes harshly, I leant forward and scrutinised the faces of the men. I saw only the ardour of despair. I knew, I felt within myself, their set eyes that were the prey of the sombre passion that they still desire to have and to devour alone.

They were dazzled, certainly, by the promises of earthly paradises that, uttered beneath vaults of stone

or of blue sky, took fire among the poor. But as soon as there is but the thickness of a body between our bodies, I perceive clearly that the basic impatience that urges on these servants-at-arms, these valets, these little men, is that they are the perpetually repulsed, driven. In their homelands they have never been aught save the torn *beginnings* of destinies. Some among these whom my eye swiftly embraces have fled remorse, but all have fled malediction. The fury of suffering is their spur. Rather than their former existence they will attempt *anything*, everything, things impossible. "Nothing can be worse!" and they surge toward the confines of the old world.

Each is weak, lost. Only their number, the vast expanse of their flesh and blood, gives them strength, and brings successive victories there where their stormy multitude has passed—behind the Teuton or English paladin silhouetted blackly against the great clouds like a heavy pothook affixed to a horse—with an iron-mongerish head and a scything wing.

But already, here and there, the miserable survivors of the multitude that perished on the long journey half-waken, disillusioned to find, in this land, the same trees as at home. What then is changed? With their heavy steps and tight-shut mouths, with all their travail of hope and desire, they are yet trying to forge out the goodness of God. . . .

Near the magnificent tent, lit up by the glancing light of torches, the smile of the merchants in their opulent robes: the masters of ships with crafty eyes and beards that gleam like jade, their hats bound with golden cords—the Pisan and the Venetian smile. The Pope honours these personages as Isaiah, with his Prophet's mouth, honoured the merchant-princes of Tyre.

In the shadow of the trafficking merchants and the nobles is a monk who is there to write; he gathers in the noise that echoes all about, and sets down: *God wills it!*

The ultimate exiles of Britain laughed loud and long amidst the storm as they said: "Verily they are matter for laughter, who take the appearance for the cause, and assign doctrinal reasons. . . ."

But days and centuries shall pass, and the outlines of the writing will not fade.

On and away! Clinging as I was to the threshold of other lands, I had no more any wish to return. I wanted to go in the opposite direction until there should be an end of space, until I should reach the limit of everything—or else carve out something new—or else, that grandeur should at the last wash me clean.

For many years I tossed up and down throughout Asia.

I have journeyed from one wilderness to another—from the northern snows to the burning tides of the tropics; and what comes back to me most often and most vividly is the vision of the rocks of the Emerald Isle, and the sound of their voice.

With the rest of the caravan that stumbled on exhausted, with bowed backs and halting feet, I came one evening where the two rivers met. My head was bent—weighed down with the weariness of the long day's march: as ever I saw with my mind's eye the gestures of the redressers of wrong, upright upon the rocks and white as the frothy eagles of the sea's legions. And my mind's eye had also, in a sort of vision like a compact bird's-eye view, the image of the far-off land of Elcho, with its fire-reddened rocks and its ineffaceable greenness that is as if lifted high toward heaven by

hundreds and hundreds of spears: and in the midmost, thy face, thy smile, Clairine!

When I reached the encampment and lifted my eyes, my own country rose before me like a familiar ghost.

My heart beat and would not be stilled as I recognised that outspread vastness, red and green upon the waters. A colossus, rough-hewn from a red mountain clothed with trees, she broods upon the meeting of the Ming-kiang and the Tong-ho—a foot in either torrent, and her head level with a corner of the plateau that holds up the midmost roof-tree of the world. Looking up and seeing all the length of that land shaped like a human body, one traces the woven draping of forests; the fields, her thighs; and the mines, her belly: although for centuries the sharp elements have been wearing away in that great continental effigy. That seared, discoloured visage reflects the setting sun—it is its greatest mirror. And I felt anew a certain sweet remembered *gentleness* of earth. The aspects shed by heaven upon the world are innumerable, but everywhere the same desires lift the sky higher, and the same need of peace draws down its soft equal light upon all things in earth's refuges.

The likeness of this country to my own helps me to realise how far those countries too are alike, which are most different. . . . Serya, daughter of merchants, and grand-daughter of the old initiate, lived in a palm-leaf hut in the depths of the forest. Once when I was thinking of Clairine, I walked thus far. She signed to me from the threshold. I went in and disrobed her. Her name,—her face,—her veils,—these were amazing, and even in her presence I was conscious of them as though I moved in a dream. But her body was like the bodies of all the dead and gone women

who have been mothers of my body. Surface things dazzle us; but in our hearts is a dark limit. Nevertheless, and despite the blasphemy of the flesh, as I returned I murmured: "Clairine," and the name seemed as full of life as if it clothed herself; or even as if I were hearing it from her own mouth.

The old, old, transparent man who knew everything was telling me, in slowly-dropping words, the great things I already knew.

"The Empire was so broad and so weighty that of itself it split into parts. . . . The earth—of its nature ordered, practical and sober—became an Empire. The heavy work, instead of falling lightly upon everyone, was completely overturned by mere chance, and heaped up into a great mound with some man or other at its apex: an Empire!—because a man stretched out his hand."

There was a silence, for Serya passed by, and I pondered her from head to foot. When she was gone I recovered my wits, suddenly recollected the words that still echoed in my ears, and replied, "You mean the Roman Empire."

"I mean the Empire of the Hans and of the Sungs.

"A potentate added to the constitution a sentence containing his name: to the constitution, my son, not to the law! He destroyed books, that make light out of darkness; he arranged for official instruction so that it was like a yoke."

"Who? Augustus, or Trajan, or Antonius with his gilded cage, Alexandria, full of poets and thinkers hopping and twittering—or Constantine who made a school into a Citadel, or Justinian who walled up the spirit of Athens?"

He answered: "It was Chi-Hoang-Ti, the yellow

emperor, who burnt the books, that he might separate humanity from itself, and keep it for his own.

"A day came when the Barbarians poured down out of the north. The draw of the south, because of the sun's ripening touch, has always made the peoples of the earth migrate in an oblique direction, in accordance with the acclivity of the soul. The father of man, the supreme far-off Being, came down from the white northern latitudes, shouldered forward by the avalanche, when he had attained to self-knowledge: knowledge of his mind and of his heart: and had become the word of himself."

"Yes," said I, "I know."

"The Barbarians were employed as mercenaries in the imperial armies. They saw: and coveted what they saw."

"Turbulent, childish barbarism coming down upon Rome. . . ."

"Upon China."

"That victory was a lie and an illusion," I cried, hearing the spacious voices of Erin. "The conquerors of the City of Cities were led and guided by the conquered."

"Yes. The men who took upon themselves the ruling of the City of Cities and the middle flower of the world, were sunk by the weight of their victory. One watched the Mongols swaddling themselves in the splendour so suddenly brought within their grasp. And Kublaï overflows with Chinese originality. They recharged the imperial dream with new blood, young, vigorous and animal: they worshipped every letter of her ancient law."

"The great legal dogma of the west," I exclaimed, "mother of civic idolatry—is a monument of hypocrisy, with liberty for its façade."

"I have seen the law," replied the Sage, "in the little bell-shaped chapel built by Asoka, so high upon its mountain that one comes to it only through months of winter."

"May the will of the people be the only law! thus wrote upon the marble the lawgiver whose head was marble.

"It is even that which is written in the Yassuk of Ghengis Khan. There it is said that the multitude of the Kouroultai has power to dethrone kings. And it was content to be called the Assembly of the People, that multitude whose mutterings have reached even to me—that army, every one of whose round-faced warriors said to Kuyuk, when he was still a child in his mother's arms, 'As long as there shall remain of your race as much as a rag of flesh, or a wisp of grass rubbed in your fat, we will have no man else to be our Khan.'

"And the same sacred theft of power by the interposition of heredity can be seen in the fairy-tale adventure of the pastors descended from Mohammed, who made the shores of the Mediterranean their garden, and the long territories of their conquest the ornament of the whole South."

"And yet the voice of the Man of Light has been heard everywhere! It took five centuries to find its way from Palestine to Scotland."

"It took ten centuries to make its way from the Seven Indies to Zipango, over the roof-ridge of the world."

"Jesus, the Christ."

"Siddartha! There have been several, who were the same. His real name is: The voice of one crying the cry of gentleness,—wisdom and equality."

"All the centuries that have worn away since then

have been given up to nullifying that gospel. Those two words have been equally falsified. They were alike; they were the same. To have said 'There is but one' would not have been to falsify them."

"No, in that they would not have erred, Yaso. . . ."

"Both these faiths, that so grandly combated formalism and temple intrigue, have been obliged, in order to live at all, to gather to themselves every known superstition. The true Fo-Kiao,—Mahayana—still reigns, but he is a dried-up carcass of words and gestures—a religion like all the other religions. Those who spread it understand it as little as they understand the sacred books of the dwellers by Lake Singora, which no one can read now. And who can decipher the inmost meaning of that incantation that has been incorporated by dogma—*Om mani padme hum*, the four most often repeated words under the arch of heaven: the six human syllables most comparable to sand-grains and rain-drops. *Authority* took possession of the chain that binds all hearts when it perceived how their weakness holds to it so strongly, and made of it a yoke, which is become the teaching of Siddartha—in the eyes of all but Siddartha himself."

Serya passed by again, but that marvellous vision did not delay my quick response for so much as the space of a tear from Time's glass:

"If there was but one created being who did not recognise Christianity, that man would be Jesus himself!"

"And of all mortals, Lao-Tse, the old man with a child's heart, would be the last to accept Tao, which claims to be moulded upon his ideas. Truth has only prevailed against error at the cost of resembling it. Methodical, regular organisation. . . ."



"Clovis—twenty generations ago. . . ."

"Kanisfa—thirty generations. . . ."

"It flowed in a broadening tide from the walls of Mont-Cassin, and from Cluny, and permeated everything, like water."

"It clings to Thibet as their shape clings to the rocks. Taking hold in the monasteries, it leavened the whole central mass of that country of square-cut mountains and deep-rooted ritualism; and its millions of inhabitants seem less than human, so much alike are the signs they make with their arms and legs, and so much like versicles in some sacred book are the features upon their flat faces.

"They broke in upon countries with the sharp prows of their ships, across the thresholds of the river-mouths; and to them the right bank was the one that is on the right when one breasts the currents; so used were they to mounting rivers towards the source, upon the flux of the incoming tide."

"The Normans—"

"These were the men who chose as the most beautiful sojourning-place in all the seas—"

"Sicily!"

". . . the long curving archipelago whose two thick terminals seem full of eyes—the country of China's morning—Zipango."

He was bent into the form of a workman's tool, and his strained posture—his knees, his elbows—made my joints ache. I could see the contracting muscles in two arms stretched out before me—arms tanned and sun-scorched, and sweating like sliced fruit. And I could feel my strength forming in drops upon my forehead and over my temples. The drops fell one by one and each one made a dark spot in the dust. The rice-straw

was frayed out round the edge of my pointed, roof-shaped hat.

On all sides the ground I am digging—a poor exiled soldier, daunted by his task—is patterned with the marks of my bare feet; the prints, marked with warts upon their outlines, of my thousand unresting feet.

All day long the sun has scorched me. I am striving to fill up the rock-terraces with wads of precious soil, so that the field may not slide down-hill into the sea. I have been labouring too long. The same movement, repeated over and over again, begins to brutalise my shoulders more and more unbearably; evening draws near, when the recurring heaviness of one's tool fills one with dumb loathing. It is not true to say that I am alone: work is there, in hand-to-hand combat, returning blow for blow, ever more bitter. From time to time I stop; then I am afraid—and redouble my blows in my effort to alter this speck on the face of the earth: desperately clutching hands and body stiffened like a tree with swollen, twisted rootlets.

It is he! He passes, a dark figure in the distance: the Master. I am afraid.

This is the first time he has passed this way. This ground is his. And why? There is no reason.

The soil is nothing but the dead bodies of the soil piled one upon another. As I laboured, seeking out the true soil as a miner seeks out ore, I came to a layer which was quite red. In this red powder my tool rang suddenly on something. What were these things in a row there? Skulls, carefully arranged to face the setting sun: yes, they were all gazing at the same point in the reality of things. These skulls bore ornaments of polished stone, and small objects made of polished stone were scattered about.

Under the red stratum was a black one. In this

cindery stuff, too, I found skulls, but they were not like the ones in the red layer; instead of being round, they were very much elongated. These long skulls were not carefully disposed, but tossed about anyhow in the carbonised debris—a penal disarray. Some were cracked, some had holes in them, others gaped like open mouths. About them were scattered points and splinters of stone—not polished, these, but pebbles split crudely with sharp strokes.

Then I noticed something else. In the vertebrae, in the shoulder-blades, in the fossil scraps of skeletons which held to some of the elongated skulls of the lower stratum (as the last fragment of a wall still holds to some other piece of debris) were stuck arrow-heads of polished stone.

I felt awakening within me that which these buried things, confusedly, spoke of; that which had happened when these hideous bodiless heads, with broken noses and vanished eyes, still lived; when ferocity and fear still held sway in them, in the beautiful flesh. The round skulls were the conquerors. They invaded the country of the long skulls, and slew the strongest because of their perfect arrows; and subdued them. Upon one beginning of life they superimposed another.

The pine branch is outlined, horizontal, against the sky, inordinately long, like the eaves of the world's roof, and trimmed with aigrettes of needles. Behind, the screen of blue light is so pale that the corded branch seems engraved upon it in black—an amazingly delicate piece of work—starred with all its nests of spines. On the horizon the sky is tinged with pink, as if the colour had drained from pink rose-petals into that white humid surface; or as if pink powder, upon swansdown dipped in water, had been dried, and laid

upon celestial, shimmering tissue paper. Elsewhere it is the same: the middle of each pine is like a tangle of black sea-urchins, and its bristly border is printed in Chinese ink upon a ribbon of space that is blue above and pink below.

In the background, the notched peak of the volcano reflects the red light. Over there lies the sea: two or three trailing wisps of bluish pallor upon which a few distant junks are outlined, and where can be seen white fleeces that cover reefs. Near at hand a bit of sea with a curved back is covered with rippling scales, like a fish; the sea's expanse, slashed into long pieces, makes exactly the shape of a vast monster, flowing and invisible, yet blue and white.

The field where I am toiling, where my life is dying within me, is not mine; it belongs to the typhoon, or perhaps to the volcano—to the marsh-flats, or to the man who calls himself Master. I am a stranger to my own life; I am a wretched animal upon a pavement of skulls.

The mosaic of an army. The clamour, the painted complexities of armour, the frenzy of strong-spiced colours. Beyond and above the red, green and blue arc of the army, above the spiked bucklers covered with many-coloured shells in imbricated patterns, above the scaly leg-pieces and the string sandals, the bronze gauntlets—like fins—above all this a misty army: the banners. Pennants and standards dancing and whistling above the roof of the army, that is shattered into a thousand fragments. . . . Tissue paper in tattered streamers, white with black marks in the middle or upon the edges. Like burning papers; snaky tongues of flame and paper; with sometimes the charred black inscription fanned into ruddy colour by the wind.

Then the lords and nobles, locked up limb by limb

in cases made of metal scales; and their horses, the weight of whose trappings is terrible.

And there, with his back turned, is the lord of them all, heaped with silk raiment and enamels, so swollen with things of richness that his motionless figure seems alive and dancing, and shot with lightning like the hurricane. In the midst of the throng his enormous robe and the architecture of his cuirass and of his cloaks make a whole ceremony of their own.

He gives a shout and turns his head, and one can see the opulent curve of his thick batrachian neck; the hieratic features engraved beneath his casque; the mouth so small that it is round; the forked beard and moustache, their lines so fine and so sparse that one could count them; his eyes, so narrow that one could hardly find their like outside the delicate drawings shut in books, but, nevertheless, very balls of fury. He is descended from Lminu-Tenno, descendant of the gods, founder of the most ancient of towns; and he himself, installed in the midst of his followers like a gigantic and divine insect full of eggs—so ancestral, so rich with the future,—he holds all the reins of government and deals with matters that come to him from every side, from town and country. He centres in himself the rays of the sun, that are like the petals of a chrysanthemum: and his emblem is his portrait.

The Yamato caste, which tilled the Aino, and soiled and darkened it, and which held in its hand also the Kinaso and the other islanders, who were first scattered and then brought together again, as the sea finally does with flotsam. The masses are clad in rags, and eat mire and dust, and their flat faces seem as if they had been crushed by blows. East and west, assailed by all the year's cruelties, a prey to the same seasons and to the same masters,—to the weariness of the east and to

the weariness of the west—these bodies, dumb and planted in the earth, owning nothing but their own weight which fixes them down, are as much alike as pine is like pine and silence like silence.

“That which happens on one side of the earth,” says the contemplator, “happens also upon the other. For the complication of events is nothing but the magic of a terrible simplicity; and it is not by casting yourself in the opposite direction that you will find either change or hope!”

Serya said to me: “Odon, your life is in danger; fly at once!”

I do not love her, since it is Clairine I love; but I love her caresses, and for a few days yet I shall be obedient to my body’s choice.

But the merchants have had my eyes put out; because I have seen the place where the diamonds have their nest, and the bare body of Serya!

My cries, my tears, at the moment when the two blows struck my eyes like thunderbolts and my light was put out,—all that is over. Softly, little by little, I recovered from my anguish. I resigned myself to being only touched by things. People hold on to me and push me. When they are not there I wait for them to come. And I think of a woman—my mother, because it is only for her that I am not much changed. Clairine I see no more, I know no more.

#### *ANGELINO*

“Angelino!”

In the dusk of evening Clairine summoned me. Her voice was hoarse, martyred, ugly now with the approach of death. She said:

"I no longer desire to see Odon again. Long have I wandered seeking to rejoin him, and several times almost did I find him. But now no more: he must not see me. I made a vow that for a long space I would not look at myself in a mirror: when I saw myself once more—I saw a strange woman."

I looked at her in haste. It was true: she was no longer the Clairine I had known, and I felt afraid. In her face no traces now of her beauty or her youth or even her name. Only a few short years since Odon went, and she was a girl of twenty. Ah, but a year becomes so much more than a year and weighs as if turned to lead by an evil spell, when each evening gloom claims you for its own, each night your hope dies afresh, and day by day you grow more bent and racked over the work to which you are a bondsman, and you labour to produce your embroidery as a mother the child from her womb.

Better that Odon and Clairine should eat their hearts out afar from each other, each cherishing the adored image of the beloved.

"Farewell Angelino."

When Torise said that, I knew she would die before I saw her again. She was full of life but I felt she would find a way of dying. She was in love with death, too unhappy to live any longer—the whole world was too hostile to her. For the last time I watched her beautiful rounded figure receding. She could bear life no longer, surrounded as she was on every side by hatred ready to spring,—not only on the part of her own relatives but even from outsiders, even from wretched creatures like herself.

Today she lives, tomorrow she will be dead. The one supreme happiness is to be alive, just to be alive.

Let Odon and Clairine come together again, no matter what they are like, if only they can go on living. In the end to love means just this: to have one human being, from among the whole world, whom one will not allow to die.

CLÉMENT AND ANNETTE

In the evening Méliodon and I came out of my cell together—friend-like.

In the cloisters we encountered a pale shape before whom we bowed; and we let him hear our voices so that he might recognise us—for he is blind. Dom Damasius is one of the preaching friars whose Order was founded by the great Spaniard Dominic fifty years ago, and he joined the Order on the day of its foundation. The Abbot of the Benedictine Monastery of Elcho affords him hospitality. He is old and quite white, and has been blind for so many long years that you no longer notice it.

His hands remain hidden beneath the wide, loose sleeves folded over each other; he echoes our gentle greeting, but those feet of his, blackened with dust and mud, do not halt in their march. His eye-lids are downcast over his extinguished eyes, and his face too is downcast. There is about him a pallor as of marble or clay, and he is so prepared for death that he seems actually to have died, and been resuscitated.

In the reflection of this pale sheen Méliodon looks doubtfully at me because of certain things that have been spoken between us.

During that brief moment I recall certain words he once uttered: "I could swear, by my hope of salvation, that I don't understand a thing about it." I am seized by a presentiment:—I see: he *will* swear that!



He will disavow me. But I am disowned already by this singer, this slave with his splendid gestures and his honeyed words, this maker of verses and phrases, this inveterate sycophant of things ordained and authority regnant. I read in his face, as in an open book, the hatred of the poet for the seeker.

Coming out from the low, cramped gateway, our eyes are struck by the courses of new stone and the pure white buttresses. Near the door the first stone of the building which was erected by Raman Cornudet, baron of Elcho, is let into the wall. This stone is the boundary which formerly marked the confines of the barony. Men say the column was dug up on the shore; it bears the ancient crest of Elcho, the dog's head.

Méliodon fingers the projections of a flying buttress of roughly carved stone, stone still in its morn of carven newness and says:

"Here we have the new art! My father used to curse it in the days when there was still good sense in the world, and it was rightly stigmatised as 'Gothic'. But nothing made the least difference. Men went on devoting all their energy to breaking in two our beautiful rounded arches—just as if they were branches of trees—to making imperfect the perfection of the circle. Nothing availed against it, so much so that I myself am about to set to in praise of this fashion!"

This is the new art.

The words have an unwonted echo, they reverberate. Who has just pronounced them close by me? In the garden sumptuous as an Oriental carpet there is a great patch of violet; it resolves itself into a white haired personage with a curly black beard, clad in a long violet robe. He is covered with embroidered belts and gold-

laced bands; on his shoulder is a dazzling clasp, and in his hand a green palm. He is talking to someone clad in sombre green.

He points to the town, huddled up against the hill, to the porticos, the terraces, the square and rectangular houses and monuments, a distant collection of free-stone and clean-cut blocks.

But upon the newly-built basilica there is a round cupola! This roundness is unique amidst the whole crenelated mass, with its right angles and straight lines amidst the dark and light squares of all the other buildings.

The violet arm points to the hemispherical anomaly.

"This is the new art. They have managed to introduce it step by step, secretly, for the interior of chapels, substituting unnoticed the vaulted for the flat roof. And now, behold!"

The personage in green said wearily, his voice full of discouragement, that the modern spirit is a veritable persecution.

His silhouette stands out against the long blue line of the Mediterranean whereon cruise corpulent galleys, like black swans with rigid white wings.

Whilst I bow down respectfully before the green-robed man in that lordly garden I cast a sidelong glance at him and see him raise his right forefinger and wave his admiral's baton in his left hand. Then he bursts into vituperative anger, evidently under the influence of some recent occurrence.

"These misty dreams of the day-after-tomorrow are dangerous. I am determined to despatch to the realms of eternal silence anyone who dares contend that a day will come when we shall sail on distant voyages in daylight. How could that ever be possible without the aid of the stars? They want to make men mad.

“And this in the definitive epoch that has established, from the Orient to the Occident, the peace of the Church. And Constantinople was established for ever as the capital of the Empire.

“Yes.”

They whispered together in the open street whilst the pointed reeds they held quivered against their whispering lips.

They spoke of the things they knew and understood; of those matters they were wont to deal with all the livelong day.

After their long, ceaseless poring over script, straightening themselves up as if emerging from the shell, their eyes still blinking from the dancing forms of the little flat letters, they seemed frightened by the open air.

Said one: “The twelfth epoch is the rampart wall of all the epochs.”

Said the other: “The nobles pass on possession of their dominions and their rights of government either to their direct heirs or through intermarriage among the great families, but they are obliged to swear allegiance to the King. They can only become masters or governors, whether by inheritance or by marriage, on condition that the King accepts them, and that they do him homage. Nor must you forget to add that they owe him aids in money and military service.”

And the two of them, marvelling, agreed: “Yes! In this manner is worked out in every detail the law of the strongest; all powers, in their different degree, from the highest to the lowest, adjust themselves to it, according to the wise and comprehensible institution of inequality, which makes the toiler so unhappy.”

“Yes! However much longer the world lasts it will

discover nothing beyond the vision and the laws of our sublime, our supreme twelfth epoch."

The sudden bursting upon them of a long sunlit cloud of dust, enveloping the shining or dark sinuous lines of knights and litters, tiaras, adorned parasols, thrust them roughly against a rose-coloured wall and cut short their words as they issued from their mouths,—those mouths of the scribe Amenomopit, and the scribe Penbisit, writers to the great Khakoori Sanouosrit Ousirtasen (Health! Life! Strength) the Theban sun of the twelfth dynasty of earthly kings.

Vast spaces, when you come back to them, change in shape like the movement of a chant.

In the quiet eventide I go toward the only thing that is left to me, to her. The scene unrolls before Méliodon and myself as we descend among the rolling stones of the little path—we behold the bottom of the valley. We reach it by winding among huge rust-coloured blocks of stone and huddled hovels where nothing stirs, whence no sound comes—the ardent silence of doorways deep within the silence of evening. Here is the cemetery; it is much quieter than in the fields.

I go toward the sole thing that remains to me, to Annette. Never have I so much needed her and the solace of her great heart. As I draw near to her my eyes tingle with tears of gratitude. And yet, I tremble.

This evening is like all the other evenings, and as on those other evenings Annette comes to meet me on the brink of the Line. The evening is peopled with trees and bushes seeming human in their dark, folded masses. A wind springs up to fill and then empty the pale sky. Every leaf on the poplar begins to stir, and its branches, which usually stand almost upright,

parallel to the trunk, are now blown back, and stipple its feverish sombre mass with light spots.

The Line cuts through the rocky hill, and then follows the torrent. Behold the impassable boundary that separates Elcho from Rulamort. It marks out as it were the curse which divides the two countries. It goes right to the sea, to the spot where, men say, there landed long ago the conquerors who piled up Elcho's first walls.

On this side Elcho: on that Rulamort. It seems to me that nature, unmoved, despises this tracing of boundaries. And the lordly ignorance of trees as to all changes of property! The left bank of the torrent is all-obviously the sister of the right. But these sisters are at daggers-drawn. Human interweavings have disturbed the natural scene. The two river-banks are as separated as night from day. Fear and danger hang brooding athwart this divided region which only the wind dare traverse from end to end. The hatred of Elcho and Rulamort has so entered into the very soul of things that it alone suffices to make the watchdogs on each side bark at one another.

I point out to Méliodon a place before unknown to him; the latest mêlée of the men at arms had torn up and charred the ground and filled the holes with all manner of debris and burnt bushes like wisps of hair . . . there too it was the same on both sides of the river. I said:

"Men are mad."

He trembles and puts his hand on my arm, all the while looking round fearfully.

"Elcho's spies lurk everywhere, Elcho's ears are everywhere."

Then he raises his voice in the evening-quiet—this time he wants to be overheard,

"We must not try to resist what is eternal. This Line will remain for ever."

"Men can unmake what they have made."

"Silence!"

His vile lack of spirit infuriates me.

"But Méliodon, you yourself have written in your 'Lay of Wild Youth': 'Mad mortals who make war'!"

He begins to argue like a great big child.

"Yes, I did say so. But I didn't do anything, but *say* it! I spoke as poets do: I spoke to the wind, I spoke to the empty air. Thank God, my words won't stop war! They consecrate it even whilst they curse it. The poet's rôle, as I have said, is like the lark's: it is to glorify; to render discriminating homage to the wisdom of laws human and divine, to the little flowers that enamel the verdant fields, to the groves in spring, and to the prudence of princes and the glory of noble sword-play. Is not strength one of the cardinal virtues? You drag your spirit of revolt and vanity into everything!"

He then begins to make a mighty business of controlling all the reproaches he might well make, and grows mollified by the thought of his own forbearance.

And Annette? But she is here, she is here, standing so still beneath the canopy of the twilight; I behold her noble face in its exquisite pallor, her slender hands, her long bluish dress draped around her in rippling folds and falling upon the flower-spangled grass.

She interposes, gentle, calm and chill.

"You want to knock up against everything! Take care!"

I hasten to her, to seek her, to find her, and I see the crenelation of my black cap reflected in her great liquid eyes.

"You frighten me," she says.

And then I saw that we were separated for ever.

I saw that she, no more than the others, would ever understand the great adventure of my soul; she also would say: "This is rebellion!" She it was who succoured me, who brought to birth my hope and created power in me, but she herself, smiling her creative smile, remains below, surpassed by the dream which I owe to her. When she said "That is beautiful", she spoke words without significance—like the poet: and now it is too late to call her back to me; our disunion is consummated since she is afraid of me, and he who evokes fear is, or will speedily become, a stranger. Alas, what brought her to meet me today was simply habit, feeble sorrowful habit.

We spoke no more that evening. She left me immediately. She was uneasy, unapproachable, with a sort of empty gentleness; her pale beauty seemed to become rigid, dead. And yet, in spite of everything, it was worse when she had gone.

I climbed back across the rocks in headlong haste, straight to my dwelling place, bowed down by sorrow, a fugitive, an outcast.

I shall never see her again. I should not recognise her if she once more stood before me. It is my own fault. I was blind to signs that others would have noticed. I contented myself with the calm, everlasting mirage of all those who go on saying to themselves: "She is *still* what she was." And then, I hid from her only too well my dream—this dream which is—to *speak!* Silence between two beings weaves, moment by moment, the tissue of death. It is over. Our once-shared words are no longer on my lips, but in my heart alone.

## CHAPTER XII

### EXHUMATION

"One must never follow up ideas right to their logical conclusion!"

Walking beside my uncle on the rough road I looked at him and suddenly, in a flash, I loathed him.

I was flooded with a passion of hate for his carven face that was ornamented by the delicate silver-work of his hair and beard, and for the fine-line ideas his intellectual finger traces in the margins of reality: his cleverness, his gross cleverness.

He stepped aside quickly as a motor-horn suddenly startled us. In disgust of death, his face curled up, his eyes darting right and left, he pulled the lapels of his overcoat about him as though his body were a bottle of blood, while the motor-cyclist, amidst a whirl of dust and scattering of stones cleaved the air with the edge of his profile, his straight hair brushed straight out behind him by the rushing wind.

And my uncle never knew how intensely, for a moment, I had wished the Juggernaut mechanism to seize him, and crush him and all his dreary bourgeois demagogy, and all his ranting apologia for mediocrity.

The gleam of animal hatred passed from my eyes. I walked on, he toddled. That day an event of considerable importance metamorphosed his destiny; the excavations of Alican which he had urged successive Governments to undertake were now to be started, and we were actually journeying together towards the site



of the ancient monastery, where the crew of workers was already mobilised.

He was wearing new brogue shoes bought for the occasion, and strutting along, he rejoiced at his success, recounting the cunning he had been obliged to use to overcome the obstacles set by the various authorities.

He very willingly answered my questions. "Exactly: In the several fossil-beds, they have discovered indubitable traces of the victorious wars which the brachycephalous Neolithics (translate, young man, into: Round-headed men of the period of polished stone weapons) had waged against the dolichocephalous Paleolithics (that is to say, Clément, in case you do not know: Long-headed men with weapons of pointed stone.)

"Egbert, a Baron of Elcho? Strike that from your tablets! Where did you pick up that surname, my learned nephew? It does not belong to these lands, it is Teutonic, and more than Teutonic, Saxon! Among others, it is the name of the great King of Wessex, who in the Heptarchy laid, if I may say so, the first stone of England's greatness, quite a thousand years ago. As regards the territory of Elcho, an enclave in the Kingdom of Arles, there is no complete list of the names of the Sovereign Barons who ruled over it, members of the powerful house of Cornudet. They were generally called Raymond. Shall I astonish you beyond belief, Clément, when I add that the Barons of Alican (Elcho being the older form of the name Alican) are not in the slightest degree related to this family, now long defunct? And indeed the house of Alican exists no more, although there are still Lords of Alican: wealthy merchants of the neighbourhood, bearing the patronymic Massard, bought the baronial title of Alican in the Eighteenth Century. They performed

almost the same operation, temporal and spiritual (if I may say so), and above all surgical, as the Goyon Matignons who, by aid of much ready cash, grafted their family branch onto the truncated trunk of the princely tree of Monaco—for their only connection with the Grimaldi is, in the *Almanach de Gotha*. But to tell you the truth, nephew, we are on slippery ground. Monsieur le Baron Massard d'Alican, *député et conseiller général*, member of the Archeological Commission, is the Mæcenas of these excavations, and it is thoroughly understood that our work must never throw doubt on the tradition of his family's nobility, and the ornamental quality of his ancestors treasured in his home. As you know, M. d'Alican is a most important member of society, a supporter of the democratic order of liberty instituted in the year 1871—or at least so he asserts every time occasion demands, especially to his constituents. It would be unkind to suppose anything else."

We arrived at the site of the excavations. Silhouetted in dark charcoal against the pale water-colour blue of the sky were workmen bending over their spades, stakes marking the section of the ground to be explored, and gentlemen in top-hats who looked like male wedding-guests turned out to grass. On the arrival of my uncle, the black silhouettes, smiling arabesques, ceremoniously raised their hats.

It was only quite by chance that I realised, that day, that these precious excavations of Alican were bound up with my dream-existence, and that in searching the past, the very "substance of things hoped for" was being pierced by the pick and shovel. . . .

During the whole month I have been down here, plunged passionately into days long past, and chatting superficially with my uncle Raphard about everyday

things—I have never once associated the strange deviation of my inner life with this solemn farce of everlastingly postponed archeological investigation, which has been as familiar to me from my youth up as Holy Writ! We cannot perceive for ourselves the most astoundingly simple relations and unities.

For I hardly took any interest in present-day affairs. My work and my writing? Greater things have arisen to hide them, and they are beyond my reach.

I am vowed to a work without name or object. And it is *not* a work, since it has no body, and I cannot work *at* it. I live for it—I am doomed to—and it diffuses into nothing. I am wearing myself out vainly. And I don't profit from what I see resuscitated. I ought, surely, in the intervals of my watch, to transplant my life into supernatural realms, to strive to live with and for these beings who are come back into living flesh and blood in some few of their intensest moments:—these contemporaries that are diffused through the void, whose flames rekindle in *me* because they are all part of my ascendance! But I leave them, I forget them.

I don't pursue my visions. I can't. I'm weary, and stopped short: when I come back to my normal existence, to its detailed, material exigencies, I am without any energy, and I fall back into my cage of actuality. My powers are not equal to my dreaming. The adventure is too great for me; it covers a wider sweep of life than I have strength to embrace. We are not made to be too great. It would be too great, too beautiful to link all things one with another, to make a chain.

Who even among the gods, those animate prayers, those beauteous shapes that lived and walked and breathed before us—has done this! I am in the hell of humankind, the hell of banal mediocrity, peopled

by the spheral public, that is, uncertitude and confusion of tongues. And yet, despite my detachment from grandeur, gently, yet surely I am being annihilated. My dream-existence may verily have been but a moment (the first time, I was conscious of a whole world of impressions in the time it took me to go upstairs; at other times I have lived through long spaces of destiny in a few minutes' somnolence, or even while I traced a dreaming gesture, within the cadre of the solid present.) But for all that, the utter intensity of this anterior life besets me, runs me to earth, and gnaws into my life. If I have no fear of this struggle for defeat, it is because I will not and cannot understand it—(as it is indeed, for all men, always).

“By all the evidence the landslide must have been from here to there. The outcrop of stone is visible at each end. The surveyors blunder in supposing that the spot formed part of Rulamour.”

My uncle left me. These worthies walked to and fro, pointed in different directions, solemnly counted their steps, their chins sunk in meditation. They volubly poured forth their so rich knowledge of the local history, apropos the least detail. I could see that they and I were ardent huntsmen of the same secrets, but I perceived that essentially we had nothing in common. I am in life, they go upon death. I have resuscitated the living past, a prophet of that which no longer is, and there is no help for me in their technical, arithmetical, residual summaries . . . Algebra, Emptiness, Nothing. . . . Books had already given me a large-scale lesson of the futility of artificial syntheses and of meaningless symbols.

And yet, despite all, my eyes and ears were eagerly attent, even to words. I was caught up into my uncle

Raphard's agitation. He had lost his muffler—he could not think where he had put it down: he wrapped some sacking over his shoulders. He was holding an open book in his right hand, and a closed book under his left arm. Gripping my arm, he took me aside. His eyes glued to the upturned soil, in a low, preoccupied voice, he bade me take notice.

“That must be the right wing. The part described by the Abbé Vigneux in his book on the monasteries of Provence—published in 1777—where he tells how in his time they showed the ruins, and notably the Magician's cell.”

The Magician's cell! That precision went like an arrow straight to my heart. Precipitately I asked:

“The Magician. . . . What became of him?”

My uncle had slipped away like a dart; I chased after him to put my question, dimly conscious of the ridiculousness of it all.

“He was burnt,” replied M. Raphard from where, twenty yards away, he was watching a man at the digging: he kept his eye on the tool as he spoke. “He frightened the villagers by his sorcery and knavish tricks. He cooked apples under his armpit, he brought storms with his broomstick, and he drew hell-fire straight from hell. He did all that! He was burnt. Some claim that he was exhumed long after his death, others are certain that he was burnt alive. Careful, my friend, dig gently there! That looks to me like sculpture.”

His words were lost in the wind. It was like a solemn farce. This positive, brutal,—yet so slight—revelation, did not touch the presence of that living being who still drew my whole mass with his and into his,—nothing is changed. And then . . . the man who affirms with redoubled energy, does he know what he is

saying, even within the little territory of his haphazard knowledge?

It is as though he had not spoken.

In the midst of these people moving hither and thither in the ephemeral twilight, in the bustle of the quick above the dead, I am alone, alone. I do not understand them, and they do not understand me. No—there is nothing in common between me in my eager and breathless excitement, and these beetles burrowing among the corpses, throwing up the dust of the dead. I am alone. I can find support only in myself.

There was a moment of infinite wonder. They stepped back—the three earth-soiled workmen—and there it appeared in their midst, white and upright.

The Stone!

Arms were holding it up to the light. Words buzzed in my ears: "Curious, this head of a dog," as I reached it.

Nobody paid any attention to me, nobody saw my terror-stricken eyes. It was the Stone, the Stone itself! The carving was not quite what I had expected; more worn than the memory of it preserved by the brain-cells wherein imperishable sensation dwells on for ever.

*I had known it better of old.*

My knees shook as I went towards it; I knelt down as if to get a closer view of it, I put my hands on the great stone. This image whose furrows I feel with my finger, had been buried there by *me* more thousands of years ago than can be computed. It was I who had embraced it twenty-five centuries ago, when it was streaming with the waves of the sea: and I had held it in my hands when this fracture was made in it, that the air has since gnawed. Had I spoken the real truth,

the narrow undiscerning world of today would have cried, "The man's mad!" I remained there, forcing myself to keep silent before the indelible token, the hewn mountain fragment.

The time slipped by, the passionate turmoil within me subsided, and I grew weary. Progress was slow and the work was getting tedious. They had nearly traced the outlines of the monastery, which was in ruins when a landslip from the mountain buried it. Here and there they found pockets of crumbling, earthy stones, which were duly arranged, ticketed, indexed. The stone dog's head, sheltered by a thin friable crust of earth, must have been dug out at some previous date, released from the fettering depths.

Towards evening, the finding of an iron ring re-animated their interest for a moment. It was as big as a collar and quite rusted and corroded, as also its fastening. This mouldy piece of iron, swollen by the damp, a concrete object surviving from the construction time has pulverised, scarce attracted my attention and could not hold it.

It was here that Clément Nourrit had walked after he left Annette. I laughed: in pride, or in humiliation and despair?

It was here. . . . Nothing can fill up the gulf between the past and the present, not even the sacred presence of the dog's head itself—since it is there, and does nothing. This awesome almost terrifying residuum, now left lying on the trampled earth (the iron ring, whose surrounding dungeons have dissolved away, was placed on the top of it) had diminished. *The stone had been; it was no longer.* The present moment is, a supreme, inimitable moulding of life. It is the body of truth. When it ceases to live, it becomes

a lie, and . . . there is no lie greater than the word "resurrection". Each minute is a summit from which falls away colossal destruction. It is always at this absolute point of intersection, the present, that the only solid affirmations of hearts and of philosophers are based. . . . The solid affirmations of philosophers! For there is a certain attainment of metaphysic. There has been judgment. Of the two great original tendencies of human seeking the subjective and objective (the inner and the outer world are successively the one in the other) the subjective is the real and the objective its obverse. The individualists are right. The instinct of the flesh is always right, and, at the other end of the scale of harmonies, the dog who, already murdered, with his last effort licked my feet.

The spark of life is needed. He has walked here. Of all the beings whom I resuscitate from the dead, he who had moved in the place where I walked, whose memory wrapt me round like a warmed shroud, *he* was the greatest. I felt that I was primarily *his* living depository, little as I was. He had walked here.

I see Marthe Uriel coming. She stands still in the light of the setting sun while I go toward her. She is wearing a big cloak, brownly radiant, reddish, whose folds, leaving her shoulders uncovered, fell and trailed over the grass that was patterned with asphodel.

With every fibre of my being, I still hold on to the last living moments of my long dream. I was going away, despairing. My suffering was surpassed by remorse for not having spoken, for having allowed Annette to become estranged by silence, for thus preparing her departure from me. Not to speak is to efface the days. Silence between two humans weaves, little by little, the cloths of Death. A secondary silence is, sometimes, sufficient to separate them entirely in a



silence eternal—and everything counselled me to speak to her; the earth itself, the very trees bade me speak.

Marthe is there, as had been Annette. The film of dust in the light of the setting sun superposed Annette upon her, in an exquisite aureole over her face, in a pretty fringe over her dress. The face is the same; never were they more one. That evening Marthe tries to search me and know my heart. She has sensed the mystery, and she has a right to know it. Away from the others, her low voice caresses my face: I could feel the scent of her voluptuous breath upon my eyelids.

“One would think that you live in a starry dream.” She has come at the aptest moment to obtain my avowal. This evening, in the sweet warmth of our intercourse, everything prompts me to speak, the very trees bid me speak. I hesitated, trembled, and in spite of myself, in spite of everything, I refused truth, I desired not to share the light—. “No, no! I don’t dream at all.”

Why was it, when I glanced again at the light circular fragment of rugged oxide on the dog’s head—the swollen entrails of the iron ring that had been worn in olden times on soft, living necks,—why was it that a sudden change came over me, because of the very littleness of this thing? . . . Here is a real, concrete thing, reclaimed from the complex world of long ago. That exists and resists—while I, I am only—images. I am nowhere. It is the determined diggers, the hunters of stones, the feelers after bones and sepulchral hollows, who are in the midst of truth.

The trace of footsteps. I looked at the ground where so many feet have trod. Thought is nothing, one needs the trace of footsteps.

The day's work is done. The people have gone, and left me. Solitude everywhere: the hillock where this vision of a woman first shone, then vanished; solitude in the ruins of the monastery, which though destroyed, yet dominate me.

Weary, worn out, regretting deeply that I had not spoken, I go toward the convent. They don't know the connecting paths, but *I* know them: it is here that, between two mounds, one approaches the façade.

I reconstructed the monument; the smooth, endless slope of stone, cut out by my imagination, the huge limb of a counter-fort. This side, level with the ground, the window of my cell. Yonder, between the two mountains, an oblique ray slips in and bathes the redout in light, through the undulating sparkle of the glass. My head above the curved window-frame, I see from without my narrow, worn abode, this solitude wherein, henceforth, I shall be doubly alone.

But I stop—I recoil, my hand on the jutting edge of the stone: I have caught a noise coming from inside. The redout, on the side near the door, had fallen in. In the square gap of the door a white form advanced. The blind Dominican! He enters my cell, crosses it. Distinctly I see his sandalled feet, tinted and encrusted by the dusty soil—his tall, habited form, curved like a cloister arch. How well he knows his way about! He holds out his hands in front, his hands that were always hidden in his joined sleeves, and that one usually saw as little as his sightless eyes.

His face is lifted up, and one perceives not his conscious look as in other faces, but only his eyes, the up-turned eyelids sealed as with red wax.

He goes straight to the sheets whereon I had written *everything*, and he seizes them. . . . He raises them to his face as if to read them. He does read! Then

the pale spectre takes up pen and ink, and writes across one of the pages my name, Clément Nourrit.

Ruin. All is ruined. The sudden realisation of the intrigue that has encompassed me pierces me to the quick. Too late I see the Church, that is the inner power of Time, affix its expedient: this man come by subterranean ways into the heart of my destiny, with his leprous whiteness. . . .

And now the garrulous voice of Méliodon—he has rejoined me—breathless—and his light talk jumps about from one thing to another like a lively sparrow: now he describes the lances of the Margrave of Pillnitz in Hungarian dawnings, and while the palm of my hand grips hard on the stone block, I am frozen in my soul by this placid voice of all the world, this voice that *never hears anything*. It is an insurmountable condemnation.

And I remain there, so vanquished, in such submission, that I sway feebly in the twilight, unable to go forward or back. I think of many things at the same time, and I remember how that my father—who had himself instilled in me avid curiosity for all the secrets of the universe—was disturbed when, as a child, I sought ardently for some hidden treasure in everything I beheld. Once I heard him murmur: “What will become of him?”—his voice was so tender that I knew full well that he was speaking of me.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE REIGN OF MAN

Where am I? . . . Where am I? . . . In the half-light the children mock me.

I have not re-entered the accursed cell.

I have gone with the wind that was behind me and before. It pushed me toward the sea.

I came to a shore and followed along it. My feet sank into the crumbling pebbles. It is essential to speak! I, who have found in nature, like a *motif* of joy, the supernatural theme, must speak. I, who through the realms of mind am the bearer of Words let love die because I would not speak. It is by the voice that love is built. I must speak.

He came up to me at the moment I was passing directly between him and the immensity of ocean. And he said, in low tones: "It is essential to speak!"

That is what this stranger, of whom at first I was afraid, said to me.

"It is by the voice that conscience is built: you must speak!"

The inmost order of my mind and heart spoken from the mouth of a casual stranger, and of conscience! And I was astonished that I had had to wait to have *said* to me that duty is the same in every mode of man's activity, before I could perceive it for myself.

He whom I had met was thinking of devotion, and of the public good. He had awoken the great hope that is supremest life—and that ever seems dead. He

wanted to reconstruct a better society by rediscovering in the Kabalistic formulæ of authority, the law of justice and equality discerned by the divine sage. What I had done in the blind forces of nature, he was doing in the blinded forces of life. First, scrutinise with a fresh, unbiassed eye: then speak, to establish order. But dead, petrified words are thrown to apostles. It is necessary to speak against ready-made words, and to demolish falsehood.

As I was about to reply he cried out:

“At a certain moment, the word must cease to be a sound, and become a thing. We must recommence Jesus Christ in our own person, when we have rediscovered Him under His today’s disguise. We must be good, pure, and poor in actual reality: poor in money, and poor in dogmatic and ritual subtleties. All must come from *below*, from the great expanse of life that bleeds as greatly as the sea: not from above, by changes and chances. All will be changed.”

And I say that without doubt men will, one day, understand all that. He replies that we must not wait. To say, “I hope” is to refuse. To say, “Later on” is, to be silent.

“Shame on the paradise that is relegated to another world. Art thou then certain that thou wilt live again? *Thinkest thou that the worms will vomit thy corruption?* The future is a mystery that cannot bring calm to the just. We, the followers of Waldo, are afraid of this future state when men shall be saved.”

“You are of the Vaudois?”

Involuntarily I recoiled from the man who bore the hated name . . . the rebel, . . . the aggressor. I even reproached him for his treachery in not telling me that before anything else.

But now . . . we are sitting side by side, he and I,

with clasped hands . . . we, alone of all mortal men have ceased to be idolaters. Night has fallen, and we seem to dwell among the stars.

Now, as the luminous distances of the Great Bear and Orion reveal the universe, I understand how that there is one law for surfaces and solids, and how that every unconscious thing falls with unerring wisdom—beneath the heavens there is a law for each and all.

And these two laws of physics and of peoples are alike, and form two sciences. Neither natural science nor political science are chance fantasies of the human brain: they are the reflection of the universe in the mind of man.

It is by the light of this reflected gleam that we must reconstruct around us a truer reality. Discouraged by all that is against us, I sighed, and closed my eyes. We are the Isolate. . . . Yet in the night I hold the man's hand in mine, and the contact speaks of limitless life, and the chain of the ages, and of all that is to be.

Who will show the world as it is! Who will wake the Night!

I was still beside him when he reached the walls and paving-stones, and was assailed on the outskirts of the town. I realised quite distinctly that, this time, it was the true beginning on earth, but I knew, too, that the abyss would take us. Hatred and malice, in a yelling ring, were closing in. In front, a Dominican monk in spotless white, a school-boy, his eyes half shut as he repeated by heart a passage from his book, an old soldier—a mere collection of mutilated limbs—a poet, full-fed and fêted by the lordly rich, a woman, her eyes dazzled by the tinsel of the soldatesque . . . one and all spat upon the Christian, and stoned him. They said:

"He would have us believe in over-beautiful things.

"He hates what we adore. And he believes in holding all things in common—women as well. . . . And that those who have nothing should force their way into the houses of the rich, armed to the teeth.

"He has blasphemed. He is of the Vaudois. To the stake! . . .

"He has spoken no blasphemy: he is a Puritan. . . . To the stake with him . . . hypocrite . . . Cathari!"

And over all an angry growl:

"He has no respect for those in authority. He will not obey. . . . See him . . . the enemy of man!"

The speakers were the poor artisans of the crafts and shops, blackened, bent, heavy phantoms crept forth to the attack from their wretched hovels, open alike to wind and icy cold, and where the only warmth was that of their own bodies.

He was already struck down and motionless, he had already breathed his last word of faith in the regeneration of the world, when one Telo came forth from the crowd and aimed a kick at the lifeless body. . . . Telo, the scum of the earth, with his bent, broken back, his hands changed to stone by toil, Telo, whose own children had been killed by his Baron, whose ears the priest had cut off. . . . And he yelled in fury:

"He wants to change the world!"

"He is dead," said the Dominican. "We, alas, can do no more for his soul's salvation. . . . Now he is in God's power alone."

The crowd melted away. Night fell.

There are too few good men. So few that they prove only that goodness has no home on earth. They arouse hope, but only to kill it.

I stayed there, alone with the Monk, who, with

folded hands and bent head, seemed unable to desert the body of him who had already passed beyond his power. But he felt my presence, looked up and saw me. Doubtless he recognised me, for he stood for a moment quite still to study me. Then he pointed toward me:

"That fellow is ours," he cried.

But there was no longer anyone to hear. No-one? Someone approached us through the rainy dusk, and I recognised the Fool. I thought I saw him just now in the *mêlée*, but in that confusion. . . .

Now I saw him stop behind the monk, who was still motionless as he denounced me, and bring down a heavy stone with all his force on the bared head. The Inquisitor fell like a log and lay still.

The Fool shook his head slowly from side to side. He too stumbled and fell. He was bedaubed with blood from head to foot. . . . His beard was a clotted mass . . . yet in the shadow it appeared to have regained something of its youthful blackness—and I could hear the blood dripping from his wounds.

His eyes were glazing, but he saw me, and spoke:

"In these days they call me the Fool. I am wise: But beware you of wisdom. One day they will see what this new thing really is. I am incarnate conscience—, therefore, the Wandering Jew of the ages. There will always remain some voices crying in the wilderness which they will not succeed in stifling. Those who know how to shake off the shackles of the present—worshipping that glory which is afar off. . . . The scattered forces of Israel. . . . The bitter exile of the Jews has unchained them . . . everywhere it has placed them at enmity with the vices and crimes of the massed nations, and brought the universal Refusal to their lips (not to their minds . . . for they have no clear conception of



what they do). It is I who shake the foundations of idolatry . . . send forth the cool wind of righteous wrath upon the people, and the seed of madness that raises them in revolt. . . . I marshal the forces of mankind against the worshippers of the empty word."

"I hate that which you hate."

The old man drew his breath painfully. He was kneeling, supported by both hands on the ground, and he stared at me fixedly, with eyes already suffused with blood, as he laid bare his inmost soul before me:

"But I hate you too! Only the Kingdom of Israel matters. In the end the race will bind all the nations of the earth with that strongest of all chains,—the chain of gold—even the gold of that fleet that Solomon sent forth from Eziongaber. Our enemies are still too many. But the day will come when I shall no longer be fighting with you against those others, but fighting against you over their dead bodies. Listen"—he staggered, and nearly fell—"Hear me well. . . . In my grave when you bury me, you shall place a heap of stones at my right hand . . . that yonder I may cast them at the Carpenter's Son."

He was already dead when three people passed by through the rain. The Inquisitor's body still writhed.

A poor woman saw it: the mother of a lad he had condemned to be walled up alive. She stooped over him, recognised him, and raised him in her arms . . . she was a slave—enslaved by humanity, by ignorance, by defeat; slowly this mother dragged herself and the body towards the town. . . . like a mother!

Torches . . . men-at-arms . . . a Franciscan with his coarse brown gown and long beard. They carried the monk into an open barn in the market-place. They laid him on a heap of straw, and soon a crowd gathered

round about the barn where lay this thing . . . livid with closed eyes in their circles of blue-black skin . . . in the midst of the flaring torches.

He cried out, shudderingly. It was very clear that he was afraid to die. . . . One could see his icy shudders.

"I am accursed."

His voice sounded strange, coming from the face that was already corpse-like. His bloodless hands seemed to struggle futilely to escape from some enveloping shroud.

For the fear of Hell was upon him—so great a fear that it cast a chill around . . . a shadow.

And the poor Franciscan, the humble peasant of Mother Church, hardly knew what to think; his eyes are full of tears.

In his plebeian simplicity he says to the dying man:

"You are fortunate, brother, you go forth to meet the Saints face to face."

And then it occurs to him that it might please the Dominican and distract his thoughts from the world he has to leave, to hear the lovely legends of the Saints: of Saint Martha who subdued the dragon and tied him with a ribbon, of Saint Giles and his doe—that amiable and discreet confidant, of Saint Honoratus, who by faith caused the monastery gates to be carried overseas . . . and of Saint Francis of Assisi, his own patron, with his bright bird-like glances, his swift, gesticulating speech, his laughter and his tears, Saint Francis who said "My little sisters, the doves," for he understood all animals, and even the wind and the rain. But after all it was the Benedictines whose Saints were the most numerous . . . was it ten thousand? No, sixteen thousand, surely!

He began a tale of enchanting sweetness:

"There was once a man who saw a most beautiful bird. . . ."

But the Dominican cried out: "Have mercy, my brother!"

His mouth is twisted with pain, like some exquisite church-carving of the damned. A cry of despair rises to the beams of the roof. He moves his head feebly from side to side, and then lies still on the reddened straw, that is a halo of gleaming coral round his brow.

"I have made men suffer and die. What have I to do with these things of which you speak? While they lived, my brother, these beings who were of the pure crystal of righteousness, while they lived, the Church set up once more on earth the long-abandoned rites of torture. And the torturers desired to be the angels of God."

"Brother," says the good monk—his fleshy lips still smack of well-zested food— "does not Thomas, the angelic doctor, tell us 'Happy are the Saints, for they shall look upon the tortures of the damned'? For those of the religious life it is more agreeable, but less meritorious to remain withdrawn in the hermit's cell than to fight in the van for the triumph of the Faith. For, as Saint Anthony, the father of monks; says: He who lives in solitude escapes the darts of three enemies: sight, touch and hearing. And moreover, Our Lord never bade us spare evildoers. He said, as Holy Scripture tells us: Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be rooted up and cast into the fire. He said: Let the unprofitable servant be cast into outer darkness; and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He said also: Bring hither my foes and they who willed not that I should reign over them, and slay them before my face.

"The two faces of the Church. . . . Her smile of

love and light . . . the spring . . . Dominic Canon of Osma, Hound of the Lord! by force thou hast turned my face from the light. Five hundred heretics have I given to be burnt. Once, in Champagne, I burned a hundred and eighty-five in one day. I have tortured thousands . . . walled thousands up alive . . . I invented that gibbet with an iron chain, which saves the victim from the flames for a moment, only to hurl him back, and prolong the agony of his death."

The crowd gathered ever closer round his glazing eyes and his terrible, piercing voice.

When the earth covers him, we shall still hear him cry: "Hear my confession!"

He confessed that to torture men, was his passionate delight.

"When Hildebrand ascended to Saint Peter's chair and enforced the vow of chastity upon the secular clergy, binding them, body and soul, to be slaves of the Faith, he set free other passions, demanding other satisfaction."

The poor friar interrupted him:

"Brother, it is said in the Book of Books: He is worthy to be my servant who says of his mother: I know her not: Of his father: Who is that man? and who knows neither brother nor son."

". . . demanding other satisfaction, I say. . . . The ecstasy of inflicting pain replaces the ecstasy of caresses. The tremor of flesh flinching from the steel violates chastity by demoniac paths. There is truly a marriage between the Inquisitor who stands and watches, and the victim, man or woman, who lies bound before him upon the worn and greasy wood of the rack, with limbs tautened with some new agony every second. Then do your eyes see truly into the souls of others (and there are looks that are kisses); there are cries of

pain that force their way into your soul . . . interior nakedness . . . more than nakedness. . . . There was Perrinet, whom I loved. When he changed his creed, when I had to fight against him, to fight against myself with his body, his virgin bones, what intimate conversations, how fervent, how solemn . . . until at last, his strength failed, he died."

"My brother. . . ."

The Franciscan frowned over this confession of repentance so little to his liking. He strode heavily up and down, stopped to stare piteously at the crowd, awkwardly twisted his rope girdle between his fingers.

"How should I not be damned, who have too dearly loved this sweat of agony!"

"My brother, you have in no wise transgressed the commandments of Mother Church, nor of the Holy Office. It is for the good of their souls that we must cure heretics against their will: *Compelle intrare*. In truth, you have shed no blood; you have done no violence to the decree of the Lateran Council."

"The Iron Maiden . . . it opens in two halves, and the inside is studded with iron spikes," shrieked the dying man, with his dreadful laugh. "How intimate, and how brief is the embrace she accords to the naked man delivered over to her. . . . She replies to the kindly precepts of Holy Mother Church: To chastise as charitably as possible, and without bloodshed! The Maiden sheds no blood, for the iron casket fits tightly together . . . shrouding the body in a decent coffin, where blood flows only out of sight. . . . Bloodshed!" The Dominican propped himself painfully on one elbow, and raised his voice (his eyes flamed like torches). "In the torture-chambers there is ever a smell of roasting meat and of blood . . . deafening screams, and smoke. . . ."

He was terribly afraid, shuddering with panic . . . but how he loved to speak of it! Only the ecstasy of his memories kept him alive.

"We sat, we two, surrounded by this crowd of naked men, variously bound, and by rusted iron chains. All around lay strange implements, dreadful, incomprehensible, unbelievably numerous and diverse, under the charge of a man too busy to know where to turn.

"In the middle of the room hung a slim white figure, very still. . . . He was accused of heresy. . . . His limbs were stretched by leaden weights on cords. From one corner came the dull thud of a meat-chopper. On a wooden scaffold, a kind of blunt-pointed roughly-made star rotated slowly. . . . And the star was alive . . . living flesh that still sweated blood . . . limbs that were nothing but useless stumps, a body held by the backbone in a vise. The sound you can hear if you listen is the sound of human bones cracking under weight. . . . This other . . . they are tearing out his tongue with red-hot pincers. He is not even bound to the rack. He obeys like a corpse, but he is alive, and not one pang is spared him. His arms are disproportionately long, swollen and blackened. The executioner, as he wields the long arms of the pincers, braces one knee against the belly of his victim to get a better hold on his tongue . . . from the dark furnace of the distorted mouth there issues vibrant flood waves, smoky—and smoke, too, from his eyes.

"Two priests watch over each of them.

"My partner was so old that he sometimes dozed off in his stall . . . he only woke up to take gentle hold of some mangled hand, and stoop down to bring his ear closer to some face that had once been human: 'Confess that you have spoken heresy, and plotted against Holy Church! Confess, and tell me the names of those with

whom you have spoken.' And he awoke also the moment his sleepy eyes caught the glimmer of blood on bruised flesh. Then he sprang to his feet to curse the executioner, his worn-out eyes flashing: 'Wretch! See what you have done! You have shed blood. And Holy Church, in her infinite love, wills that blood shall never be shed!' And he would insist on seeing the mangled limb carefully wrapped up so that no trace of blood should appear. Hear me, all: If that had happened only once, in some province, it would be enough to damn the Church!"

"My brother, you were always two in your struggles against the obdurate. And to each of the inquisitors who work together the Holy Father has given power to absolve the other: they are free to do their will, nor can they sin."

But the other raised his eyes to heaven and said:

"In the white and gold that is highest in Christianity, far above the regal crimsons and purples of the cathedral, I can still see her hand, white, almost luminous, tortured, that in a church window would have been sheer whiteness and goldness. And the voice that fell from beyond the benediction of that dove-like hand, that fell from the dome of heaven, proclaimed: 'There is a great thing to be done. How great a triumph for the Church if we could preach a crusade against the idolatrous Slavs of the north, the schismatic Greeks of Constantinople, and above all, against those heretics of Toulouse, as we preached it against the Turks and Saracens! My sons, prayer alone will raise up no armies. We must make use of the passions of men. Not one of the men whom we must use to re-establish our full authority and to affirm the Faith will ever understand the dogmas on which the Albigensian heresy is based. What they will understand is the glory

of pillage, and the joy of killing. We will therefore show them this glory and this joy, at the same time as the salvation of their souls, the rich fiefs, the treasure, and the captives to be held for ransom: thus did Alexis Comnenus enlist crusaders by the promise of dead and live booty. Let us spread forth before the eyes of the King of France and the northern Barons, the rich estates of the south, and straightway a great army will rise up to crush the south, and the fountain of the Capitol of Toulouse shall flow red with blood, as in the days of Clovis and Charlemagne.'

"And the voice that soared above the diaphanous hand, that fell from the skies, said:

"'Moreover, we must have some object to which to divert the misery and despair of the people. Their respect for all authority is crumbling. The south has sinned against the principle of temporal power. It is harder and harder to find labourers. In our days the Churches are built by the whip. Dangerous alliances seem to threaten on every side. Let us therefore repeat what others have said before us: Community!—It is a new word. . . . Therefore to be hated. . . . For it is not God's will that there should be any community of the poor against the rich, nor yet of the poor and the rich together.'

"My God . . . my God!" With supernatural strength the Dominican stood upright, and cried out asking what the name of God could mean on their lips!

A little after, he fell back.

"Have mercy, have mercy upon me!" he cried in a dreadful, delirious voice: "Mercy. . . . Do not strangle me with those white hands! I know I had no mercy for your tender youth. . . . But you will forgive. . . . Ah! . . . Loose me. . . ."



And we stared into the darkness, trying to distinguish the form of the girl as she appeared to him: the gentlest, the weakest of all his victims, and yet the only one who came to wreak her vengeance!

His hands lay crossed on his bosom. He had received the Sacrament, and absolution. Suddenly, he began to speak hoarsely, mechanically, as if reciting a lesson:

“Beware! Beware! For they will come on the eve of the Jewish Passover, to burn the Chapel with fire. Beware, or better still, forestall them!” Then he grew calmer, and he died surrounded by the murmured prayers of the poor, who had understood nothing of all he had said, save his last appeal . . . for we live in the sad time when the righteous and the evildoer speak alike to deaf ears.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WRECKAGE

At daybreak as he went to work in the fields by the river he saw a file of Kathar prisoners manacled two and two together; the Swiss Captain seemed at a loss what to do with them. . . . Further on in the field he saw the grave-digger digging a hole.

"This has to be got ready at once," said he, "for the criminal."

"Where is the corpse?"

"Still alive and well, in the Tower. He is a perfectionist and was denounced by his neighbor. I have to tear out his tongue and then quarter him with four horses. . . . You man who look so fixedly at me, listen! I am not cruel at heart, but I have no choice but to be Catholic."

In the evening when he went by again the trench was filled up, a mound over it.

In the evening, when he went by again, there floated gently down the river the whole file of manacled prisoners; their throats had been cut.

She smiles into space and since she is alone, she looks like a drowned woman.

The piteous burden of Torise's smile ascends towards the Holy Balm. She was condemned to death by the hatred and reprobation of the wretched creatures amongst whom she lived. Because she is about to become a mother, they insult her and drive her out, and for her no frantic survivors will weep, as for those

other dead. All have abandoned her. For her no saint's shrine has any more succour. She kneels and in vain tries to hold converse with the impossible. How comes it that even the religion of the poor grows weary of those who are too poor?

Her frail image toiling up the mountain seems to dissolve, and there appears a shadowy woman, bowed down in a like manner, making the same ascent. She ascends to the rocky shrine of Baaltis, up there. . . . Ah, how many women, as the centuries have rolled away, have climbed up to the sanctuary of one of those goddesses who, sister-like, share and divide with women their supreme sorrows; they change not save in their names.

Saint Mary Magdalen, who lived seven years in the Holy Balm, was fortunate indeed; she loved and sinned in the days when God walked upon earth; she knew Him face to face, Him and all His Court, so well indeed that Jesus visited her in the grotto of the Holy Balm and caused the fountain to gush out just to make those hands of hers white as of yore—to return to her that lost treasure. Mary Magdalen was born in the château of Magdala—like Saint Rosalie in the château des Arcs: both were people of importance. At the supreme moment the Virgin Mary held out her arms to her. Ah, it was never the Holy Mother in old age who did that! It must have been Sarah of Egypt who came on the ship with Mary Magdalen, Mary Salome, Mary Jacobé and the saints; Sarah is the protector of the homeless and the outcast—but she is also in the company of the mighty ones who wear aureoles.

But we poor souls, we meet gods only in pictures and only the Christ of the highways, whence He never moves. Torise had indeed approached the nun in the

Church's precincts but she seemed frozen, and silence proceeded from out her mouth: Torise was afraid of this scarred woman.

And she was ashamed that she was a creature of so little account, there on the mountain-peak whence she would soon take flight from this earth.

The great chain of events has unrolled and all the cries of men have been sown in their places.

The last upheavals of the plains are the last echoes of the triumphant laughter of the Master.

From the heights the laughter of that superior intelligence cascades down, down to the petty brains spread out beyond their round boxes:—that intelligence does what it lists, having said what it lists. Hark! You can hear the words of thunder, the majestic pretext made with the clouds: "I have taken up arms to glorify my God Assur."

"The heart and the will, entwined like a thyrsus, escape the tyrant's clutches. The Master's sway cannot touch the life—within."

O Epictetus, O Philosopher with your subtle attempts to oppose to reality a world woven out of phrases, come then and see if there is anything, anywhere, even in the inmost recesses of the heart, hidden from the Master.

The Sovran Captain points to the houses.

"I decided that these should be burnt, those smoked out. On the roof of one of the burning houses we saw a pure young virgin dancing naked, before she went to rest in the arms of the brasier. Ho there! Tear down that wall, enter the house where I had the man and woman walled up: two lovers, with their little one, who loved each other. . . . Look upon them! They

died digging their nails deep into each other's flesh. The evidence is plain to read: love turned to hate. So is it always when terror and hunger have passed all bounds. Ha! The breast is torn right through to the ribs. And see the teeth-marks on the other, and the dead woman's eyes are narrowed with pleasure at the taste. The child is dismembered. They have eaten its arms, or perhaps used them as clubs.

"Will you still say we cannot lay hands upon the inner life, your wretched inner life for which you can nowhere find safe refuge?"

"But better still, look at the dead man huddled at the foot of the wall. He clasped his hands together in despair so agonised, so savage, that one of them has been fractured. Look, that you may recognise that the master of force can hurl upon each other even those twin sisters, the right hand and the left."

But in a corner the dog, in the midst of the bodies of children, had starved to death.

A father snatched from his fireside and his family-circle, where sleep had overtaken him: of what avail his strength now? Soldiers no more to be resisted than tigers—how often have I seen the like. Have I then wandered about the world in the skin and harness of a soldier, a wolfish explorer of life? God in Heaven! What have I done? Memories come back to me, they crowd upon me, they pass gently before my eyes—and rend my heart.

In vain I hide my eyes in my hands, I see right through my dirty soldier's hands.

It was on a dawn harsh as the sea among the copses of Brittany or Arverne, in the days of the Saints, of

King Arthur or Ricimer the Great; it was a rainy evening on the edge of a birch-wood in Poland; it was in the terraced country of yew-trees and olives across which could be seen the castle of Ramon Beranger, golden in the sun. . . . (Surely I was not to blame, since I was a soldier!) In Germany we could feel the very houses, shut up, all alike without sound or movement, trembling as we passed. The environs of Dortmund, so calm and sweet, but full of the unseen mystery of St. Vehma since the Archbishops of Cologne became masters of Westphalia; the northern fields hammered by the furiously Christian knights of Hermann of Salza or the bands of Henry Rapson, Landgrave of Thuringia and rival to the Emperor. . . . It was at night (nothing can be blotted out!) in a little mud hut close by a palm-tree—the sky was a deep purple, the tree black—the year when Ussum Hassan, victor over the Turkomans of the Black Sheep, founded the dynasty of the Turkomans of the White Sheep to hold sway over Persia, Chaldea and Azerbaijan; it was when Akmet, of the race of the Tartars of Sarai and Khan of the Golden Horde of Kaptchak, was caught as by pincers between the Russians and the Nogaïs; when the enfeeblement of Henry VI's mind gave rise to royal hopes in the Duke of York's savage breast—in English fields glowing with the colour of the Spring's verdure. It was in a village like a closed white box in the great snow-clad principality of Novgorod, and the great white dogs around the sleigh seemed like a bevy of brides. . . . Or the band of us who rose up in fury to capture the man were Castellians whom the King of Granada was helping to lay waste Xeres, Arcos and Sidonia.

The landscapes, the hovels, the costumes, were not fashioned each time after the same mode. Ikon, em-

broidered stuff, pottery bedecked with colours like solid nosegays—a thousand invented differences fostered by each man's love of his own country,—a fairyland of different tastes and customs. . . . But what is the same 'midst every change of time and space is, the suffering of the poor who cannot even fight against their misery. From age to age, in every clime, always the same scene upon the human stage, tho' costumed in diverse manners by the diverse centuries and lands. This man branded and seized: greater than a sentiment, living being, for he is the foundation upon which all rests; this face disfigured by fear, the tears very close to his eyes, never the same yet the same always.

The Captain, whose neck was as powerful and dark as a bull's, laughed boisterously, unceasingly, whilst he seized the sentinel whom he had found asleep on his round, dragged him along the ground, and flung him from the top of the wall that fell sheer down.

The wretched soldiers laughed when the dice were cast to see who should be sacrificed—father, mother or children—(since a corpse had to be provided instantly) and each tried to cheat and secure the other's death.

But the same wretched soldiers who were told off to kill the child played with him till the very end, that he might not understand what was to happen.

And other base-born soldiers would not add their burdens to those of the old horse, because there were too many for him; tho' exhausted they took up their own loads again, to relieve the beast of his agony.

The field of battle, covered with stones and poison, ruined, burnt as far as eye can reach—Nature re-fashioned by Man!—Is now a field of horses.

The war-horses are ranked in rows like tables of stone, like the stones with grey shoulders in the Landes that date back to the time of Nomenoë, and even of Conan Meriadek. An ash-coloured donkey is there too.

Warrior-horses! Animals are like human beings; in them are the essential attributes, displayed in simplicity. Our words make use of them as symbols. And there are times when they represent us more fully and better than we ourselves, for man is rich but animals are poor.

The old religion, grandmother of all the religions, naturally chose among the animals the pure lines that represent Man. She created therewith the symbols which a grossly material cult has appropriated, but which in truth merit man's respect, nay, his adoration.

These war-horses drawn up in ranks proclaim innocence, ignorance of all reasons why, obedience, and a great wild mingling of strength and weakness.

#### GUILT

"Mercutio, Mercutio! Away with hesitation! Strike! You alone can do it. You know that full well. The news is positive; tonight he will butcher the twelve thousand Paduans in his army, to revenge himself upon Padua for surrendering to the enemy. . . . Strike down Eccelino, kill the Romano—rid the world of him even if it cost you your life!"

"I am not afraid to die, but I will not kill."

"If you kill him, the twelve thousand innocent men he has doomed to death will live."

"We must not do that which we condemn in others. What! Hatred of violence is to make me shed blood!"



“Swift, swift! Strike at the evil—at its heart and at its head. There are twelve thousand of them.”

“I will not kill, for we must not kill anyone.”

Eccelino de Romano, the Ghibeline tyrant of Padua camped before Mantua, gave the order during the night, and the twelve thousand Paduans in his army were slaughtered. Which will the wrath of God smite first, he who slew, or he who would not slay?

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SHIP

The aged ship was worn by the water that had rolled against its sides as night rolls up against evening. There were twelve of us united in this passionate voyage of adventure.

We were fleeing from the misery of our time. When we asked ourselves: "Whither go we?" we answered: "Toward freedom."

We go toward Ireland.

"Comrades, be swift to turn the storm-battered walls of your ark elsewhere, direct elsewhere the tall, clear-cut shadow of your figure-head. Ireland has been the abode of misery and barbarism since Henry Plantagenet built his palace in its midst. The English Pope said to him: 'I deliver over to you this Emerald Isle as I send to you this emerald ring.' Erin was sold to England by the Pope, to the King by the Church. There are still free Britons in Wales, but should we reach those shores it will no doubt be to learn that a cage has been built right round them.

"Comrades, let us set sail for England; know ye not that she is now a free land? The will of man has blazed forth there and has forced the King to submit to the authority of law."

"Nay, nay, it was but the rage and will of the barons and great churchmen that Simon de Montfort inscribed upon the parchment. They have bridled the English King,—but what difference does it make to the English

people? What difference do these new names, this lawyers' jargon, make to the flock of two-legged beasts? Nowhere will you find the poor more wretched and the vagrant more cruelly hunted down than in the land of the Great Charter, the land which has appropriated, as Rome before it, the *word* liberty. The word is engraved on the workers' collars but none the less they are tied, till death, to the same demesne and the same craft. English liberty! Let us away from this foggy mirage."

"Down over there, comrades, at the outermost edge of the earth, hanging like a pendant from a necklace, lies Thule. When Harald Fair-Hair united the northern fiords to those of the south across the virgin hordes of the Buendi, by his network of lines he brought all the Danes under his sway. Then certain free men took to the sea once more and sailed far to this great wild, unsullied island, to whose shores the snow-bears are sometimes drifted on flotillas of ice."

"Yes, but these free souls left the shores of Iceland when it too was seized by authority—they fled elsewhere, elsewhere—like us!"

"The free cities call us urgently. How glorious are these municipalities of Italy, Provence and Flanders."

"Your prow will never reach that glory, comrades. It will vanish as you draw near. These communes are simply lordships with many heads. To the baron and the bishop there is now added the heavy burden of the burgher, the toiler who has been clever enough to make others toil for him. There is no place for common men in *that* liberty, and the mass has never shared it save in the brief moment when it helped to conquer it—for others. The Town-Hall has rejected the poor desires

of artisans and peasants more savagely than ever did castle, church or monastery. When at last the wretched peasants, stripped bare by greed, gutted and naked as poplars in the wind, have risen against their fate, never have they received the least assistance from the communes. The merchants—those freedmen—are, of all, the worst oppressors of slaves.”

“Comrades, I will guide you to the workers’ fraternal Guilds.”

“Their brotherhood is a matter of compulsion. Bonds are created between them only to hold them fast. Thus the whole mass is caught in one trap, each man held fast in his place. True, mastership is still open to the journeymen of the artisans’ unions, forbidden at first by the Kings of France (as being of too Germanic a pattern) tho’ afterwards used by them, but that will last very little longer, and the gulf becomes ever deeper—as though it were nature’s own desolation—between those who rule and those who work.”

“In my country, comrades, among the Dithmarchers and the Frisians, there have never been serfs. Let us put in there; the sea has swept away the Batavian shore and united her waters to those of Lake Flevo. Here are men labouring on the marshes, sweeping away the water, draining the gulfs—so do they change the sea into dry land. Work like that can never be accomplished by the degraded efforts of men who are in thrall to others. None but free men have love enough in their hearts to sow the grains of earth and create the broad expanses of the fields.”

“Yes, and that is why they wandered forth from their homes to the four corners of the globe, carrying

their liberty and their republic on their backs, when the Counts of Flanders or the Philips of Alsace forced the secret paths through the marshes, and turned to their own advantage the people's superhuman labours—just as did the first Pharaohs in the first dawn of history with the labours of the first Egyptians.”

“Then these makers of solid earth went off to endow the world with little Flanders—which later were stolen from them in the same way. How are we to find these great, wandering sowers?”

Night falls—or perhaps it is a storm, darkening the sky like the flash of a bird's wing. The figures grow dim, shrink into themselves, absorbed in hunger and thirst and dreams.

“Comrades, there are regions specially protected by nature, inaccessible to armies, wild nests. . . . The Basques, the mountaineers of the Illyrian Hills, those of the Black Mountain and of Albania, of the Caucasus, the indomitable Lesghines. . . .”

“They will have naught to do with any of us. They are only free still because they have remained imprisoned within their natural citadels. Their beautiful freedom is full of hate, savage. They would cast us out as strangers. They would say to us in words of terrible majesty: ‘We do not wish to know who you are.’ In like manner they would repulse us were we angels from God.”

“We must hope in hope's despite.”

“No.”

Poised between the sea's twilight and the sky's, they mournfully bowed their heads, standing close to the great solid stem of the ship silhouetted against the sky.

But one of these half-shadowed faces were raised again, whitely.

“Venice! . . . Comrades, wherever I may wander I am haunted by the splendour of her reputation, so dazzling that to imitate it in the north there has had to be the Hanseatic League with its fifty towns, and amid these towns that wonderful gilded Wilby where the pigs’ troughs are made of silver!”

“Republic need not mean Commonwealth! Venice is the republic of greed, that bloodiest of all tyrannies. Her great magistrates, gilded and adorned with the privileges of noble birth, no longer refrain from merciless oppression. From Ravenna to Quarnero behold the aristocracy of wealth, the sumptuous paradise of merchant-princes, the best devised hell on earth for the poor. Let us flee from the sinister, empurpled reflections in the lagoons! I myself must needs hide from the daggers of her eavesdroppers—they are everywhere, as are the spies of the Flemish guilds—for I am a banished Venetian artisan, I go condemned to death by the laws enclosed in the Republic’s iron casket.

“Venice is at war with Genoa; Pisa with Amalfi. Florence has designs upon Sienna, and Milan intends to attack Pavia, Cremona and Brescia who are enriching themselves at her expense. Each one of them is at war with every other; each one, as soon as may be, strives to utilise the great, enduring, lasting religious or political conflicts in its own petty interest. The warring factions manœuvre against one another with commerce and demagogy—that are but disguised war, and with war direct: meanwhile, continually and with heavy oppression, Germany descends upon warm and lovely Italy. Victory or defeat, and between them—no peace; and all the old world resembles Italy.”

“Men say that Sicily is happy. They say that there every man may worship his own god and that Moors, Jews and Christians live side by side without rending one another, thanks to that Italian Cæsar, to that Frederick who rules there bathed in sunlight, his richly-caparisoned elephant bearing the royal standard upon his domed back.”

“It was so once, but now no more, since Innocent IV excommunicated Frederick II and raised the world against him in the name of liberty. The Pope has gone the round of all the princes of Christendom, offering them with outstretched hand the imperial crown, and the radiance of Lucera’s handsome Emperor is quenched, and the happy peace of Sicily has fled away. Sicily is no more to be desired!”

We are laden with the sorrow of bearing within our hearts an image which exists nowhere now on earth save here and there, in fragments. Liberty does not exist at all if it is not universal; you can no more divide her up into diverse parts than you can the sea.

We are a wreck that still floats. Despairingly the phantom-ship seeks a refuge whither it may direct its rolling course.

“The Templars and the Knights Hospitallers! It is their mission to welcome all Christians.”

“Pomp and grandeur are their main endeavour! Besides, they have consecrated their lives to extremest mutual hate; the Syrian Sea is still red with the victory which the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem won over their brothers.”

“The Jurors, the Pacificos, the White Caps!”

“Or else those who try to steal liberty, or the elixir

of liberty—money—the banded robbers, the pirates, the plunderers of land and sea!”

“The rascals, and trained thieves who are bailiffs to the King of Thune, the crop-eared and the gypsies of Bohemia, those descendants of Sarah, who pass in fragments to the Saint-Marys-of-the-Sea!”

“The hunted races who are treated as lepers, generation after generation, simply because of their race, men accursed, men like dung, trampled men, the deformed, those who may not enter a church, or even join in a festival, or any crowd. Let us go to them!”

“Yes, to the accursed. But, comrades, they are everywhere; they are in no land where one can find them, nor is there any need to know them in order to be with them!”

And thus from every side there fell upon that tiny island of a ship the cold wind of reality. Toward freedom? Then nowhither, nowhither.

“Do your eyes behold freedom?”

“I behold the North, the South, the East, the West. . . .”

“I behold Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter.”

The vessel athirst for freedom and repulsed by men, turned round and round on the sea, caught in the cage of the world. Never could we burst through the bonds of our flight and always we came back again full circle.

Our goal is visionary but, prisoners of hope, we shall flee from unhappiness as long as misery remains unchanged, as long as day succeeds to day. On, away! We shall haunt the wide eastern seas, from Mozambique to Calicut, where the Arab and Malay navigators have set up sea-laws nobler and more honoured than those in our old ocean-spaces. Further yet! We shall



voyage on the sea of darkness, among the Arctic fishermen who, since the year one thousand, have harpooned the whale in the abysmal depths a drowning man would take long, long to reach.

We are flecks of greatness, as terrestrial dust upon the waters: let us then resolve to voyage to the very end of space!

It is the horror and dread of the past that thrusts the poor on toward the unknown. We steered in the opposite direction to that which custom follows, and at the end of our inflexible voyage, on a day the new world opened before our eyes, rising before us miraculously, slowly, as a garden springing from earth.

There we found a pyramid built in tiers and in the earth long skulls engraved with polished stone instruments. There we encountered natives and narrow heads and we asked them: "What has there been here?" and they answered us: "War and blood. And over there, whence you come, what has there been?" We answered: "War and blood." In the other half of the world we found war as we found evening.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE VOICES

#### MASSARD

Night. No wind, nor any noise to plumb and show forth the depth.

I stretch out my two hands, and touch with light fingers the pines that breathe upon me as I pass: from all sides they press upon my burned forehead as I climb.

This evening I have rid myself of the kissing, warm, tender cluster of my family: "Leave me!"—and they all said, "Leave the Master." She stayed on, leaning with her elbows on the little table where are the tinkling scales and the coffers, the little table that, with its white board and thick supports, flattens the gentle, overflowing, milk-white Peronne. And my son and daughter-in-law, too, stayed there where I had left them, side by side, with rounded eyes.

Sometimes, God knows, when I'm alone, I think on it—the young husband and wife are brother and sister, for both are sprung from me. But none knows it;—Mahaut, the wife of Guillaumin, who was complaisant to me, was dead and buried in time for the union of our children to be accomplished—whence my financial affairs prospered enormously. As for God, who was third party in this secret, not only has he pardoned my marriage, but he has blessed it, in virtue of unstinted donations, and the gentle violence of prayer.

Everything has been successful for me in this world.

I need in my house ever more spacious prisons for the accumulations of my gold. All the world says: "Master Massard ought to call himself Master Lombard." Here,—and there,—and there on the shores I ordain the warlike laws of trade, I have captains who bring to me—without division—the profit of expeditions: and I have my Jew. It is a piece of furniture that belongs to me. I bought him so that his abject hands should perform the usurious functions that—miraculously—augment capital, and bring forth money from nowhere—and that Holy Church (and yesterday our holy King) forbids Christians to practise themselves.

Thus have I avenged myself for my former poverty and taken others' portions, for there is insufficient terrestrial paradise for all men to have part in it, and here-below, each one who is happy must have the substance of many unhappy.

I walk on in the shadow of fields and forests, carefully picking my way with my cautious, blind feet. And now at last, after the long glade that is thick-strewn as if with the broken stones of a whole city, (a fatal place for trees; the fallen or upright skeletons of wood point their white limbs toward all the stars of night), I felt the narrow trench of the two moss-grown rocks that are a pointed portico: then, with groping hands, I reached the hole. I advance, and I now have above me the great spaces of the stars. I am in the subterranean passages, and even were the sun shining in the heavens, I should still be enwrapt in this same thick blackness.

I go toward the delicate, magical centre of the night: To the hollowed chamber—in all probability I am the only one among the living who knows of it now,—

whither there filters down the echoes of all that is said in the great Hall of the Castle of Elcho.

For I know that an astounding event is to take place in that hall. I scarce dare breathe the visitor's name to myself. It is the Baron of Rulamort, old Ermelin himself!

Elcho and Rulamort, that are the very embodiments of hatred, have decided to meet in person tonight, to hold parley. It is the first time in all the centuries of strife whence the two houses have won their glorious renown. And therefore I, who must know what is afoot, am come to seek in the bowels of the earth the echo of this unbelievable meeting,—as others seek therein some incorruptible corpse of treasure, and as others came long ago to celebrate in the depths the fearful cult of the Earth-spirits.

I halt. It is here, in this narrow trench where my hand feels, confusedly, the six stone facets. It is hither that the voice, by some artifice of construction, is focussed and gathered from the vasty depths.

Scarce had I entered this sarcophagus when the rock spoke to me: "Greeting!"

Yes, this word came forth from the unending wall that engulfs me, and I fear this frozen, broken sound, this thing that is formless and yet wings by like a sudden bat: the very rock seems to stir and tremble, to send me this "Greeting". But the rampart I lean against moves not, and it is but the spark of human speech that cleaves the immobility to where I listen, avid and bent, my cloak tight about my shoulders, my ear intently straining after the oracle on high.

And now in the hard confessional where I am ensepulchred upright, words, without sight of their speakers, assail me: they are like stone amidst the stone. Two, three voices. They cover one another,

compete and clash. How confusedly I hear! And I hear too the tumultuous, confused noise of footsteps, rustlings—a formless clamour, disjointed from life. I shut my eyes, to visualise what I hear. . . .

To my thieving ear come groaning or furious complaints:

*“Anathema!”*

*“The order of things is menaced. Respect, death. . . .”* It is the long, low cry that rolls down from the castle, transmitted by the roots of trees, and by the dead.

The speaker, the aged potentate, strives against the ending of a cult. I seemed to see his anger like a fleeting fire-flame over his face.

Bursts of loud speech came to me: *“All Faith is departing. . . .”* That is what the earth-beast repeats to me in its stifled, muted voice.

*“All Faith is departing.”*

*“The people’s head becomes daily harder. The lay, burgher conspiracy.”*

But there is more to come. O yes, there is more! Listen! Listen!—cries to me the lipless immensity, the storm of sound that beats upon me through the close-packed earth.

*“There is a disloyalty that is ever extending, a plague of disloyalty and shame. The populations of field and town betray their everlasting masters, and turn from their manifest destiny and degree.”*

And in a loud, raging voice the ferocious Seigneur says all. “I hear, I hear!”

*“The devouring voracity of the King of France, the tearing up of the ancient, deep-rooted nobility.”*

This is the peril that has brought together the two incarnate lands.

This menace it is that strikes my hidden, unseeing

head, and through the sound-gaps and the intervals of lost words, I make out the burden of his complaint. It is no longer a question of a vague allegiance, like the homage that links the beneficiaries of lands to the Count of Provence and to the Emperor of Germany. Now that the powerful lords have devoured the weaker, over *them*—according to the law of greatness—towers the strongest of all: the Sceptre-bearer of Paris and Rheims has extended right to the boundaries of Elcho and Rulamort his rounded fulness of roads and lands:—and now he desires to devour *them*.

They go in horror and fear of this mighty stranger. Their raised voices as they reach me are charged too with exasperation at the baseness of the peoples. Because they prefer to live in peace, the peoples lend themselves to this heretical distortion of the fatherland.

(The only true fatherland is the jealous-loved paternal countryside of Church and Castle.) They sacrifice all honour to a soulless system, a vast stretch of land that is as disparate from north to south and from west to east as the whole world, having no justification save a word: the name of a King. . . .

I re-utter between my teeth the phrases I heard confusedly.

“Infamous apostles of the dogma of French fraternity—blasphemous words!—sold to the foreign King have the audacity to spread these errors, in which the villeins, and all the dregs of the poor, see their advantage. And so the plebs no longer confines its ambitions, as in time past, to the affairs of its lords: it thinks of its own profit! And thus the great idea of order disintegrates, and the just hierarchy of domains and of populations is shaken and shattered—the wise organisation of the inequality of men. Already

we have to fill ourselves with the harsh, dry French language.

“Our speech is being torn from us as if it were a bright cloth. It is escaping from our heads. Beware! Our sovereign crowns will be broken like our right of war.”

Thus the cry of the powerful who now are in turn despoiled; this their malediction on a new, over-extensive law that descends upon the world comes to me in this six-walled cavern.

They will have none of the Fleur de Lys! Their fiery hearts rebel: “*Let our peoples and our lands perish, so only we save our fortune!*”

(And what is *my* best interest in all this?)

They have stopped shouting, they are talking very low, like the pulse of my blood. What are they preparing? I know not. The words that gnaw me like graveyard worms have no contours: I cannot now reach up to the living source. . . .

Yes I can, though: *War*.

Then I hear no more speech, only laughter. I pierced into the wheels of their laughter. In this hole where sumptuous mystery is distilled drop by drop I see them, for one moment, in their laughter, for sound and light are moulded into form—either their own laughter or the dragging bruit of weapons. The two enemies swear alliance above war itself. The laws and the divisions of great forces are not what we suppose: they are greater.



## CHAPTER XVII

### YOU FAIL AT THE GOAL

In the end I came back. Ages had passed, and now at last was the end of the cry: "On and away!"

On a day I came back, I myself, or some fragment of me, some fragment.

I returned to my home with my closed eyes, directed and carried on by a far-blowing scent, the blue scent of the sea, the green scent of the pines and the mossy stones.

Night was falling when I arrived: the sun's brightness no longer fell upon my head and I felt night's freshness around me.

Night, that hides all things, gave my closed eyes a gentle welcome; my return was like myself. For me it was not, as for all other wanderers, the last great illusion. For me it was its very heart, its essence.

In this region where I had lived the depopulation had been so great that I could feel the vacant spaces.

The people renews itself constantly, and yet, at the end, it had been driven away, scattered to the winds by war upon war. From every side the empery of despair had closed down upon them.

But there is still a refuge here and there, and above all there is the holy chapel of my life—the four walls within which I found once more thy voice, thy hands, beloved Clairine, whom I cannot see, who, since I cannot see, art there like the whole world.

Clairine, who is everywhere about me, speaks. She



tells me of departure, of death, of ruin. We breathe the air of death.

So much has gone. . . . The castles have vanished—they are like nothing now but the stone-quarries from which they were built. The gardens and fields lie ruined on the earth like torn tapestry. Angelino has vanished, and Torise and Clément Nourrit, and all the others; all those to whom God gave two mad arms, two arms warring against each other, and a hostile head that wore them out. For all those who were my companions there came a day when, suddenly, there was no more movement.

All has vanished, but at least there remains the song of parting, the only sweetness in the emptiness. In the old days when we two sang it together we used to stretch out our arms into the night. Nothing is greater than the voice, and everything becomes possible when a human mouth is unclosed.

Before all had departed or died the incredible magnanimity of the people had time to change the hideous name of Rulamort into that of Rulamour. A poem celebrated the phantom ship, that floating isle, that isle of hope which for ever encloses the twelve souls athirst for freedom. In the poem of Doon le Réchin it is related that the wicked Baron Doon became poor, and had to take to flight and even—last, worst chastisement of fate—had to work with his hands at Aurillac, he and Bertha, his wife. To wear out their eyes and their hands in work! A frightful thing, and Doon and Bertha wept, and the poor folk who heard their woes wept too. And naturally, God could not leave them to go on working.

The poetry which springs, like ears of corn, from the underworld—for all true poets do but listen to the people—has apportioned, in its spirit of revolt and its

desire for perfection, virtue to the hangman and victory to the vanquished. It has glorified the Celts of King Arthur who were driven forth, and the Cid who met with ignominy, and Count Roland, who, rather than have the distaste of asking for help, allowed all his rear-guard to perish; Roland the Paladin who through avid desire for praise became the assassin of his own men; Roland, the father of the great lie of warlike virtue.

There is a world of colours and sounds that begins to live just when the world of life dies. Beauty is the tender, sensuous aspect of truth. But beauty is too beautiful: woe to all who touch her: they become a sacrifice, and her great treasures, that the people discover, are but the fruit and the seed of despair.

Angelino. . . . He sold his soul to the Devil that he might hold fast to the tip of light's wing, and that the rose-window in the Church might seem as if wrought by music.

"He bargained away his soul," said Clairine, "to buy light."

"Like all the other unfortunates," said I, "only they do not know it."

Through him, who spent himself, we can see the poor folk in their house, dark as a grave. But just a vestige of brightness aureoles these living beings, there where the mean wall and the mean roof are pierced by the sky. The slave of work whom the long days engrain with smoke and grey scum is great only in his aspirations. He is a king of misery and a god of weakness.

Then Clairine said:

"Angelino is dead; we alone go on living."

"When we are dead," I said, "it is he alone who

will survive the years and centuries in the light he made."

"No!" she cried with tremendous emotion, "he will not survive, he will be dead. Other men will think of him, that is all. Only the living *are!*"

But the living have only songs and images to help them as they pass on their way. Blinded creature that I am, I see the human *Cry*. My closed eyes bring me this advantage: I can listen, I can hear the colourful things of which Clairine speaks, revealing a little of the treasures of suffering and truth, and at last it seems I am granted my prayer for the impossible.

Both of us say: "Once more I behold thee!" I stretched out my hand and touched her face, and my hand saw that when Clairine said "I behold thee" she had shut her eyes.

To us alone was granted still a little happiness, to me the blinded man, to her the worn-out woman.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CIRCLE OF THE WORLD

It is a bitter night in the station. The few passengers are shaken and swept along by the wind and the rain. All long for the train that will rush them far away.

In the trembling glass-work of the wall the door opens out a hole on to the platform. In the midst of the black, wind-filled frame is an electric globe, against which the straight lines of the driven rain show forth sharply.

Vividly white against the blackness, the globe attracts and holds fast the wandering gaze.

Yonder, in the depths of the rain, in the blackest inking of the tableau (and constant trampling has stained inkily the stone floor of our prison-house waiting room), yonder one can glimpse an iron geometry with intricate sparklings and buffers of wadding.

Greasy-silver piston rods, muscular switches, rails shining like glass, engines like funeral hearses loaded with black ostrich plumes—the scene was a nightmare of iron safes methodically vibrating with the rhythm of the earth.

And inside, with their backs against the wall that oozes out sooty drops—whereby night reaches in and grips them—the little crowd waits, and waits, their sodden faces drawn, shapeless, yawning. They are mournful as they sit here, crowded together on the bench. From time to time a shadow wakes to life, to ask the time.

The white round of the electric moon inscribed in its black, quadrilateral frame becomes golden, coppery. It comes from the immense sea. It is vague, lovely, gentle. The wind is a fragrance that caresses.

"Go on, father. . . ."

The children are enraptured by what has been told them, the high-sounding adventure still ringing in their ears, their golden heads grouped in the shadow of the shelter, and so small that they are lower than the level of the table.

"It is all so far off, my dears. During the time our folk were still among mankind."

The darkness of the wall (I can see my big straw hat hanging there, steeped in the blue shadow) is cut by a rectangle of light: a door opening on a shining beach. The sand sparkles in the sun like a sea of molten stars; the heat is a golden haze that gives curving undulations to all that the eye can see. Our nest of freshness, with its creeper-walls, where the shadow gives to all things a skin of night—clear-cut as moonlight in summer—is assaulted by the blazing bonfire of space; the joints and hinges incandesce. Outside, near the palm-tree that scintillates like a fountain in fairyland, I have just seen passing over the sand, over the blinding gold, the flat, mauve shadow of the dog, his ears pointed and his paws intertangled.

"When we were still among mankind. . . . It is now two hundred years since our people were isolated from men, two hundred years since those on board the Holy Balm were swept by the tempest to the uttermost ends of the earth, to these shores. Leaving their boat, they subdued the inhabitants of the coast with their more lethal weapons, formed a herd of workers as law ordains, and founded a city, in pious imitation of those they had left afar off.

“And although life followed its universal course, and the earth aged in company with the men who tilled it; though the generations succeeded one another steadily, each dominated by the name of the patriarch who ruled it: Jean, Renaud, Michel, Jean, Bastien, Renaud: we have remained, in truth, in that epoch when our fathers’ fathers set foot on these shores.

“We are too entirely cut off from the old world; we have lost the instinct of greatness. We have not even explored the boundaries of our continent or dared the distance beyond the horizon. Every expedition has returned dismayed after a few day’s journey; although we know that northwards there are limitless regions of dry land and universal life passed there in days gone by. When our fathers, who were giants—because one with the main mass of humanity—came here, they were not the first. The Icelanders of Bjornis and Leif Ericson scattered in the year 1,000 over the white lands that they called Greenland to attract other settlers. They long remained linked to the Danish soil by voyages. For a long time they paid Peter’s pence, and they came down so far South that we knew them. They said men had forgotten them, and we in our turn were gradually sundered from them by things beyond our control. The roads disappeared. The once green sea has thickened with rocks and mountains; the past is recounted dreamily or in tales told to children; Leif, son of Eric the Red; Greenland and Vineland; but these names are no more than strings of words, like shadows of birds, material only for dreams.

“As for the open sea, eastward—even if we had a ship we would not dare launch it in the limitless direction of the lost kingdoms. And we cannot build a boat: we are too weak, and immured in distance.”

"Do they remember us, father? What do they say about us?"

And while heavy silence replies to the children's question, we thought with them: What are they doing, over there in the world? Are they asleep? Their numbers are great enough to cover the seas. Be it as it may, no man from the great world has returned here for two centuries.

All is strange, and above all, the phrase whereby we try to attach reality to a sign in the kingdom of speech. *We are in the year of grace 1461.* We are in no epoch at all, since we are all alone and sightless!

If we were indeed the only living? If the old world had disappeared? If it was a null expanse bearing the visible continuation of names and dates. . . . If it floated in the firmament like Fomalhaut, or frozen Altair, or viewless Aldebaran, or Sirius, that crystal pyre! . . .

All that is traditional, all that is *there* is wonderful! All remembrance is angelic. We live under the influence of that unknown world as if it were astral. We are filled with regret and with hope from the hour we are born. We are the men and women of hope. Over there!

High above all else in our lives, we ever felt one need, one desire: the world beyond. When we talk beside the sea, at sunset, our gaze involuntarily turns eastward toward our lost dwelling-place; instinctively we scan the empty wave in the hope of discerning some spot on the horizon. And amidst our daily task and work-a-day chatter, we tell one another, always: "They will come back."

We are, in truth, plunged in a sort of dream. Truly we belong wholly, and whether we wish or no, to the

rounded vastness of earth and the multitude of the living.

Ever better than I, my eldest son walking beside me on the beach knows how to withdraw into himself, to contemplate the far-away past across the gulf that is fixed, to listen to its voice, and to know its awe. He, more than I, is its guardian.

He abandons himself in prayer to that far distant past from which our fathers fled, yet which, ever since, has drawn us so powerfully. He is like the artisans who built the churches. Their desperate faith is sealed upon his visage. Often he has the stony stillness of gargoyles dizzily leaning upon their elbows, their bodies part of some vastness carven out of the clouds on high. All about him, when his gaze wanders, he sees the tiers of clouds build themselves up into cathedrals. Ofttimes, impelled by some mysterious racial urge, as if he had a ghostly double, he would begin to build with his hands poor, transitory, mimic churches of loose stones, that fell down again: for we have no more skill to build stones to a height, than power to build ships on a scale splendid enough to rediscover our eastern paradise.

Power sojourns, then passes on. The narrow-skulled autochtons once knew how to build pyramids like this whose spacious tiers may yet be seen through its slowly-sliding avalanche of stones; knew how to mould whole mountains. But now they survive their own glory in weariness and oblivion, and the mountains sculpture themselves anew, each one.

“It is they! They have come back!”

On a day, we saw a new speck upon the sea's horizon. Then we left everything and gathered in groups upon



the shore, our hands tremendously idle. As the speck grew and increased this holidaying crowd grew too, until, all packed close together upon the sands, we no longer knew each other. But we spoke to each other of this thing that was coming like a meteor, like a world fallen from heaven.

By evening the moving vessel rose upon the bay, vast like one of those castles that are built of words. Tremblingly we pointed it out to each other—the holy Ark—enormous with her column of a mast, upon which sways a great flail bossed with muscles of reefed canvas. The boat which brought our ancestors had been large too; she had been formidable, superhuman; but she no longer existed except in dreams, and since then we had made nothing but clumsy rafts, or frail, timid craft that hugged the land and shunned the open sea.

A twofold clamour broke out—joy crying out like anguish. From the dark ship a dark boat fell like a drop, and grew as it approached over the sea's scatter of green and rose triangles; and—simultaneously with the rays of the setting sun—men spread themselves over the sands where we were rooted by the great event.

Men, the wizards from Europe, full of the world's secret!

A glowing crowd—laden with colour; and so curiously clad! . . . Blinking, we revisioned their human form. What! Had men changed as much as this? . . . But they are accosting us, and we understand what they say! They speak as we do, though much faster. A young man is saying he is from Florence, and that the boat sailed from Dieppe. Here a belt-buckle darts gleams of light; there a dagger-hilt shows, encrusted with gems; beneath a black sleeve one can see the violent crimson of a cloak and the embossed

pattern of a doublet—carven cloth! They laugh very loud: a merry-making fair of men.

One can see that their coming marks the completion of a victory over space. Bands and shafts and spears of dust-of-light shine straightly upon them from heaven; the sea is purple and silky; in her midst burns a great river of illumination.

There came an extraordinary moment. They were going to tell us everything.

“Brothers, brothers, what has been happening in the world?”

We throw ourselves upon them, our suppliant hands stretched out towards these beings who know—expecting to hear everything from their lips. We fall on our knees before their voice. Upon this beach, biblically-simple, every passion vanishes before our thirst for knowledge.

They understand, and marvel.

“What, then! You do not know! You have been asleep for two hundred years? We are here! We are here!”

They too reached out their hands to us; and the moment was so great that as they faced us their eyes were full of tears; and in the setting sun those tears glistened ruby and topaz.

“All is changed! The earth is transformed!”

These dazzling strangers who made our old countryside appear around us barren and sacrificed; and who seemed to detach us from ourselves—brought such strange contentment that their voices seemed a song.

“What has been happening in the world?”

“Wars. . . . But now a new age has begun!”

“What wars? Who?”

“Everyone—battles everywhere. The world has

come to the end of its strength: it is vanquished by wars. But we have come to the end of the Iron Age."

They would like to talk to us of other matters than of the past—of other things which draw them; but we are avid for that which, for us, has not yet been.

"Who? What are they called?"

For a moment these men, gathered in a noisy throng upon the burning beach, are all silent together. You could see they had too much to say and did not know where to begin.

One warlike-looking man—(he had no hauberk, but plates of iron upon him)—begins. He clenches his fists, throws up his head, and says:

"Scanderbeg!"

Then the harsh voice of another soldier:

"Him! The chieftain Alexander, he who has blotted out the ghost of Richard Coeur de Lion in the hearts of the Infidels—he who is most like Sikandar the Twy-horned, also called Alexander the Great; an ancient King, you know. . . . Scanderbeg, Prince of Albania, the White Devil of Wallachia. He has cleared the Grand Turk and his hundred thousand followers out of Croia: he has been victorious everywhere,—everywhere!—with his Venetian troops."

The Chief, the god of armies! Amid the smoke of battle, projected by the shock of acclamations, this was the picture which takes shape over the sea. A man plainly dressed and standing apart in the magic rays, says "Sabaoth!" The waves seemed to thrust upon us the outskirts of the clanging mêlée of the old world's men-at-arms, bristling with a thousand splintered lights. They cried out:

"One day he galloped by in front of me—he whom men call the Devil, the Voivode of Transylvania, John

Huniade. He it was who saved Belgrade from Mahomet II's swarming followers."

"Mathias Corvinus is more invincible than his father! The man of the black crow who holds a gold ring, put himself by a single stroke, in the place of the Jagellons. He took Hungary as Podiebrad did Bohemia; and he will take Bohemia from Podiebrad."

"A long time ago—I wasn't twenty, and I am fifty now—a woman's hand gripped mine before the battle." The man who had spoken lifts his hand, and says: "Look you; here, as it might be, there was a stool. . . . A little French town—a house where the King lodged; I was on guard. I remember well; there was a pattern of red squares upon the wall, and the floor was made of black squares, only they were cut with joints by cross lines,—so. She passed. All in steel—the whole length of the wall, from one gateway to the other. All in steel except for her face, and her hand, which took hold of mine to urge me on. I can hear, just as it was then, the clank of her footsteps and her armour, and I see her all among red and black squares; even the shadow cast by her forehead, her nose and her finger—just as if she were here now. I see her so clearly that it's a miracle in my eyes."

"There where the Teuton knights went, in the high north, brothers of Christ and sword-bearers, to plant the Cross in blood upon the seashore after the knights of Livonia—there, in Poland and in Lithuania, war never ceased its raging. What days of cloud, what nights of red-iron were those when Casimir IV marched with the rebels against the Teutonic Order, grown too evil and too rich! The Archbishop of Riga fought against the Order, though he was a member of it. Formerly indeed the Bishop of Riga had called to his

aid, against the militia of Christ, the idolatrous Grand Duke of Lithuania."

"Ha! The Archbishop of Upsala called in the Danes to Sweden."

"Matteo Visconti called in Henry VII to Italy to re-establish his power. The nephew of the Emperor of the East called in Bajazet; the Fregosi and the Adorni, the two halves of Genoa, called in, the former the King of France, the latter, the King of Naples."

"Comrades, the greatest soldier of the wars was Sforza. He spoke to me once—touched me and handled me roughly. The troops which the republic of Milan had entrusted to him against Venice, he used to besiege and starve out Milan, until suffering opened the gates and they proclaimed him Duke. He needed to be a Duke."

"The greatest of all was Piccinino."

"No—Angelo de la Pergola."

"No, Guido Torello."

"François de Carmagnole, who was first a swine-herd, then a private soldier of Milan, and then rose above the rank and file,—he surpassed all those four you were talking about. But in the end Venice beheaded him."

"I have seen the Scaliger at Verona—his statue, for now they all sleep with their fathers. In a corner of a courtyard guarded with a grille I saw upon an iron horse a terrific iron man, a statue as live as a corpse! In every city there is a house that is a devourer,—two or three houses, of which one crushes the other. But when it crumbles, all the towns throw themselves upon the spoil. Yes, he was there, the dark, dark-faced cavalier, the metal mummy. Verona still fears that breed, though it is long since they slew one another. Can della Scala was killed by his brother. Antonio

della Scala killed his brother Bartholomew, but, conquered, he fled into the mountains of Forli, never to return. . . . Just as the survivors among the Colonna became no better than wild beasts in the forests after they had been driven out and their palace ploughed over by Boniface VIII. But of the Colonna one remained, who killed the Pope."

"At Rimini. . . ."

"At Ravenna. . . ."

"At Rome. . . ."

"At Naples. . . ."

The men of iron raised and intermingled their voices as if quarrelling. They let themselves be invaded and overflowed by the real: the din and dust of battles. As far as they could they were imitating war, as it is in the world! Faced with our long, our antique silence,—it seemed as if these men were masquerading in their costumes, and acting Holy Story and the Passion.

They wanted to show us German, French, Spanish happenings. They wanted to show us the Danube, Sicily, Barbary, Cyprus, Egypt, Syria; with double wrath and many colours, and the two unchained extremities of the great sea: the vast water covered with a deluge of fleets.

War is everywhere; kingdom against kingdom, and the towns of Italy against each other,—(Italy was once a single kingdom; now she is a world in herself)—and faction against faction in the bosom of each town. France against England or Navarre, Amagnac against Burgundian, York against Lancaster, Blois against Montfort, Beaumont against Gramont of Navarre.

There are not two districts, two families, or two people of importance who are not struggling one with the other to break free and climb higher, upon a heap of bodies. They and their hatreds are inseparable.

They would attack their own shadows. All the hopes of this world are centred on the luck of war. . . . Ah, the luck of war! . . .

And they stopped talking, because each could touch but a little piece of reality. The past is too full! They were choked with the orgy of names filling their mouths. To bring the whole of war to life again in us was not in their power. They could not thus add centuries to their listeners. The splendid horror cannot be told.

“There have been wars, and more wars. . . .”

As the Florentine stood up he was bathed in red and copper light; he said that the old world was rolling down to the abyss.

He spoke loudly, forcibly. He wanted to get rid of the old world. He said it was unjust and ill-constructed, mad. It was a world cramped and stifled by the intrigues of soldiers, of orthodoxy, of tyranny; it was the incomprehensible world of the few against the many.

“The victorious nation triumphing over the vanquished nation; yes, but within the one nation itself the victorious caste over the vanquished, and within the caste, the few over all the others.

“One over the few.

“It is inevitable that power, whirling and always ascending, should finally become solitary and centralised. The strongest tends to become the one alone, though right he has none save that of the whirlwind. All the blows rained upon it, whatsoever they may be, whencesoever they may have hailed, have but driven in more firmly the crowned pivot. The great earth-spaces which bear on their bosoms multitudes as though they were ships are regulated not according to the

right harmonies of multitudes but according to the designs of the giant-great dynasties. The origins of immense world-happenings are to be found in the births, deaths, marriages, alliances and furies of these superhuman beings. It begins up above with one or two great personages; it ends with millions.

“Behind the great war between French and English we must discern two men, among the ant-heaps of men, disputing as to whether the nephew or the grandson has the better title of inheritance. The two high and mighty lords thus pursuing their proprietorial business in human flesh and blood were sprung from the same stock, spoke the same tongue, were bound by the same code of morals, produced by the same laws. There were no strangers confronted with one another save the Princes and their subjects. This dispute as to golden titles to land and as to the ceremonies of suzerainty caused a war which none could stop; a winter of a century and a half fell upon nature, famine laid its fell grip upon the poor and in France and in England mothers ate their children; human flesh was sold in the market-place, and many men built hovels at the cross-roads to murder wayfarers and steal their corpses. Corruption began to infest the very fields; beneath all this sway of death came plague, the black death. And worse than plague, and deeper, was hate. Not hate made the war; the war made hate.

“Sometimes the poor rose up in rebellion, like angels—or like dogs: they did not rise together in great masses, they did not fulfill their own greatness, they had not the talisman of knowledge. They struck with all the ignorance in which they were steeped—their blows fell short. They went out and flung themselves to be slaughtered against the nobles’ battle-array, and even, in their greatest wayes, against the Lord of



Lords. Thus they were as completely suppressed by Richard II as by Charles V, the wise king, or by the mad king to whom France was bound for forty long years. And none will ever rightly know this tortured fury of the great masses, because each time it has been altered out of all nature, veritably slain, by those who have written of it—by the slavish sycophants of chroniclers like Froissart, that base scribe. And for him whose home is the rude hut, he who lives on beneath all change, the red man, there is as little escape from massacre as from life itself.

“And it is impossible not to behold at all times and in all places the monster of riches. He reigns because he is already on the throne, because he controls all the writers and their words. The justice he metes out is made in his own image; he has sucked profit from every side, from foreign or civil wars, from revolts, from the claims of the bourgeois and the artisans in their walled-in islands, from the States General and from the great Charters which have given him money—in exchange for promises! From the Church’s splendour as much as from her turpitude. He has exploded the Pope’s ancient thunders and his two old swords: the successor of St. Peter and Gregory VII confines his attacks now to the petty princelets, for the others would break his tiara upon his papal head as if it were a golden egg. He has adopted a child-like wisdom—he issues Bulls.

“Today the old battle-field of the world is divided up like a map with circles and lines—roads and administrations—radiating out from the centre, the capital: a spider’s web fashioned by a man.

“And behold they no longer form their royal armies with soldiers: now they take citizens, an army of innocents. Poor wretches are forced to become execu-

tioners: the peasant to become the maker of deserts! They say: *We*; they become one body with the people, for they have devoured the people.

"The first man who stood above his fellows, turning like a tall tree to sketch with outstretched arms the limits of his earthly prey, that man, a circle of violence, has continued to dispose of the lives of men for no reason save the force of the strange dream they have themselves invented. Looking at the whole stir of human activity, the most prodigious feature is its submissiveness. To display mankind in one single word we need only this, *Submission*. Submission despite the crying needs of body and mind, despite sharp suffering, threats, humiliations, and the whole mountain of absurdity!

"The black shadow of an eagle on a shield—nay, rather the vast shadow of a winged and taloned cloud, a cloud possessed with mind, above the fields of the real earth—that eagle of the Cæsars and the Carolings, sculptured, torn, spattered on a wall, that dark eagle with arrow-like wings appropriated by the crowned hucksters of Poland, Sweden, Brandenburg, Spain and Sardinia—descends upon the gentleness of nature and the people to fasten upon a whole land."

"When Frederick III rode by at Nuremberg . . . !" said a soldier. "Above the silver framework of his cuirass, into which his neck was neatly fitted, the Hapsburg was covered with a swelling white cloud floating around him, covered with black, two-headed birds.

"And the lions thin as a king's sinews, with their ploughshare talons, black upon deep azure, or red upon gold, or gold upon red, and the extended leopard of England and the winged beast that was transplanted to float above Venice. First one monster was the

strongest, then another, then another. Success has visited all the armouries of the world in turn.

“But Force grows old, victory becomes exhausted, glory burns itself out.”

In the distance trains are passing, shaking the windows. The little station. . . . Near by there is such a sound of roaring that it carries me along with it even as I stand: a torrent of noise whence gushes out through the rough door dust and steam. Very rapidly squares of darkness and light flit by, alternating,—a moving nocturnal street.

After the great red eye has bored its way in flight I am left alone on the empty platform, buffeted by a cold breath full of cinder-dust and wet rags. I return to the waiting-room. In the black panes of the now motionless door I see myself in black and white, all colour eliminated. I see the bones of my forehead, of my face, with dark cavities, as if in the other world, through all its purgatories and limbos. The deep voice of Osiris breathes through my soul: “I will give thee endless renewal.”

Night has fallen on the shore, the kindled torches throw a captive, wavering light upon the sand. Then the twilight talk of the returned wanderers both displayed and hid the earth's riches. Commerce, means of transport, all the monumental comings and goings which overwhelm earth and sea and mingle them together: Crusaders, pilgrims, slaves (infidels, heretics or schismatics), precious commodities, spices: pepper and malagetta spice with which throughout the inhabited earth men disguise the smell of stale food: glory—profit: they are one. A vulgar nobility, product of trafficking, has penetrated into the ranks of the no-

bility. Certain men of the commonalty named Medici sold merchandise, and behold, they are as rich as all Italy. Doria owns more galleys than all Genoa. Everything can be bought. They recount all those things that are universally bought and sold, now: titles, even royal ones—the halo of a crown, such as Charles IV bought for his son; or sovereign powers as did Galeas Visconti:—the powers of life and death and the levying of taxes;—countries, provinces, towns, liberties. Wealth through power, power through wealth. The King sells freedom to his slaves, and to the Jews, whom his father banished, the right to return; and he has taken back from the communes, one by one, the privileges which his predecessors sold to them. He yields to the temptation to issue a false coinage, multiplying at his ease his scraps of gold and silver stamped with royal heads, and despoiling the bankers. When he is impoverished he skims the poor, who mean riches to him because of their numbers, and when he is rich beyond dreams, like this blazing sun of a man, this master of all Flanders, with rights over all the merchanting of Flemish cloth—he gorges the people with revelry and feasting so that they may be simple, heavy, inert, a docile tool to his hand. . . .

But there are signs of wrath!

Ertogrul's fresh hordes have descended, with all the tremendous élan of their nascent might, once again to impose the power of Mahomet, replacing the decadent Arabs and the Seljuks, whom a long period of violent sovereignty has exhausted. The Ottoman Turks have set up the threshold of their Sublime Porte at the spot wherein is enshrined one of the black stones, at the foot of Bithynian Olympus. They have forced the Christian east to recede and to change its shape because

they of all the peoples are the most fiercely and the most recently given over to warlike life, because Timor Leng is dead, and because the defenders of the Cross are no longer united among themselves. They had all too little faith or too little intelligence to shake themselves free of their deep-rooted personal interests. The world will have to undergo a complete transformation, from top to bottom, before a great idea can again have any compelling force. Even in this great twilight peril they could not put an end to the schism of the east; the political breach engineered among the faithful by the manœuvres of pontiffs and kings was too tremendous. Eight long years ago Constantine Dracosius was killed in the breaches of Constantinople by Mahomet II, as, long ago, Saracos was slain at Nineveh by Cyaxares. Now, after the insolence of this defeat within the sight and knowledge of the whole world, all the Levant belongs to them. Henceforth only as prisoners or slaves shall we know Palestine where is the Sepulchre of God, and Mesopotamia, which was the cradle of the human race. Half of the great inner sea, the sea of the Phoenicians—Iamgadal—the sea of the Greeks and the Romans, will be naught save a liquid desert. The Turks have removed from the Mediterranean, as if they were populations, the Euxine Sea, the Sea of the Archipelago, the waters of Crete, Syria, Egypt.

Then Genoa and Venice who had waxed so greatly in rivalry! . . . Genoa, jealously and furiously commercial, possessed in Taurida its sister-town of Kaffa and had staked out with her strongholds all the trade-routes as far as Armenia and Iran. . . . Venice of the Hundred Isles, born in the time of Attila, to whom fell the fourth part of Constantinople when Henry Dandolo refused the Latin Empire, desiring only to be

Doge, and despotic lord of Rumania: Venice child of the Levantine Sea, whose name is like Venus' own, whence flow away intermingled many and many a track of gold;—situated at the extremity of the huge estuary of the Adriatic she was the resplendent counterpart to Ethiopian and Indian Alexandria; all this was Venice: now her greatness wanes.

We are at the end of the centuries. But a few years since and all the lands of the southern azure trembled to their foundations. Rocks fell apart like sea-waves, and thousands and thousands of human beings were precipitated into the depths. Was not this vengeance against a world where the happiness of some depends upon the unhappiness of others, and where nothing is left save the ever-accumulating mountain of hatred that the kings have for the peoples, the peoples for the kings!

Hope!

Everything is about to change, everything has changed! The past is past. A new age!

The world is walled-in on one side, but it is opening on the other. It is wide open, and from this breach in the ancient hell of the west, all will change. The great towns entangled on the ocean-shore have moved, have turned like pearls towards the other side of the newly illuminated space (only Venice cannot twist round, toward the western ocean). The spirit of adventure hastens now to the other threshold of the old world and flows over the western shores. In men's mouths now are the words: Portugal; the Basques; Dieppe; new forces!

. . . Their voices trembled. They imparted to us the ardour we had seen on their faces when they landed with the sun shining upon them; we were carried away. The Englishman, who wore no ornaments and was up-

right as a column in the midst of the others, described, with voice and hand and eye, the virgin ray that lit up Rebecca by the well when Eliezer approached—he said that dawn has fewer promises, that dawn has less dawn of hope, than the setting sun.

“Jason and his comrades set out to obtain the marvellous Fleece so golden that it gilded the skies. . . . Following in the path of the sun, pursuing the rays of the sun, that ship set out over the ruddy waters of the ports, into the gliding fires of porticos and towers and domes, into the latitudes of gold.”

The Florentine’s beautiful voice described these things very clearly.

“They sailed past the two steles of Melkharth, which for so many ages marked the limits of the world. Dante Alighieri had written: ‘Hercules planted his two landmarks on either side of the Straits so that no one should dare to sail by them.’ ”

Dante Alighieri. I repeated this name of a man. There fell a silence. The man facing me started to speak, then shook his head: this name he had chanced to utter could not be further explained.

“Poor creatures,” he said, “who know nothing of what mankind has done!”

But the young man from Florence stretched forth his hand:

“Happy are they, for they shall know!”

A voice took up the theme: “If men ever consecrate a temple to the power of renewal that dwells within them, then it is upon the promontory of Sagres that they will build it. This was the point of departure, Prince Henry’s palace, whence curiosity, a goddess yet more violent than the tempests, impelled forth the measurers of the unknown.

“They passed Cape None which, like the Pillars of

Hercules, had declared none could ever pass it by. And Cape Bojador, that was the infernal threshold of the unexplored, with its reefs rushing right to the inviolate purity of the horizon. Well! his hitherto impassable waves have been ridden over now for five and twenty years. Each man plants his column further afield than his predecessor: the White Cape, the Green Cape, the Cape of Palms, the Golden Bay. The priests stopped proving to Henry of Portugal, out of Scripture, that he would never discover anything: everybody stopped making fun of him, and the Pope said that explorers were a fifth element—once the black ships that sailed into the sun and into a new setting of the stars, reached gold. From the day Baldaya brought back the yellow dust, these idealist expeditions became a force of nature.

“Men knew that the unknown had been, formerly, accessible to the saints. They knew that once upon a time seven exiled bishops had discovered seven happy isles, or perhaps that they had built seven towns on one happy isle—and that Saint Brandan wandered for seven years from isle to isle across the slimy sea, until he was piloted by angels. They knew the obstacles, too: how a circle of flames engirdles the world, and that the Sea of Darkness bathes the shores of regions so remote that the sun’s light grows weary before ever it reaches them.

“Islands, lands, new seas—the men who constructed the terrestrial globes, the Catalan and Italian pilots, the Provençals, the Majorcans and the Minorcans who made flat maps (so that the configuration of the continental masses could be displayed in little)—they marked them all out on their globes and on their portolanos, and mentioned them in their charts. They discovered them beforehand! They invented the other



half of the world; the thinkers made all these discoveries within the orb of their heads! All things begin in thought; when a discovery has been created in writing, it *will be* in reality. They named the world. It is impossible but that on a day very near at hand the ships will reach the Empire of Zeng, clearing the shores of Sofala, Zanzibar and Meliudis, and circumnavigating the whole African coast; and since we ourselves set out towards the mighty west it was inevitable that we should arrive here at some island or peninsula of the Asiatic east, for the earth is round! We shall now set sail for Europe, to announce the great news of our arrival, and we shall return to search in the south for the strait through which Marco Polo sailed when he brought the Mongolian princess to her barbarous bridegroom. On a day very near at hand all men will be united once more, and distance will be annihilated."

They are so marvellously creative, these men who give names to all the earth; their audacity dwarfs all things and they can say: *The world is but a small place!*

Then they went on to tell us that man is no longer the same as when our folk set forth.

He has discovered secrets buried deep in nature. Truth is not invented by man: she *waits* for him; she has but to be found again, as were the West Indies. Learned men working with amazing singleness of heart have been able to demonstrate the evidences, and the greatest of them has synthesised all and raised the veil which has concealed the infallible mechanism of cause and effect. Visible nature is disorder: in invisible science we behold her order, whereby judgment is pronounced against errors and lies.

Now men can bring distant objects near by means of certain glasses and the ships have a finger made of

metal, enclosed in a little box, that always shows the direction of the north. They have invented a black substance that, when touched by flame, bursts into lightning with incredible force and destroys everything around it. And thus by the power of invention are fortifications and armouries broken in twain. Men have found the way to multiply books. Each page is carved like a seal; there is a collection of wooden letters, each separate and yet packed closely against the next, and the impression blackens them on the sheet once, or a hundred, or a thousand times, at will.

When one of us said that this was very strange the Florentine laughed his rich laugh and said that when a man hears very suddenly of very great matters he cannot raise himself at first to their altitude; confronted with them he is but as a child.

And he added:

"Henceforth we can sow thought as it were grains of corn."

"In truth man has discovered himself. At last he has said: *Ecce Homo.*"

It was the Englishman who spoke thus. His sombre simplicity, his erectness, made a dark patch amid the brilliant speakers.

I contemplated the group—they were so noble, so entirely unreserved and at their ease. One lay on his back, a smile flitting across his face, his hands clasped round one knee: he wore a green cap and a doublet silky as a bird's plumage. Another was magnificent upon a rough sea, his great cloak floating over his shoulders like Bucentaur's purple veil. His neck was large and white. One slender hand, dyed rosy red by a fold of his cloak that was lit up by the torches, played with a jewel big as an egg; it contained a spring that gently moved a needle round a circle at a regular pace, and

thus kept time with the hours of day and night. Their voices were virile, and at the same time, those of men much beloved. We could guess that in their own country, at their sides, would be found women divinely feminine.

“Discover the external world?” asked the Florentine. “We have been farther than that in time and space. We have rediscovered our own origins: we have rediscovered antiquity and behind antiquity, nature in all her greatness. Antiquity is the elder sister of the Church, and it is proper that after the Holy Scriptures it was the philosophical essays and poetry of Greece and Rome, bibles of reason and life, that issued first, strong in numbers, from the workshops of Mayence and Subiaca. Our poets have nourished themselves upon the muses of antiquity. Beauty had been degraded by a narrow religion, the splendours of bodily birth and the glory of nudity had been denied. . . . But the profound study of the human figure was at once made use of in depicting the saints and martyrs; the great personages in the Bible served as precious models for the painters and for the sculptors who separate from form colour with their mighty chisel-strokes, whilst the Holy Family lent itself to man-made rainbows. Palaces, statues engraved with poems, love-poems engendered by two human faces, gardens with mountains, the lovely lines which the art of perspective causes to dance before the eyes of a man as he walks and love which is greater than lovers—all this glows and shines before men’s eyes at Florence, Florence which has still remained a Republic. The rich Medici who rule over Florence have no overwhelming titles; John de Medici was acclaimed by the people simply, ‘Father of the Poor’. Florence, the green city! Strangers, come back with us, be happy, be Florentines! At Florence

you will see in the distance, as if from a belvedere, deep within the shadow of a portico, or on each side some undying statue, the whirlwind of lords over peoples, and that hastening to and fro of captains and armies which, shaking life to its foundations, impelling all things forward, is turning the cities of Italy into a pack of eager hounds. Epictetus, slave though he was, was free, and not less so, as Planudus tells us, was Aesop. Slavery, havoc—what matters it? Every man is king of himself—was that not said but yesterday, in the very language of Horace, by the Sovereign Pontiff, whose death must have drawn so many a tear from Apollo and the Muses!”

The man from the north, who was still standing erect, raised his arm as if he desired to raise the talk to a higher level. His simplicity, his erect majesty of demeanour, drew all eyes to him.

“Yet more! This generation has claimed for itself freedom of thought. Spiritual aspiration keeps pace with the material conquest of the universe. We dare now to examine all things, we dare to be sincere. Each one of us must most vigilantly keep control of his faith as if it were a ravaging passion, he must be ever ready to re-cast his truth, and obey none but God.

“There is now a band of faithful souls who are striving to return to the natural life of the Gospels, just as the first Christians tried to do away with the legalism of the Temple—worship and return to the pure faith of the first Hebrews, and as the Vaudois tried, prematurely, to oppose true Christianity to the iron Church.

“Their talisman is, simply, the Bible. ‘Search the Scriptures’, is the watchword of the men who long to see once more, at first hand, the warm living countenance of God and hear the precious words straight from His mouth. So thought Lollard and John Wykliffe

(the greatest of the new prophets), John Huss (I lived in close touch with him, Wykliffe's revelation so shone upon him that it filled him at nights with waking or sleeping dreams), and Jerome of Prague. They desire that every man should study the Bible for himself. They hold that we shall there find everything necessary, if only we are worthy of the revelation. With the Book wide-open in front of him as on an altar, each one of us must be his own Pope. They have begun to translate Holy Script into the vulgar tongue, with open hands they have freely given back to men their Gospel.

"In good truth, like the prophets of old they have also testified against the scandals in the Church, against the pride and concupiscence, the nepotism and unworthiness of the Popes, against the simony at Rome and Avignon, our Babylons—trafficking for gold in benefices, hopes of pardon, indulgences; yes, in good sooth they have cried against the cynical outrage of excommunication being put at the service of this trafficking in temporal interests."

When we heard such words uttered out loud upon the shore that seemed like a fiery forest beneath arches of smoke, we trembled. Such words, we thought, it is well neither to utter nor to hear openly. And yet—these men spoke out bold and loud. Some change indeed had come into the world!

"Petrarch of Arezzo told his own age that the Church was slipping headlong to destruction and that the Papacy would be destroyed. A century later and all men see what he saw.

"It was not the terrible scandals alone that cut to the heart these explorers of forgotten paths; they felt even more terribly the withering blight of formalism."

He paused to reflect; the charm of his personality

made all wait in a surprising silence; then he resumed:

“Friends, we are older than you by the lapse of two hundred years and taught by this experience we know as you do not that the sound of words eventually usurps the place of their sense. Language serves at first to express thought; in the end it betrays it. There is a kind of sorcery about language, for we came to imagine that we can endow truth with life by the magic of certain syllables; but thus do we seize her form, not her soul. The most careful watch must be kept, for the letter is a worm that devours the spirit. When the navigators found writings and plans of the ancients such as Ptolemy’s Tables, the Mediterranean they themselves had explored, sounded, mapped, took on for them once more its earlier wrong shape. They placed accepted authority above the solid testimony of the Saint Thomases of the world.

“Error is worse than wickedness, for it does not appear to be wicked, and thus do religions die without any appearance of death. Counterfeit truth, the truth of formulas and sanctuaries, has actually destroyed the truth that flowed from the great Master’s lips, and has left to the faithful naught save its dust and ashes. ‘Great Pan is dead’—; that cry voiced the soul of a universal moment. The great cry of the modern world is: ‘The word is dead’.

“Since it is dead they can do with it what they will. They can decapitate the divine revelation as they decapitated the corpse of Pope Formosus that had floated up from the funerary well. They do make of it what they will. By it they justify the most arrogant deeds, and reason is forced to dance like a puppet upon strings of words. Whilst the Janissaries were advancing right to the Danube, the Franciscans were clashing against one another with texts and definitions, and dis-

puting about the ecstatic light that the monks of Mount Athos could see on their navels.

“We must smash verbalism as Saint Martin smashed the pagan temples. In the time of the Emperors Zeno the Isaurian and Theophilus, there were the iconoclasts who destroyed all graven images. Their brutal method of reform bore fruit again among the Vaudois and the Albigenses and today the idea is reborn in all its fury and all its clear-sightedness, but this time it was against the idols set up by words. Man’s duty is always—to act. We are encompassed about with moral precepts, but true morality lies in this: To change evil into good. But before we can act we must rid ourselves of the phantoms conjured up by words!

“The Roman Catholic Church has persecuted these latest prophets as she persecuted the Vaudois, the Béguins of the brotherhood of Poverty, the lepers and the Jews,—as she would persecute the early Christians if they were brought before her now. The Inquisitors and the Councils burnt Lollard, they burnt John Huss (I saw him, wearing the tall cap they had sprinkled with sulphur, disappear amidst the smoke), they burnt Jerome of Prague, even they disinterred and burnt the body of John Wykliffe, the John the Baptist of the new order. But in every age the vengeance of those in authority, but hastens the growth of those at whom they strike and sows the seeds of truth broadcast. In his own despite an Antiochus Epiphanes calls into existence a Mathathias and a Judas Maccabeus. It is from their hollow skulls that the new beginning springs. A new Christian Church is arising, it germinates a pure virgin shoot in every heart.

“And then this living freedom that has opened so wide the doors of faith, begins to irradiate everything

and points out to the unfortunate the way of humble, earthly salvation. The poor have heard talk about liberty and equality being found again and such words have fertilized them. The masses begin to see what they must do. Liberty in the human family is what can be compared to greatness, and equality is justice changed into daily bread. The ideal plan of human society (for every revolution is spiritual)—begins to take the place of what actually exists. Man was really a domestic animal—and authority, like a sorcerer, shaped the people to its will instead of being shaped by them!

“In the fields are those who make bread; they are the colour of mud, their skin seems made of earth. They gather together and raise their voices and show that their desires are according to the Gospel, and that it is not good that all things should be regulated by the games of chance played by the great ones. In song and cry they sound again their old plaint: ‘We must rid ourselves of lords and priests!’ Woe to the blind! Amidst the dark night clouds behold the lightning flash of scythes and the gleam of astral reaping hooks. Behold on the move a beast vast as the countryside itself. Behold by the side of the heads of lords and priests a round head wiser than they, the wooden figurehead, crowned like a saint with nails instead of thorns by those who are filled with hatred of suffering.

“Certain crowds are nobler than others. Spain has recovered in despite of the arabesques of her infidel kingdoms, and the struggle there is against the Hidalgos, those sons of the first Gothic conquerors, by the brotherhoods, the holy brotherhoods of the towns and the workers: in such wise there have they understood how to enlarge the fatherhood harmoniously, working as brethren, supporting each other. The



provinces and towns were as strangers to one another? Not so! Then was there but one people? They stretch out their arms to each other like men newly healed from sickness.

"We are at the end of the ages. . . . And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains."

"Ah! if we returned to the past!" said John, my son: he had grown very pale as he listened, quivering with ardour.

"How rich is every second of the day!" quoth the Italian.

"Our work is to wrest the future from the present," said the English doctor; his mind's eye beheld the empty spaces of the future.

There unrolled before me, as if it were a mighty memory this undying dialogue between the undying types of the soul. I see, as if I had seen them somewhere already, the three essential human beings. First he who adores the past; the force behind this ensepulchred one is inertia, the monumental inertia that makes a single prostrate creature the equal of the ruins of Thebes, and makes the long story of Egypt the endless mantle of a Sphinx. Then, he who is concerned with the present and knows how to handle it: philosophy and culture lend a lordly flight of imagination to the petty poet's *carpe diem*, and the power behind this instrumentalist is the joy of life, the continual rebirth of the present, the certitude of the clear light of day. Last comes he who prepares the future and 'mid the confusion of outward resemblance and sophistries brandishes the moral law like a sword; and the might of this reformer is the sword's nakedness and the wrath of hope, the Messianic hope.

They are not alike; they are as different from one another as all three are different from the turbulent soldiers who have nothing save war in hand, eye and mouth. They cannot agree. The young man in whom a dizzying tradition lives again regards with distrust the man sparkling from a thousand facets; he fears his too magnificent taste will injure beauty. The Italian fears the desert that lies beneath the mirage and the might of implacable ideas. The Englishman considers that both the mystic and the Greek from Florence profit egotistically. And I turned towards the man of the future, despite the respect that the first deserves and the love one feels for the second, for only those who lay hold of the future can unite the ideal with the real. Brush this man ever so slightly and you perceive that in spite of glowing appearances, sincerity is an heroic effort, human brotherhood not a thing of charm and fantasy, but wrought of discipline, of reason doing ardent battle, of painful effort.

Ant yet neither of these two apparitions from the inhabited world, who bring us things we could never have discovered for ourselves, is wrong. And since both are right, who knows if they will not need one another to make the new world complete, and if there will not come a day when all things will intermingle!

And now they speak together, announcing that the universe is at last come to the end of its miseries, proclaiming liberty, equality, fraternity, a change so profound that none can escape it. All the signs are there. Look! look! you who are the topmost summit of the centuries, you who are Today! No point of space but the promise is there, ripe, happy. After the squandered epochs all things begin to take again the great way of nature, and when once mankind has ventured on this path, it cannot call a halt.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CIRCLE OF THE WORLD

(Continued)

“They came back one day. . . .”

“Yes, it was long ago. Then they disappeared for ever.”

The years, the years, the years. I am very old. I stand on the brink of the tomb, and yet when those men gave life to the setting sun of our shore, when they announced to our father, standing huge in our midst, the recommencement of the world, I was but a little child.

After that—for us, the night, as before.

No! Not as before. From the moment they vanished from our eyes into space, we lived on their words. The era of change for us who never move, dates from that evening when the navigators from Europe came to predict it to us, to demonstrate it. We perpetuate the luminous joy and gala bravery of that night. We no longer need *them* to see from afar the burgeoning of that great recommencement which they fanned into flame in our hearts, and then departed to bring to fruition elsewhere. Our lot may be dreary, abandoned, and drowned in the wide reaches of the sea. But we know the harmonious unrolling of the world on yonder side of the watery gulf, and we stand at gaze.

We say to each other—How simple it was! The law was ill-founded. The great drove all humanity

straight before them by means of dead words. The weakness of the few was their strength against the many, because of gross idolatries. Then . . . everyone took heart,—each reclaimed possession of himself. No longer do all hands belong to the one hand which happens by chance or theft to hold a symbol.

No more peoples oppressed by predestined men, or by other peoples. And we understand very clearly now that equality is the immanent equilibrium of society, and the contrary of public misfortune. The multiplication of the beautiful, the elevation of material labor, the intimate probity of all religious effusion; no more funeral pyres, no more violent wrongs: now the personal temple, the support of humanity by humanity replace the savage law of war; the advance in the True and the Good accomplished by the idea of a wider country. How fair is science with its true phenomena!

We behold the new world, not only to its invisible horizons, but to the centuries yet to come, with their vaster, loftier, whiter cities; and we follow with our eyes and point out to each other with our fingers that humanity which, from every side, has rediscovered its true path.

For they proved to us, and the splendour of their passage among us signified: that the one important thing is to rediscover oneself—to find oneself anew. That was the one essential thing, as simple as the world: to find oneself anew, fundamentally, to face things, to see them, at last, as they are, and then—to marvel and to begin anew: to go whither the great, natural instincts lead: *in the way which allows of no stopping.*

And we? . . . They ought to have come back to remake us in their image! But everything here is im-

pregnated with the ideal we can only proclaim, being still swathed in infancy: the good news that our narrow feebleness only deserves to dream,—the earthly paradise which is poetry only, to us. We repeat reverently the mystery of the great and celebrated names, of which we know only the name. We have tried to shape into *things* the revelations left us by those fortunate men: the infallible finger that everywhere points to the Pole Star, the art of multiplying a hundred-fold the written image of thought. . . . Some devoted their lives to trying to remake, by basing themselves on crumbs of phrases, the black powder which explodes like lightning—the weapon of intelligence. They never succeeded, but the search gave them joy. One rocks babies to sleep with splendid promises. And these holy words which ripened on the crimson shore seventy-five years ago, and almost warmed the sea, are those that inspired the love that unites me to Nahica.

The coming of the men was still palpitant in the air when we drew near to each other, she to me and I to her.

This evening, she is there, near me, as always. She is almost as old as I. But all sweetness is hers, even that of the beyond. Her hair is still black; but time has wounded that narrow face with its sharp profile—she whose ancestors were born from the soil. Her look, which has borne all the stamp of love—when with her hand imprisoned in mine, at once rebellious and docile, she seemed caught in a snare—that look is now impalpable tenderness. She reveals that friendship of the aged wife, which is superhuman, even supermaternal, indescribable. At this moment of our life, when all our life has been used up, and the only rôle left to us is, to survive no longer, each of us, like our

first parents, stands on the brink of the unmerited punishment. But we think of the vast world of the others; we think of all those beings who have in them a heart, and from whom, through time and space, we are and have been exiles. . . . Oh, the miracle of it, that this great affection of ours should live because abandoned! . . . We think of these things, and together our two faces smile, sadly radiant.

It was on an evening like this that they came. Yes, exactly . . . *since it lives*. On an evening, another evening with the same sun flooding over the edge of the sea. The setting sun disposes over plains and the mountains other plains and mountains that change not. The square fountain, unadorned to look like others, and bathing in its sap the tree that it has nourished—both were present. The cabin too; and well I remember (are there not memories which have a divine stubbornness?) that on the wall hung the big straw hat of my father—the father who has been a gnawed skeleton at the bottom of the vale this many a year.

Down there, on the flank of the mountain, we saw a troop of men advancing. . . .

And we realized that the evening of long ago had come to life again. . . .

It is they, the strangers from the vast world. They have come back, and like the first time, it is impossible and yet true! They have come back, but by land. In front of us, along the whole measureless line of the ocean, there is not a speck.

They plunged into a defile. We no longer saw them. Then we saw them again, nearer—nearer. Swiftly they were here—before the square fountain and the moist-dripping tree, and before the linked welcome of

our outstretched hands. And even while their ever-increasing forms pressed in on my eyes, I looked at Nahica, so eagerly was she watching the splendour of these newcomers as she stood erect in her white robe, clasping tight her two hands!

We are the projections of their-dreams; we are ready and eager to astonish them by our resemblance; and to answer their questions—to answer, to answer.

They surround us, growling harshly—they run around us. They are clad in black, a dusty, yellow, mildewed, rusty black, and draped in ragged cloaks. Their faces are grey and hungry, and in them roll eyes of war; distrustful, irritated. Their big hats look wounded on their heads, with their plumes of dirty feathers. They all lean one way, like trees in a mournful wind. Soldiers; soldiers!

One seized Nahica by the shoulder. She cried out, and instantly the hands of the men sprang to their sword-hilts, all together, like a military machine. The blades were half drawn. I saw the naked throat of a sword.

Their language is incomprehensible, and so they seem to be howling like beasts. But from a sombre herald come words we understand:

“Prisoners! Prisoners of the king. . . . The king, —the king!”

Tumult, dusty crumblings . . . ruins.

I was shut up and fastened in my own house.

In a corner of the dwelling where we lived, I was bound to the tree-trunk which patiently supported the entire framework. Familiar things—this great beam, this wall—and in the midst of a wild disorder, I perceived how pleasant they were before, when I was one with them. The brigands did not speak to me. They

talked among themselves only of treasure, and of their king, far away.

Through a hole in the wall I could see their dark and scattered groups, running hither and thither on the beach, tawny in the red glow of the setting sun. They were performing some ceremony.

A personage has hoisted himself onto a rock beaten by the tide. He raises his arms to heaven, stretches his body in the air, and declaims. Detached sentences reach me like ejected stones. He looked strung up, crooked, like a corpse swinging from a gallows in the wind. He was more ornate and gaudy than the others. The stuff of his sleeves and hose daubed a silhouette of crude and vivid colour, like the slices of a watermelon. From his shoulders hung a cloak, torn, soiled, shiny, with gleams like steel. Against his hard collar one saw the wrinkling of his features: his mouth, vociferous, moist, gleamed and shot forth lightnings. Someone, a black figure with hair glued in ringlets like feathers, wrote something on a white leaf, and brandished it.

. . . All became calm, motionless, dispersed over the beach, standing upright with long shadows of black velvet cast on the sand, or stooping and seated, with short shadows.

It was at this moment that a thin man, black and feathery, entered the hut. He had a sharp nose and sparse hair, heavy, clayey: a crow without feathers on his face, skin grey and beak grey; cloaked in tattered black. Say rather a black cock; yes—a black cock.

He saluted me—and smiled.

I tremble with questions, mendicant, before this high, livid face with retreating sides, in the breadth of which a squared, white rectangle was marked out—



his teeth—and two round white pools rimmed with a black ring—his eyes. His lips were glistening, smiling, full of honey. He said: "I, I am your friend."

First there took place in the poor hut that evening a supernatural dialogue, such as it seems impossible that two men could have exchanged at any point of time and space.

"Where are we?"

"You are in the new world of the King of Spain."

"Aren't we in an island of Asia?"

"You are in an island as big as Asia. Just now, the most noble grandee who is in command has, according to custom and in the name of the king our master, taken possession of all that country, those shores, ports, islands, with kingdoms, towns, dependencies and populations, which have existed, are existing, or may exist some day, from this side to the other of the Equator, beyond and within the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and that until the Day of the Last Judgment. I, the civil power, have drawn up the legal act. Now, it is written, I am the King's Notary."

A new world . . . and we didn't know it. Miserable children that we were! In that brief moment what magnificent images floated before my vision! The prestige of words is such that while the newcomer spoke, it seemed to me that we were changing our place in immensity, in order to plant ourselves on the proper spot.

As he continued to smile, I took courage. I clasped my hands.

"What has been happening on the earth?"

"The King of Spain."

He smiled—smiled. Without, all things were illumed with gold and with light. The rays of the sun

came without end, sailed on, straightly, in squadrons. Yonder a hanging cloud took fire. One thought of the great voyages which embraced the sun: the discoverers—Jason.

I yielded to the dream. I said:

“The Golden Fleece!”

The gold collars bestowed by the king of Spain, heir of Burgundy, Grand Master of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The quintessence of gold in a few collars he holds. . . . Gold. The word was like a firebrand in his gloomy mouth, and his eyes turned like a toy: two lightly gilded bowls each with a spike in its middle.

He told me that the sudden aggrandisement of the king of Spain over and above all other kings, had made the change in the eastern world.

“The Holy Empire, the Germanies, like the two Flanders and the Sicilies, are he. The double-headed eagle born in Syria in the beginning of time—that is he. (The other double-eagle, on the other side, the eagle of the northern cold, *that* is the barbaric Cæsar, grand prince of all the Russias). But King Charles resembles Charlemagne, only he is greater. Into those two hands, by the force of things, everything falls.

“I am old,” said the man.—(And there floated, indeed, something scorched and bloodshot in each eye, above his smiling grimace). —“I am old. I, Bobadilla Gamate, was born in the year when an admiral of Castile discovered the oceanic lands, and I have lived through the royal glory! As in the romances of chivalry, envoys of the king went with detachments of a few hundreds of soldiers into the midst of fabulous, unarmed crowds. Northwards, into New Spain and the Grand Plateau; southwards, into golden Castile, the Kingdom of the Sun and of the Four Worlds, and

as far as the River of Silver—the rivers have long spangled bodies. They found—and they made—ruins of cities as large as those of Egyptian Memphis. They extinguished empires and dynasties. They have extirpated the gold of the continent, and exorcised its idolatry.”

“And you must know,” he continued “we have already widely depopulated the new islands and shores. We collected herds of men and had them guarded (and from time to time devoured) by dogs. This cultivated the sweet sentiment of obedience in all its serenity. In some places entire populations of these odious slaves chose to eat stones and dirt and die of it, and to kill their children to shirk the duty of honest labour, out of hate against the king of Spain.

“The King of Portugal, who is almost a saint, and indeed, almost a monk, has beaten the Egyptians, and taken for his own account radiant Ormuz, that carbuncle set in the ring of the world, and Goa of the Arabians; while one of his servants has circumnavigated Africa. (The Zeng Empire which was once so flourishing is now gone utterly: naught remains). But it was the King of Spain who, from his throne, steered, as he might drive a chariot, the vessel that encircled the globe. When it returned its keel was covered with shells and seaweed, its masts and sails re-spliced and patched, and thirteen men alone survived. But it brought a fantastic cargo of cloves which were worth their weight in pearls, and those thirteen men had encompassed the terrestrial globe with their bodies,—sculptured the shape of the world.

“Above the new hemisphere is the grand dividing line of space, traced by the Pope, that delimits the shares of each of the two Catholic Kings, from the Arctic pole to the Antarctic of the southern sea.

"The ocean groans under the weight of the gold transported. On the old world there is piled now a burden of gold ten times greater than ever before. The royalty of Divine Right has doubled its extent and increased its weight tenfold at a single stroke.

"For glory and wealth are marvellously allied. In reality power resides in gold. The German bankers who have lent money to the king receive in exchange parcels of his royalty in his new world.

"War has now become the lifeblood of the Spaniards. Chance—the game of war—ah! War is loved so well, desired so ardently, because it is a gamble. Over there they say of us: How great they are, how splendid! And those who come after will say it still more loudly—How splendid they were!"

He nodded "Yes" to himself, and expanded always in the same fatuous smile. Then he said:

"I, I am young!"

And abruptly, like a doll, he pirouetted, and cried: "War! It is the art of being a coward!"

On my shoulder he placed his grey, scaly, skinny hand: the hand of an old woman—or the claw of a hen.

I murmured low—"Those who came hither long ago announced to us the holy brotherhood of men."

"The holy brotherhood. Quite so, quite so. It is the correct name of the Inquisition of the King of Spain."

Trembling I rejoined:

"But the Church has returned to its pure sources. . . ."

"Quite so, quite so. It is more than purified—it shines. If you turned toward Europe you would see that as you see the stars. That illumination is bodies burning at the stake. Our Grand Inquisitor, head of

the forty-five Supreme Inquisitors, astounded the Pope, who said: It is too much! And when our Grand Inquisitor presented himself before God, eight thousand victims escorted him, to claim and acclaim his salvation.

"You should see," he continued, "the rejoicings of the worthy gatherings of the people: those great bonfires, and the platforms filled with cardinals, princes and great ladies, and all these points, like candles. They have even disinterred millions of the dead to burn them like so much charcoal. That long fire on the waves? It is alive, I tell you! We have far surpassed those most vaunted of wise massacres, the eleven hundred thousand Jews exterminated by Titus, the hundred thousand Paulites and detestable Manicheans butchered by Theodora, mother of Michael the Drunkard. The year when I, Gamate, was born, the year when Granada once more fell into the arms of Christianity, was the year in which Spain was emptied at one blow of all the Moors and Jews."

This destroyer of dreams was strange. He enjoyed what he was saying. He trembled, his gaze twisted in the air, almost in ecstasy, while he murmured that the task of the Church was truly profound, logical and efficient; that beside it all other works appeared ill-done, oozing timidity and mediocrity.

I said—"Those who came told us—'We are the recommencement.'"

He shrugged his shoulders till they made two points.

"It is not with a mere phrase that one recommences things."

"They said—'Liberty of conscience.' . . ."

He cried—"A spectre!"

Once more my two hands fluttered towards him

who knew. He rolled a grimace on the wheels of his eyes, this way and that, and clamoured:

"I, I am a doctor. A learned man. Faugh! They talk about going back to the pure sources. But they don't know—they can't. And afterwards, if they search themselves truly, they see that they have lied!

"My friend," he said to me—"there would have been plenty such recommencers—if *they had been let live*. The Vaudois—who, by this time, have been annihilated everywhere: the poor men of Lyons,—voices like those would have remade the Christian religion from top to bottom. Yes, the voice of folk like those—of a few atoms lost in the crowd—might have quickened the letter of the Scriptures as the archangel's trump will re-awaken the dead at the last day. But great souls are solitary—and who is there to follow poor hearts?

"Do you call the *reformers* recommencers? Those who disguised catholicism with a few dismal veils? They lied, those half-Catholics, those new Jews, self-opinioned, argumentative and icy; who said—'We are like the early Christians.' They made a religion, just sufficiently different from the other to enable them reasonably to hate that other, and fight against it. . . .

"Liberty? They lied in the face of men. Liberty for every man to search the Gospels, on condition that his interpretation shall be in accord with those of the new authority! Luther, 'free search' incarnate, declared at the outset that reason is the devil's prostitute. Worse than the Caraites, and all the anti-Talmudists, obsessed by the terror of Commentary, these reformers bring forward an Old Testament which shatters all reflection. Englishmen who refused to accept integrally the doctrine of liberty enunciated by the new English Pope have been hanged by the tens of thousands. (And he will hang a hundred thousand

before he gives up the ghost.) The blood of Sir Thomas More, that man of audacious reason, still smokes on the block in London. In Geneva, Calvin's Rome, the Rome of liberty of conscience, the pointed flames devour the bodies of the heterodox.

"And finally" he went on, "on the side of the Pope, and on the side of Luther and his like, and notably of the supreme head of the English Church, decrees forbidding the faithful to open the Sacred Books, although the free usage of them was the cause of the whole business! The confiscation of the Bible there, in fact, is your liberty!

"And yet the reformed religion has prospered in places. That is because it has become a religion like any other. It succeeds by its baseness, its acquiescence, its similarity, its vulgarity. Princes and kings make use of it as a tool. The pompous recriminations against the corruption of the Roman clergy have served as pretexts in disputes. The holy and celestial idea is used to cloak jealousy and covetousness. The least personal quarrel is clothed in eloquence and virtue. It has served as an excuse to lay hands on the property of the Catholic Church. They discover themselves suddenly invaded by doubts touching the infallibility of the Pope, the intercession of Saints, the celibacy of priests and oral confession—Gustavus Vasa, who coveted thirteen thousand Catholic domains, Henry VIII, (the sworn enemy of Luther) who saw himself already king of souls in his island, and cumbered with the spoils of churches and monasteries; or the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, who saw no other means of becoming Duke of Prussia. They were right; the proof—themselves!

"One owes respect," thundered suddenly this astonishing man, some of whose arguments I could by no

means follow—"one owes respect only to the poor, credulous masses who come and go like a wave, always ready to find apostles in any charlatans they can see, and lend them their hearts! One owes it only to deaf and disordered sincerity—could one but discover it! But that which is most worthy is deepest hid.

"They make us laugh, those doctors who have taken their bonnets of theology and gained their degrees one by one at the universities, patiently, like so many asses: they make us laugh with their pedantry, their doctrinal reasonings that are displayed like Gothic traceries. Ho, ho, Poland and the Helvetian Cantons!

"A matter of conviction or of race? No, no! Rather of proprietors of men—and of violence. Fire and the sword created the frontiers between Protestants and Papists. Wherever they have been drawn by any feeling or sentiment, that feeling has been hate. Hate of the metropolis alone caused Ireland to remain Catholic and the south of France, that was so brutally devastated by the followers of Simon de Montfort, to embrace the neo-Judaism of Geneva. Faith has been created by blows!

"The Jews were bloodthirsty as long as they were powerful and the Christians have surpassed them, God knows! Wherever the Protestants have been stronger than we, they have been more cruel and treacherous!

"So much the better! We must have enemies. Otherwise there would be everlasting peace and the end of this order that has been so laboriously established. By the Saints of God, heresy is useful, since it obliges those of the true faith to remain armed, and to become wicked! There are eras of war, prepared on high by religious tempests. A great friend of mine is moving heaven and earth to obtain recognition for



his Order of Clerks of the Company of Jesus, and orders of Jesuitesses have been founded by Warda and Tuttia for the same end: to establish schools and missions and thereby to instill a burning faith.

"My friend, reforms, to be effective, must go to the very roots."

"Messire, the great conception of the fatherland. . . ."

"Reforms, to be effective, must go to the very roots."

"It is patriotism that would prevent change. The nations are the fissures in the world: they ensure everlasting war: they are the poison which counteracts the idea of human brotherhood. Love with beak and claws beating against the bars of its cage! Each nation is a separate world which gives its own meaning to the terms Right, Virtue, Truth, and this would mean madness, if it did not mean war. If anywhere generous men exist, the cry of the 'Fatherland' rallies all others to their destruction."

For a moment this juggler with arguments was struck dumb. His eyes disappeared beneath their lids as if he had sucked them in; he crossed his hands on his breast. Then he unfolded them and raised his eyes.

"The movement toward national *rapprochement* over the heads of castles, towns and provinces is too small a thing to satisfy reason, which goes at a bound straight to totality. It is too large for everyday life . . . the existing human groups are lost outside the narrow circle of countryside with which each is actually identified.

"The most remarkable fraud of the ages is to have given to dwarfing nationalism the appearance of en-

largement, and to have imprisoned, by organising it, the need men feel for community. A nation is the rounding-out of an individual fortune; but it is also the illusion of prosperity thrown to the poor to make them partake in dream—in mockery—in the affairs of the great. All these high-sounding phrases are nothing but the chink of other people's money. There have been many frauds during the centuries."

He paused in thought.

"But it is ever the same."

"Surely, Messire, the peasants must have hurled themselves with all their might against such miserable conditions?"

"They were very stupid. They heard this talk of liberty, and even of equality, and they imagined that liberty and equality had come. They emerged from their huts. Five years ago the rustics of Waldshut unfurled their banner, black, red and gold, to found the evangelic fraternity of rustics. They demanded that water and fish should be common property. They demanded that their lords should keep their bargains, and claim no more than their due. They begged for little bits of reform. Therefore their defeat was certain from the beginning. Who fails to change all, changes nothing. They did not know how to look far ahead. They had not escaped from diabolical complications. They were stupid. So long as you dare not obey yourself alone (a terrible obligation!) you remain a slave. When it was plain that they wished to base justice on inequality, the lords regained confidence and took their revenge. It is said that they slaughtered only a hundred and fifty thousand. But you should have seen the means they used! I wandered over the battle-field and I saw . . . many things. My hair stands on end when I think of all that has been invented

in torture-chambers to make rebels shriek as loud and as long as possible for their cry of 'liberty'.

"Wait; listen to me!

"That same assembly which accorded what they had the impudence to call liberty of conscience, declared the Anabaptists enemies of the public welfare. These people followed in Luther's footsteps, but went further than he, saying that Christians should not be baptised until they had reached years of discretion. Thanks to the Anabaptist Jean Bockelson, an innkeeper at Leyden, Munster in Westphalia became a commune where a new and surprising law flourished; all goods belonged to all men. Gold, jewels, rich stuffs belonged to the common treasury; work was compulsory for all and was distributed according to individual capacity.

"Such an upheaval of customary law set a bad example; everywhere traditions of obedience would have been abolished had not all joined in holy alliance against the commune. They marched against this evangelical town. It was retaken by its Bishop, and the protestant princes of Low Germany, and punished as it deserved for the dream it had given to the poor. You should have seen the engines of war turned on men, women and children. Life was wrenched from them slowly, drop by drop; you can still see the body of John of Leyden hunched up like a roasted spider in an iron cage hung from the Cathedral.

"Those people had the courage of their opinions,—but they were too few. You cannot refashion the world against its will, by means of one single oasis. They were stupid! It is very simple: every great idea that is new will be either victorious or vanquished."

Thinking of one whose face lives unblurred in our memory, of that Englishman who came here to tell us of the great religious revolution, I murmured:

"How the apostles must have suffered! The man who brought to life this new conception, and saw. . . ."

"That man? Don't you know what he said when he heard how the peasants' bodies were being butchered? I know his answer word for word. Joyously, exultantly, he cried: 'A sovereign is like a muleteer. Just as the one must be always mounted on his beast because otherwise it will not go, so the other must urge forward, beat, strangle, hang, burn, behead and put to the rack, the people, *Herr Omnes* in order that they may fear him and respond to the rein. Crush them, strangle them, stab them in secret or in public, and remember that no one is more malignant than a rebel. Such a despatchful prince gains heaven more speedily by butchery than by prayers.' And later he said: 'I, Martin Luther, have myself killed peasants, for I have ordered them to be done to death, and have felt their blood trickle down my neck, but I give over this responsibility to our Lord God.'

"They are like us, I tell you. Men who stripped church walls of every work of art, thundered against the hierarchy, and made a great noise about this problem or that practice were no better than the rest, and the religion they have created is like all others. They are the tools of exceptional men who call their crimes by some other name and charge them against the Lord God. They are very like us. In moments of danger this brotherhood of the privileged is writ on their faces. They are all alike the children of terror and vengeance."

He threw up his arms with an abrupt gesture that arrested my eyes and silenced me.

"But with regard to John of Leyden—only outrages upon him have been allowed to appear on paper. The

history of the great mass is much graver than is imagined, but it never sees the light. As that man sang whom we caused to be tortured by children to prolong our enjoyment as we sat in judgment, the people cannot be healed of nobles and priests, since kings are kings."

"But do not books grow out of themselves—grow as it were from within,—and surely they have developed an irresistible power? This was told to us on that day of illumination."

He looked strangely at me. For a moment he lowered his mask—and resumed it.

"The Kings and priests did their best to nip in the bud the art of printing. They gathered together all the books they could lay hands on and made funeral pyres of them. The King of France, above all, stormed and threatened to exterminate every printer in his kingdom. Yet this art has become a power throughout the world, like fire.

"Since they could not destroy it, they made use of it. The evil is accomplished, the fatal machinery of publication exists; but at least authority can seize it for its own. All the machinery of ink, paper and printing presses, that had been regarded as an abuse, became a means of spreading royal truth. Woe to the men who used it in the cause of liberty! It is true that Francis I surrounded himself with artists—so-called: mere flatterers of the existing order, harmless upholsterers of the court. The stupidity of the middle-classes may dub him the patron of art and letters; in reality he was a great King who led his flock back to the senseless struggle between Saint Paul and the Ephesians."

He chuckled; he whose keen intellect pierced motives with the coldness of a knife—a terrifying man.

"Yes, yes, the realisation of the dream lies further off than we think. It is certainly not within the scope of men whose only originality lies in declaring: 'I am going to start a new era.' Such words are meaningless, idle nothings, mere nonsense. They come up against old laws and can only caress them, a breeze passing lightly over the bones of buried cities. What do they hope to accomplish, these men who settle matters in the empty realm of controversy while events march on their appointed way? What good has been done by all their entreaties and declarations? How much goodness, genius, even truth, have they not lost by their inability to reach—beyond all catechisms—the actual realities of the world."

And one would have thought him guided by some great indwelling spirit as he cried with wild-rolling eyes:

"God's intentions are but as grains of dust: True morality is, to change evil into good."

I must have lived too long in bedazzled exile, for I can see nothing at all now of what was so clearly, clearly promised.

But I say to myself: "Man may indeed have betrayed his dream of paradise, and retreated step by step before force, and buried himself in established order:—but beyond all there remains the liberty and fraternity of the lovely works of his hand." And as in a vision I saw again that most noble of men, the splendid Florentine who had stood one evening on this very spot, transfigured by the sun. I gazed at the vision and kept silence, fearing to spread it. But the next words of this extraordinary interlocutor showed that he had read my inmost thoughts.

"Painters and artists. . . ."

I considered this strange mixture of a man: under-

standing, yet refusing understanding: a magician of contraries. He had slain the judge in himself, and was an unbalanced advocate wholly, his generosity formless, and his head filled suddenly with any thesis wherewith to encourage or cast down his audience.

"They too," he said, "have not dared.

"Art has become an instrument of authority, an ornament for Courts, a ceremonial formula—and so, a small, small thing. Now the work of art is part of the central scheme of lands and kings. No longer is it permitted to gush forth spontaneously from individual or local effervescence, from the immense sincerity of the people, from deep-rooted entities. Now all is modes, nomenclatures, academies, calendars of fashion.

"The return to nature through classical antiquity, (another word for order!) was nothing more than a return to the masters, a search for kingly discipline. Art is now a department of the State, and taught to the aristocracy of the capitals like Roman law. Consequently it exists only by imitation—in these days an artist must copy.

"Hellenism is now nothing but a disease, Hellenism that once was strong,—even great, in its youth, in its true youth. Modern Hellenism prettifies beauty, and by its very charm enervates the originality of peoples. It half-clothes the present with the outgrown garments of the past, and at the same time, its clear and airy mythology chisels men's dreams into the balanced forms of a Greek frieze. It has come to mean, 'moderation', that word fatal to genius. It will wash away the essential power of poetry and relief-work in stone, those overflowing statues that still appeal to some few puissant fools, as it has washed out the popular theatre and the flaming colours of the old stained-glass windows."

He paused to take breath and, his thoughts still busy with what he had just said, he muttered some complaint about the over-prettiness and sugariness of modern glass, compared with the masculine colours ground to the very elements by those solid sculptors of the skies, the twelfth century glass-makers. He continued: "How has it not washed out with its monstrous elegance all the violent outbursts of colour that have tried to rise from the lower shadows; how has it not demoded and made ashamed the melodious, almost singing language of the troubadours. On all sides the divine strangeness of beauty is profaned. They try to foretell genius. They disarm themselves before unformed possibility: we are heading toward a period of dead rules and iron convention, toward a system of monotonous *chef d'œuvres*: what incalculable riches will be forfeited!"

Tears were in his eyes! He wept, sorrowful: he mourned the might-have-been. In that moment he seemed other than what I had thought:

I asked him: "Who then are you?"

He rose suddenly upon his black cockspurs and chanted, his whole being illuminated before me. . . . "He painted a portrait of his sorrowing wife surrounded by his children, and put it in a room where I saw it. Ah, the mass of the universe and its eternity are not mightier than that head is inconsolable!"

"Who are you?"

His only answer was to wave from side to side his long hands with their flexible palms. He was like a puppet, combining a whole theatre in his person.

"Men have not now strength enough to throw off the burden of obedience."

He cried aloud in a voice worse than that of the most destitute of beggars, worse than that of one who



tries to sell his shame and his body at highest price:

"In your acquiescence lies your original sin. You are damned by obedience. I have seen the Tuscan with the broken nose, strung up by cords on a scaffold above the wall of the chapel that he filled with great images. I have had the glory of seeing that wall still half-white. His streaming wrist made the damned fall from the wall into the universe in great slabs of liquid. He kneaded their turning bodies with the plaster from the wall, and they rolled out voluminosly, their architecture pointing in every direction, urged by the central snare of the Christ, and that iron hand stained with colour. You are damned by your obedience. Nothing will be done until men see how ridiculous is their misfortune!

"But meanwhile there is time to laugh! . . . The time is not yet in sight when public history shall cease to be the history of an individual. Before that there will be a deluge. . . . The increasing greatness of Kings, the world-wide feudalism of nations, who have each one single head. . . . If the King falls, his image remains stamped upon the nation. These vast, directing personalities have built society on a slope. . . . Go then, drive back the rivers to the mountains:—now in this day when words are dead and all pretexts float emptily in space, and the crowd, led by its nose, seeks ever some fetish!"

What has happened? I don't know. . . .

"Tell me, where is your treasure, that belongs to my King?—and where, by land or sea, is the golden powder to be found?"

He was thinking so intently of the gold that his eyes glittered.

"Tell me where the treasure is, Clément."  
He knew my name; who could have told him?

There were shrieks, fire, an overpowering horror.  
Everything was crimson. . . . Flames! . . .

Nahica! She is dead. Her eyes are shrouded and her mouth open. . . . She had shrieked my name as he killed her. . . . That was how he knew my name. He had made a vow to Saint Jacques of Compostella to kill with his own hands twelve Indians a day in honour of the twelve apostles. That evening, when he was talking to me, he had only killed eleven! . . . He gesticulates against the background of the flames: his shadow palpitates with joy. He greets the fire with his hat, crying: "Long live the King!"—his tonsure is visible. His fringed mantle falls back as he dances, revealing his bony arms.

Nothing remains but a black, upright mass. . . . The menhir of the shore between the sea and the ruins. But see, on each side two triangular wings grow out of it, rustling like a tree in the wind. And I watch the enormous bird at the moment when his talons touch the ground for the last time and he sways and sinks, already borne by the wind, before his flight.

In my mind an unwinding apparatus displayed before me the years to come. The ruins re clothed themselves in the fragrance of new greenery, and forgetfulness. The trees which had been shoots among the cinders, sprouted—grew again. This land which they call Acadie has been settled by colonists. A pretext is needed for his Britannic Majesty to bring the land under his yoke. A missionary is murdered at the instigation of the new brigand of the world, the King

of England. The canoe which journeys towards the wooden temple already contains an empty coffin.

Amidst the smoke-clouded scenery, the *éclat* of a flashing white circle catches my eyes. The locomotive goes backwards and forwards, belching into the air funnels of smoke that spread into great rounded puffs and poise themselves above its mighty frame that is propelled by a mechanism of ball and socket joints bathed in oil; the vertiginous whirl of wheels.

The engine concentrates naked force in a miraculously small compass. The driving power of the whole train, a little town built of iron, is generated by the breath of a thorax no longer than a man's. . . . The black being. . . . The long insect amidst the primeval grasses, with his two opaque, turquoise eyes, and his two huge, heavy sawing tools. The *essential* forms of grasping and of nutrition is, also, the Royal mechanism—the thing with two eyes and a belly—at the summit of men.

Has there ever been any progress in ideas, any beautifying of the spirit? No, nothing, nothing. Nothing but the perfecting of instruments.

The door of the station opened in a burst of factitious storm.

Darkness bathes the faces and luggage of the weary travellers. Seated on a bench in the station I cried out with all my strength, but I was already sufficiently awake to stifle my hollow cry and to turn it into a cough: no one turned to look at me.

“To doubt all things—to recommence all!”

The sonorous rhythm of this sentence stamps itself on my ear. I looked to see who uttered it amidst the hubbub of the street. The sound was just fading from

a *bourgeois* strangely outlined in black: spectacles with black rims and rippling glass that looked like eddying wheels partitioned his fat, yellow face; his words resounded as they flowed from his lips.

The philosopher stopped, and raised his finger in mid-air; his thick eyelids blinked to blot out objects that his spectacles distorted and multiplied unnecessarily in the bright light. This was in Alberstraat, in front of a wooden house. Its beams had been cracked by the weather and were smeared with rust and tar.

His companion listened to him with but half his attention; the remainder wandered to the happenings in the street on his other side. He replied in a surprising manner:

"Yes, monsieur,—and they ought to imprison all the scribblers who are not capable of copying what others have done."

This personage who nodded his head and imposed himself on the common passersby, was opulent. He carried a tall cane and wore over his buff belt a collar exactly like that affected by the Count-duke of Olivarez.

"Never to see part without the whole!" went on the black *bourgeois*.

"Yes, monsieur."

And the other, having given his answer, listened to what was going on above; he heard the clock in the Tower strike four. When it had finished he waved his grey-gloved hand and said:

"That clock is wrong, monsieur. That is the fourth time running it has struck one o'clock!"

## CHAPTER XX

### COMEDY .

Monday, Tuesday . . . shadowy titles, meaningless names of the days. We are fixed in this airy, mechanical procession (although we go with it ourselves). I had three, four more weeks, perhaps a little longer, to stay here. Marthe was always with me, or nearly always. But I was never entirely with her—I had two destinies, and I wandered between them. Often when my eyes were on hers, it happened that I waited an instant before smiling at her. I spoke to her and she answered. During the day I roamed aimlessly here and there. In the evening I did not know what to do.

At the close of long and stormy hours of the night, I awoke in the peace of my bed. I sat on its hot, tumbled disorder with an iron weight in my head; then I slipped to the floor, a phantom numb with torpor. The fresh, clean smell of the dressing-room, whiffs of fresh paint, pungent tooth-paste, white varnish on the perpendicular walls; these things—all this paraphernalia—helped to clear my head. The other day I was surprised to see in the bright oval of a mirror hanging on the wall near me how much my features had changed. I should have recognised myself only by my eyes.

It seemed to me that I could no longer save myself from the slope down which all around me was slipping. How was I to unearth myself from the weight of dreams! I thought of Angelino, who damned himself

to make his light come forth from his fingers, to inflame the stained-glass. What similarity, since I was forbidden to work!

But all that is my affair alone. She—she did not know that I was a captive. Sometimes I surprised her in pensive or melancholy mood; yet she had no cause for sadness, since she did not know me.

I held to her more than ever. She was beautiful. Whenever she was among strangers I noticed sudden astonishment written on their faces as she passed—and I loved her because she was beautiful—far more than for any other reason.

I detected in myself pride and egoism. . . . Her voice was grave, musical and calm. When we walked together, her form leant proudly on mine, and her whole body moved in harmony with me.

I, the poet who wrote no more poetry, the friend who no longer knew his friends, I who had been remade with all the débris, and who, each time I awoke, found myself deeper in the wreckage of the present day,—how much longer was I to go on like this?

I resisted the power which was trying to overcome me. I withdrew into myself, into the depths of my being—I wished to endure; I repulsed the menace. . . . What menace? That which took place in my head: the intoxication of achievement. Yes, these were lines that moved, converged, thrilled to a consummation. The masterpiece that held me slipped towards the transient resurrection of the *dénouement*, towards the great yet death-bound feast of the end. A solemn and shadowy panic shifting crowds and bent backs in the embers of evening.

I did not want to be swept away by this gale of calamity! . . . In the richness of the countryside an

old man sat on a stone and sang in his cracked voice, turning towards me as if he were calling me. Then he ceased, and bent his head over the lingering cadences of the song. This plaintive dialect-song held me:

“What does your song mean?”

“It is an old song from my country. You don’t understand it? It means: All roads end in sorrow.”

It was Clairine’s song, that had comforted my former love. I had not recognised the actual song—but without knowing it, from so far off, it had called me.

To open the window, the palisade of night, I crossed the room that retreated thickly in front of me. It was early morning—already the blackness was beginning to fade out in massive squares. Against the immovable flatness of the walls the furniture loomed large and grey in their shadow matrices; the windows were veiled crosses; the pale cracks in the Venetian blinds were slender shafts, sea-blue below, sky-blue above.

I had disarranged a little mirror that hung against the wall; it was an old one, worn with constant use—its frame had been painted with a design of roses; nothing remained of them now except their colourless outlines and some patches of tarnished silver. As I paced about in the dusk I saw a figure pass me and disappear. I stood before the mirror as if it were a yawning grave; for now I was eager to see my reflection and to trace in the countenance opposite signs of weariness and degeneration.

The grey mass of dawn and its gleaming edge penetrated my boxed-in room. This wonderful spectacle grew clearer in the distance: I watched it every morning now.

The sky rising above the two bowed peaks: the sea which diluted the blackness of the horizon: the crowded roofs.

I was thunderstruck! All was quietly overthrown before my eyes. The bowed peaks remained, but no houses. . . . My familiar countryside, but empty all about me. . . .

Then, it must be that *this end of the town was not yet built*. . . .

There was a man in my room!

A man dark and indistinct in shape, hardly visible—a reflection in a mirror—coming and going naturally.

I could see his profile and his youthful fringe through a cloud of smoke. He sat down. Before sitting down, he drew apart his coat-tails. He was there, sitting before a table, or a writing-desk. He rested his slender fingers against his forehead and sat dreaming; he wore embroidered wrist cuffs.

That man whom I could see, sitting there quite outside myself—he was I, he was my very self.

He made my characteristic movements as if he were my shadow. Morning lightened.

After the drunkenness of night, I installed myself firmly. Daylight.

We like to look at ourselves in a glass—our egoism feeds itself on itself.

We are the pride of a face.

In the mirror framed with silver roses—big rounds of silver or of purple paste—I was tri-coloured (good heavens!) I, Séraphin Trachel (that name that speaks for itself!) I was wearing a suit with pastel blue facings, and a crimson velvet waistcoat beneath the bluish-white collar of lace. In my wig threads of white silk shone in curved lines. Even, a particle of the powder-puff floated above, so light that the movement of the



air swayed and tossed it. My hair was marked with a faint smear of powder which the hair-dresser had not been able to avoid today—any more than he had avoided it last time.

I gazed at myself, and listened to myself.

The lips were rounded and shiny, like those in an oil-painting, while the rest of the face had the flour-besprinkled texture of a portrait in pastels. A lispings, whistling sound came from the lips as they at one and the same time swallowed and restored words,—the dewy function of enunciation:

“This time it is the beginning!”

We had come from afar, across tempestuous oceans. My kinsmen and Dorothy had left Acadie when the odious Laurence, that monster in human form, had despoiled French colonists to the profit of the English King, transported them in flocks, and destroyed all who resisted. But after this great upheaval, Liberty. In the motherland we drew long breaths of hope and philosophy. The republican club in open contempt of the royal authority. I refused the shameful inheritance of my father's Haiti slave-pens. In the Palais Royal itself I turned my back on my uncle, a member of the Parliament of Aix who had written a defence of torture which he had been allowed to dedicate to Louis XVI, and which had been specially approved by Pius VI. It was I who conceived the Proclamation to the People during the long night-watches, and spread and upheld it among our adherents beneath the trees of the public gardens. It lies in my bosom beside the last of Joconde's letters. This melody. . . . This romance rose, clear and delicate on wings of song; I fashioned the air, and Gérard, my friend, my brother, created the poem. But I gave myself jealously to noble works;—the French Republic, the Roman Republic.

Nothing had ever been changed in the enslavement of the people. Man had always believed in his rebirth, and he had fallen back to his old self. But this time it was verily the beginning!

One evening, in the shadow of branches where the birds hymned their Creator, we also breathed the sacred words: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!"

It was we who had first combined those three words which since were let loose to the mighty winds of heaven. We were intoxicated by their rhythm, and we thought them so lofty and so beautiful that they swept us into transports of joy and heroism; we young men and young women danced in the midst of the public garden to the sound of those three words. And far off, across the trees gay with cockades and tri-coloured ribbons, the joy of the people roared like a mass in the depths of mighty Paris.

With what generous fervour Gérard and I inveighed—that very evening,—against our fellow-student and former friend, Rodolphe de La Mark, the little Viennese baron who upheld Divine Right, and reproached our revolution with wishing to adapt the most diverse peoples to the French programme of the Rights of Man. Moreover the revolution was too warlike for his taste, since it permitted, in spite of its humanitarian principles, an army. And he maintained that we should have to change human nature from top to bottom before we could make it accept a law founded on reason.

How could a human being, built apparently on the same model as others, preach such outworn theories as this Austrian lordling? He said, too, that the folly of France would have no future since England was there, and would be the tenacious and all powerful champion of the older order.

The torrent . . . at night. She and I stand on the brink of the torrent. A tree is distorted by the horrible light of the moon. Joconde stands at the edge of the flood, wearing the blue necklace and its golden cross given her by the vile seducer. We mingle our bitter cries—my curses and her moans—with the thunder of the spray.

I walk alone beside the flood, which holds in its depths an adored body. The heaving waves move faster than I. I run, icy cold, lashed by the black cloud of my coat.

Suddenly horizontal rays of sunlight streamed over the teeming expanse of grey framed by the window; the coming of the sunshine doubled the reality of the landscape and lit up the minute details of the town. Day had dawned.

The person who had held tight to me became confused. I could not even see him in the mirror. He was transparent, and in places my glance went right through him, as might my finger.

The solitude of the morning filled my room at Alican—my room where dreamy reality struggled to possess me,—where now the two dreams of reality fought, independent of me.

“This time, it is the beginning.”

Swiftly, violently my charming features of Séraphin Trachel appeared, to disappear immediately. In the twinkling of an eye, they had become shapeless and wrinkled. The hair was sprinkled with white, the cheeks hung in pendulous folds from the bones, the eyes were puffy; the whole face coarse, lined, musty.

This hideous apparition of old age had said that this time it was the beginning.

From time to time I tell myself what is clear enough

when I am face to face with myself—I, the Baron Séraphin Trachel, Councillor of State and a very important person in my sumptuous pavilion at Neuilly.

I walk slowly on stars of inlaid ebony, the floor of a circular cabinet opening on to the dazzling pillars of a verandah. The sun-bathed canvas of an awning is raised in front like the door of a tent, casting a strong shadow: it is ornamented in the manner of an opera house, with tall wooden pillars and gilded festoons—. It stands out against the foliage of the park, and green reflections of the leaves make patterns on the shining, polished floor.

I catch a glimpse of the tortoise-shell and brass curves of a clock of *le grand siècle*: its form and its bulging front resembling the figure of a Fontanges lady. I see the brass foot of a stand which projected on the parquet and cast reflections in shining rings and ripples on the polish.

I go to stand before the waiting mirror.

What a fine head, what a noble attitude!

It was indeed my celebrated figure. I gaze at and smile confidentially at myself: Baron Séraphin Trachel, Councillor of State and leader of the new Liberal-Constitutional party, the illustrious servant of France, of whom it will be said, later on: He was distinguished as much for his character as for his political genius.

I take several steps in front of the mirror, moving very calmly, and never taking my eyes from the figure in its silvered frame; I am wrapped in a dressing-gown of Muscovite fur. The years have left their mark without disheartening me; the white hair lying in waves along my forehead seems to remind me of some bust. My face is lined, but how dignified, how majestic in

my old age! It glowed like some lordly model for great painters, or for the magnificent art of chromolithography, born but yesterday. My features seem to combine the nobility of a law-making Roman senator with the imperceptible irony of a philosopher, the statuesque morality of the Protestant, the sugared cleverness of the Jesuit, and, in addition, an indescribable popular halo.

“Excellency. . . .”

“Excellency. . . .”

We looked gravely at each other. He often came to see me, and discoursed with me on an equal footing. It was His Excellency Prince Rudolphe de La Mark, ambassador of His Majesty the Emperor of Austria. My station in the State was analogous to his, I resembled him in demeanour and in movement—and I had not his absurdities.

My eyes wandered over his figure, sunk in an arm-chair that seemed to engulf him, and rested on his face; it was as wrinkled as Voltaire's,—(irony that made me smile in my inmost self)—over the stiff white lines, shaped like a bird's footprints, that marked his forehead till it resembled that of an aged cockatoo; over the crack at his knee where the red velvet breeches seemed to have been drawn together by an upholsterer; on his thin calves clad in tightly-stretched white silk stockings: nowhere any curves, nothing but straight lines. We recalled mutual memories.

I make a noble *mea culpa* to my old and illustrious friend. Long ago, before the Revolution, how I had frittered away my youth in madness! My tempestuous heart, the awful night by the torrent. . . . Yes, but all that can be pardoned. It was my inflexible, peremptory, flaming ideas that made me a lunatic!

The ambassador nodded his head, and articulated finely:

"You used to say: 'If only we had wings, wings!'"

"And you would answer me: 'You are too zealous.'"

For several years I actually had the sacrilegious idea of foregoing the fortune which my father had made in the Colonial trade, that foremost agency of civilisation.

By a sudden turn of fortune's wheel, it was the abolition of slavery in the island of St. Domingo that brought me back to the right course by ruining our family plantations, and thus reducing my income. I hastened thither across the sea, and took part in the indignant rebellion of the French colonists, who gave themselves to England and Spain in their just resentment; for when the mother-country acts like a harsh step-mother to her children and does but plunder them in return for their sacrifices, she has no further right to love or faithfulness. On my return I found a France which, also, had regained the right road.

My political career dated from the day Napoleon had himself proclaimed Emperor of the French Republic. Among other wise measures, he naturally re-established slavery among the black races, he whose mission on this earth was narrowly to adjust Roman law to the modern world, and the Romans had the gift of logic. . . .

"But no genius, Heaven be thanked!" the Prince de La Mark was moved to interject.

And after the Emperor, the British Empire—ever, thank God, an upholder of tradition—and the Holy Alliance of the three Catholic monarchs definitely consolidated the counter revolution by overcoming France:

(but it was doing of evil to a good end, and social order is even more sacred than the fatherland).

Whenever we speak of these things I end by saying:

"Your Excellency, the French Revolution was a bright meteor, blazing up before its extinction. . . . A volcano of words on the world—and really, a literary age. So many great sayings, poetic promises, tragic vows! . . ."

While I speak my eminent questioner (his story is simpler than mine; they made him a prince) listens to me with open mouth and eyes burning with eagerness. When I have finished his mouth shuts; then his thin snuff-darkened lips venture:

"Good God, what waste! Noble, superficial spirit of France!"

Although the charming diplomat certainly heaved an unfathomable sigh, yet my patriotism, which is well known to be one of the chief features of my lofty personality is wounded by his Austrian judgment, which seems to me false; and I retort, spiritedly:

"There is idealism in each country . . . and not in any others. . . ."

I add what must be said: "Something has come out of it all. Well"

"You," says the Prince; "the *bourgeois*, the legalised upstarts. Yes, the huge Revolution has given birth to you."

"Legalised . . . and legalising: The new caste of masters."

The Prince assumes a look of exaggerated surprise; I can see the lax curtains of his eyelids rise bulging over his rounded eyes.

"This authority rests on strange, artificial foundations, your Excellency."

"That itself, your Excellency, is the greatest point

of resemblance between the new order and the old."

He puts his hand to his delicate face and utters the aborted sneeze which is the abbreviated sign of a sneer.

"You are the son of a merchant, Séraphin," he says in a tone of gentle reproach.

"The new caste of masters," I repeat slowly.

He lowers his head, not without irritation. I understand his bitterness. This individual is throwing his last vital ray on a moribund species, a species demanding the quick attention of the Cuviers of historical research for its reconstruction. I, a Baron since yesterday, an upstart, who in certain ways manage to improve on the venerable puppet—I am the Future.

"Society," I proceed, "has assumed its rational shape. In 1789 we realised the great plan which has been worked out through the centuries—the new privileged class over the old. True, it is the people who have made the change and created the Revolution. Like many things it was made by the people, but not for them—for us. It has come out of the people. . . ."

"It has come out so far that it can never return."

"It played on the words: 'The Third Estate.'"

"That was clever. I have often thought, your Excellency that God was above all a comic author."

"It was, definitively, a Palace revolution, despite the demagogue Utopias sprung up around its cradle. It sanctified the seizure by the exploiters of work and trade (who come from the people, but only one by one) of consecrated authority and Roman law. Once, in the night of history, the tamers of the crowd were a race apart, but now that race is open to the energetic few, who bring it new blood."

"As the barbarians to the Roman Empire," said M. de La Mark.



“And that,” I continued, “is the supreme achievement of civilisation. But beneath all, the mass must not change.”

“The only method is that which you have used—to persuade it that it has changed,” the plenipotentiary of the Empire says profoundly. “Social science is only an art—that of obtaining the acceptance of the unacceptable. It is the lawyers who are the makers of the modern system. Ah, you are past masters in the use of the eloquence of history! When you have said: The English Constitution, or, the Separation of the Powers, or the Welfare of the Labouring Masses, or even (for you are bold), the Will of the People!—when you have said that you have done everything. And what a revolution,” he adds, taking up what I had said, “you have brought into the vocabulary! There is no longer the hated poll-tax, but there are the land-taxes; instead of the discredited aids, there is indirect taxation. There is no longer the disgraceful right of control, but there is the stamp-tax; no longer the gold mark, but licenses; no more compulsory labour, which the people hated, but prestation, which they tolerate. Such is today’s ideal (and without an ideal, man would be only his material self—a soft, uncertain sieve of the Danaïdes). And just as the ‘salt-tax’ has become to everyone’s satisfaction the ‘duty on salt’, so has the old become the constitutional régime . . . or, when it’s wanted, the republican. . . .”

I see a smile creasing the lines on the face of the *grand seigneur*, and he continues:

. . . “the Republican; in short, a régime like the others. In the contrast between what it has proclaimed—liberty,—and what it has effected—your liberalism,—the French Revolution is the greatest fraud ever played on the stage of history.”

I understand the direct blow that these words aim at me—the palpable result of the upheaval:

“After Christianity,” I correct him.

At this thrust the counsellor of Franz I starts up and darts at me a furious look, which I meet steadily. . . . Then we begin to smile, then to laugh, unable to distinguish one from the other the two tremendous comedies upon the theme of the kingdom of the poor.

There has been no Christianity, there has been no Greek or Roman democracy, there has been no French Republic. That is the truth.

The aged nobleman rises. Painfully, heroically, tightening quickly and bracing up his sinews by a princely effort of will, he retires. Under the high door, with the silhouettes of his servants outlined in the background, he turns round; his head hardly shaking, he lifts his finger, thin and noduled like a chess pawn.

“Be sure to cultivate religious principles.”

“Where find them better portrayed than in the idea of the fatherland? We have remade religion.”

“And meanwhile, in the lower layers of the populace, encourage love of war and lottery. ‘Get rich!’ That is the catchword that you must supply, so that they will let the innocence drop from their eyes, and bravely fall upon one another.”

We bow.

“Your Excellency. . . .”

“Your Excellency. . . .”

When the Prince de La Mark has gone I consider more than ever how that I am the fruit of the continual victory of a choice few over the colossal docility of men, and that there is no better way of life.

When I look at myself I conceive perfection.

I can hear young Amélie in the next room, her dear

hands drawing moving tones from the harpsichord. I have always devoted myself to music. I hum one of those gracious songs I composed long ago (the words had been written by Gérard, then as a brother to me—Gérard whose execution I had to order later, steeling my heart like Brutus; he had remained a Revolutionary!)

I open the door of the music room. Gentle Amélie, decked with a scarf like Iris, her velvet arms escaping at each shoulder from a corolla, is practising a new air.

What is she playing? . . .

What is that!

That infinite, awful harmony—thunder of harmony—and suddenly that rumbling, that limitless ascension.

I exclaim: "What is it?"

Dorothy, upright, pale, her hair white as the white lace that covers it, answers:

"A German musician who has just died."

I stay in a corner, penetrated by these great bell-notes. We bury ourselves in what we know; we judge: "No one can do otherwise." But there are some who invent new last judgments, one after another. The unknown composer had that in him, that power of sound! A man like me. . . . What must he have dared shatter to make music greater!

Of course I refuse. I cry: No! I struggle against this thing, it shocks me. It is not true; I am right! But I feel my perfected smile shattered on my portrait face; upright against the doorway in my fur robe, I tremble like a falling ruin.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE TORRENT

Alican, Marthe! The days are getting longer; so alike in the empty promise of morning and the heaviness of evening, yet they differ with mathematic differing.

We are at a season of rain and storm, and the sun is forgotten. The sky is black, flooded by black clouds. Who is burning? Over the strips of grey rock the sea, faded to the colour of bitterness, raises its stony grumblings and pours them out in transverse lines that are slanted by the wind.

I walked straight on and went far over the mountain. I breathed the great, undulating landscape. Sometimes, with bent head I asked myself, haunted by my last vision: "Did I kill Joconde? or did she throw herself into the torrent? or is it all a dream?"

Before a squat, solitary building, whose red walls were pouring blood in the torrential downpour, an old horse waited alone, exposed to the drive of the rain. With a little shudder of horror I gazed, not daring to gaze long, at the footworn animal who had yielded all the work that was in him, and was waiting there where the world had driven his last steps—at the door of the slaughter house. In this poor palpitating flesh begins the wedge of all injustice.

Further on in the crushed and pierced desolate expanse there passed a negro, coughing. He is as if shattered by internal buffeting. Obscure two-footed

beast of burden, all the world is ranged against him; heaven slays him.

A frantic squall surprised me in a gorge, and I had to stop; I looked round distracted to see where I was. Despite the wrapping of my coat all my body was molested by the glancing water, shaken by my umbrella handle; my feet were plunging in the mud and the wind was whirling away the earth's surface. I was exhausted, nearly falling. I must get in somewhere, in the first house I could reach. On the hollowed slope, streaming like me, I saw a house, and climbed towards it by a flooded path; my shoes squelched out the gushing water. I pushed aside a wet, muddy gate, dripping and filmed with water, I knocked at a low door. Before my face a pine branch dangled continuous crystal fingers.

An old, sad-faced man, lean and bony, opened the door as I was impatiently shutting my skeleton of an umbrella.

He said to me: "Come in my friend."

I realised that this old man, who did not ask what I wanted, took me for a beggar! My disorderly gear spattered with pieces of mud, my big shoes covered with clay, my drenched cap, and even this ridiculous umbrella. . . . A moment before I had taken off my rain-beaten spectacles, which were blinding me with their haze. With my eyes reddened by the glasses, I must have looked bewildered and pitiable.

He made me sit down in the kitchen, attended to the blazing fire, and sat down opposite me—as in the story books.

Just when I was about to speak, he spoke. He told me that it was very difficult to get a livelihood, that he himself had worked fifty years to be able to retire and merely exist in a house and garden.

He had little eyes set in a network of wrinkles; there was grey stubble on his cheek; his bent back was covered with a thick overcoat.

"I hope you are not a rebel," he said.

I don't know what idea possessed me. My voice was involuntarily hoarse when I answered:

"But I am a rebel!"

It seemed to me a strange thing to say. I felt that at that very moment I had escaped from eternal imprisonment; I was at last in the open air.

"All existing things are evil. We must change everything!"

Strong emotion was stifling me while I groped and faltered using phrases that I had kindled, that I had realised in another world.

He listened to me. He absorbed my words, calmly. His nose bulged loosely, his beard was greasy.

"Evil? . . . long ago, but not now. You are bitter. . . . The Twentieth Century, you know. Well, my friend, I am a progressive, a liberal. We have had three revolutions. . . ."

I knew him. . . . It was like a play (but not on the stage; no, in the corner of a dingily distempered kitchen, its windows lashed by the rain, its fire incubating a dull warmth). It was like a play that I should know him who by telling me that all was changed proved that nothing was changed. And yet, when I knew him I was at the end of the dream and the dance of past things. I was emerging into dry reality. It was here, it was today. A living man face to face with a living man, touching him. It is I and the man of all monotony; I and the wall of Méliodon and Massard.

This wrinkled old man whose face champs, who simpers into his hand, who sometimes silently chews

the inside of his cheek . . . he comes from the depths of Time, unassailable by death. He strikes me as I was struck by the dog-headed stone I found one evening, at the edge of all the mist—the stone that I handled with these ultimate hands.

He is speaking patiently, obstinately, not listening to me, his eyes closed.

“Everything has changed. . . . Nothing is the same. You are embittered. . . . There is a Republic. You know I have not invented that word! Come, there are no human sacrifices, no tyrants, no slaves, no torture; come, come! . . . The Twentieth Century, the Republic, France!”

When I am about to reply he stops his ears and repeats more emphatically the cabalistic words; and the second time he says them his jaws are already full of thick, heavy anger.

That is what I find wandering whither chance leads me. A man invulnerable and rocky, an arteried skeleton; a dull, heavy affirmation rooted in the world. I batter my head against millions of men; but not their greatness, not everyone, indiscriminately!

Marthe was waiting for me at the inn. I told her my adventure.

“He took me for a tramp!”

She laughed and that relieved me a little and did me good. I smiled. She was sitting opposite me. It was evening; the rain had ceased, the wind was weaker, and sometimes stopped dead, as if reflecting. We were at table at one end of the room. Between us was littered a newspaper, painted a vivid white by the rectangular glare of the pendent lamp.

I repeated what the old man said—that talking blockhead. And now that I was coming out of limbo, that I was beginning to blend the past with actual life,

I had it all with Marthe. And I told her in trembling confession:

"Yes, I am a rebel. . . . True honour dictates rebellion."

I look at her, watching for her to think with me.

But she shakes her head. She says: "No."

She says: "No!" . . . She . . . I . . . I cannot understand. Pain. . . .

My gaze tumbles on the newspaper lying there. A square of printing adorned with the title: *The Rebel Masses of India*. According to *The Times*, that great timepiece of prevailing wisdom, "*His Majesty's Government perceives a conflict between, on the one side, anarchy, and on the other, those principles which are the foundation of civilized states. . . . His Majesty's Air Force has thrown four thousand pounds of explosives on the population of Bengal.*" My finger, following my eyes, rests on that text: the remainder of the paper is a mist. The English would like their schemes of pillage and robbery to seem a holy thing. I am excited, suffocated. . . .

At the end of my destiny I must find life; I need someone living, some human thing. And it is this woman who is always before me. The time has come. I raise my voice:

"All these lies with which they deceive men: Violence, trickery: Trickery, violence."

She scans me, eyelids trembling.

"You want to beat your head against everything. Take care!"

Roughly I lean towards her, elbows on the table, so near her that I see moving as a tiny speck in the brightness of her great eyes, my head and shoulders.

Her voice says, "You frighten me."

The echo of that word has thrown me far back! I



relive a moment of the limitless past, when once before she said that. What? She had said it before and I had forgotten it! Only now do I realise, and see, and understand. I was telling myself, weighing out the evidence. Annette, Marthe; they are alike, but only at the end am I able to see the likeness. Like Annette she is afraid of me. Then she loves me no more. When she said, "You frighten me," she hated me. She is retreating into herself: she has withdrawn herself: it had to be.

Outside, a mournful calm: a night sky full of clouds that roll snowily: a moon buried in soft veils. No more rain; our faces veiled with humidity; only the breath of the rain. The wind hesitates, then launches itself. It is like a person, therefore hateful.

Below the slopes we are skirting, down below this chasm roof, is the black noise of the surf. When we look steadily, we see, climbing among the rocks and black like them, the waves that crumble whitely. The sea, which is silence, hollow silence, silence solid right to the earth's core, has just a narrow ribbon of tumult all around.

Towering above this endless sound we pace as if following the bank of a torrent. A torrent? . . .

We walked a little way without a word, under the avalanche of clouds, at the foot of the romantic rocks. Then I spoke, and my voice was calm, cruelly calm.

"Talk to me about yourself."

I saw her beautiful squared face shiver in its almost starry whiteness: Her fair hair was black, desolate, bewildered, her voice choked, she cried out:

"Clément, Clément, let me go!"

Dully I repeat the word:

"Go? . . ."

She stops, leans against the rock with mouth half

open, her little childish teeth—her arms stretched out to me, her shrinking hands speaking agony.

“Let me go! I will talk to you later, I will tell you . . . not now, I am too tired. Clément, take pity on me. You have not seen, these days, how I have suffered.”

No, I have not seen. I have not seen anything. She has ceased to love me. She is silent, weeping, crouched on the rock, almost falling. When I heard her speak, although my eyes were on her, I did not see her expression because I cannot do two things at once. Nor does she see me; she is wholly and harshly absorbed in her pain. She brings to me all the living grief of the world—to me who am awaking, stepping back into real things; she brings me the punishment which she, of all living beings, can inflict. . . . She brings me—*she*, to *me*—the torture of human changings before things that never change, along the great noisy deaf sea, the tearless ocean, at the foot of the bowed peak which has never been other than it is since the mountain was first cast. . . . (And yet it seems to me that the wind singing in my ears is shaking the rocks with their black clusters, as if they were pasteboard scenery.) She smiles again, a little, but she has slain us.

The wind has risen. It passes in its strength, ceaseless. Far off, below my feet in wet torture the fearful wash of the sea increases.

“. . . Torise, you are wondering why I made you meet me on this stormy night. It is because I hoped that it would make you afraid, and that you would understand the greatness of my dreams. . . .”

This sentence, dumb through the centuries, has come to me. But it is not those two who now follow the abyss, fleeing, hunted. She covers her face with her

hands—that face beautiful and gentle enough to comfort those who suffer meaninglessly—and hides, too, her neck. She—Joconde—was ashamed of her sin, and with her two hands she hid the blue necklace and gold cross that had come from the Other's hands.

The other! Ah, the other! I said to Marthe:  
“You love someone else. Tell me.”

She does not answer. She weeps. She loves me no more because she is afraid of me? No, no. It is because she has ceased to love me that she fears me—like Annette, like Joconde who would not confess it at first.

“Tell me!”

I seized her by the shoulder. I gripped my hand on her with all my strength. She uttered a hollow cry. And suddenly, with the feeling of bitter hate that tensed my throat, *I knew that I had killed Joconde.*

Joconde was here, just here. Between the torrent and the threatening sky she had lamented, and I had thundered my curses. We had told each other everything and anything, I and that creature who was at the ultimate end of her resources, her strength—we two who *had* been She and I, but now were distorted:—we said whatever we could find to say to each other to wound most deeply. But I tamed her by the strength of my anger.

And here is the moment when I wished to kill her. A dark sentence drives me into a maze of darkness: “It was only the winter after that I became his mistress.” It is those words which were enormously magnified, which outweighed everything.

Like a crazy statue she rolled heavily into the cavity. My body stayed on the precipitous bank, tortured, alone. My eyes watched the great burden plunge ever downward, and they watched too a huge contorted

branch of a cork-tree lying like a dragon against the clouds. I rushed away, wrapped in my coat. The stream dashed on more quickly than I could run on the bank, and it happened that after I had fled for a long time, at a bend in the midst of a rocky barrage, she rose up, dead, in front of me. For a flash I glimpsed the pale body, already torn, swaying and streaming, with arms hanging and dripping into foam; and before she fell back into the eddies she let me see on her neck the blue necklace with the cross of gold.

I did that once, I? Did I do it? Yes! No. I pause to ask, to ask it of the silence, of the impossible, to ask the two hands that I raise to my face. Is man then capable of everything? He who probes the depths of a man finds all.

And yet, no one is any man's master; no one is judge of anything.

I have compassion for her, her eyes, her fingers, her mouth, even that little necklace which was her ornament. She was justified wholly. . . . To pity someone is to see clearly that he is right.

But I shake off this ancient tale to rid myself of it. All that belongs to the past! What was real is now only a dream. Marthe is here. She walks there, bowed down, and weeps aloud.

I call her and she does not hear me. I stop, but she walks on sobbing.

Because I have stopped, it is over for us two. Whilst my immobility rends me from her, whilst everything, step by step, dissolves, I consider how that she is justified. I have not lived for her; I may not murmur.

I rose higher still, and have heard together the two disputing voices. I have been the two voices, confronting and affronting. For a moment I invaded the tomb

of the other. A passion of will made me see with those alien eyes, her eyes: what I saw before me was myself fleeing, aloof. By a miracle I feel all that she has indeed hid, as she said, of her bitterness, her anguish, and that charity which piously disfigures love.

But how did I not foresee, with the example of Annette. . . .

It is because there is no example. Never has love proved anything outside itself. In the world's great life there is no new beginning, but love each time recommences wholly, and we can learn nothing from it, nor in any way imitate. That is what I am forced to admit by the hazardous destiny of my so many lives, of my hundred human masks, of the half-glimpsed Eve of my journeying.

Does he himself know his secret, thrust down before us from his thick darkness? Should we know it even if he told us? We do not know. Another fragment of the world, chipped off like a mountain, emerges from the void.

On the lava isthmus of Almannagja—the Valley of All Men—cut off by crevasses from the huge snowy plain where vigilant armed bands are ringed round, all alone in the midst of all in the whiteness, at the heart of a world of silence, two beings are face to face: the accused and the judge.

They who have contained within them the surge of their anger find a mournful happiness like they who have toiled.

I seem to enter in everywhere, searching, searching, like the sea.

## CHAPTER XXII

### WE ARE GREATER WHEN WE CEASE TO DREAM

I shall never see her again. She has left this country. I am afraid lest people should speak to me of her going . . . or lest they should talk of something else—of someone else.

The room is as empty as the sea of roofs which continues it all around.

*I shall have no more visions.*

I shall have no more great memories. I feel it deep within me. I am freed, cut off from that fever, that confused solicitation of the flesh, which accompanied the doubling of my life. I am alone as before, and like all other men.

I stand there, in the dawn that is so soon to be soiled, at the night's end—at the end of many nights,—stricken by this annunciation: stripped bare, disheartened, trying to get upon my feet, as if hopelessly debauched.

Once I had a longing to be rid of my dreams that I might the better fulfil my narrow human task.

That was in this very room, where this morning I am exorcised!—I am cold, I am shaking; I am tortured.

I would give all I have to plunge again into the non-existent. There are none happy but madmen, or the consoled, with their unchanging grief.

I can dream no more. Broken, I try to move. My head in my hands, I call up again the invasions of the world's past. Pausing to smile beatifically, I postulate that (doubtless owing to some organic disposition)

these resuscitations of the dead have succeeded one another in an almost continuous chronological sequence. Everything is disconcerting, even the universal regularity.

I shall dream no more; and I shall go forth to the end of everything. I feel myself a prey to supreme, ultimate preparations—awaiting the uprush of the finale: as when Beethoven gripped me and froze me into attention and put upon me, who had been ignorant of him, a mask of splendour.

Rocks and the sea: the two bowed peaks: I wander, looking for Marthe. I am no good for anything else, now. I follow the paths where we used to walk together. . . . Along this one, and then down this slope. . . . Here she laughed, in the days when she used to laugh. . . . She laughs here still. She is in nature—in the blue sky. Her absence beautifies everything; it is a mournful presence. But in reality, all the things we saw together, and which I see now, have withdrawn from me. I am suddenly bereft of half my life.

I accuse first her, then myself. Impossible to understand, or to deny, how love always leaves remorse behind it.

So much the better! One is stronger when one is stripped bare—when one's seeking cry can find no refuge;—when one bears with one a mourning grief intense as that of the prisoner condemned to death. To see life, one must look great death in the face, and coldly measure oneself against it. Like the soul of the people, which has never achieved save in the joy of affliction—like it, that has never grown save when conquered, and whose nameless form I see—the great Crier, the bell-clapper of the sky—I am filled with a

*clairvoyance* that is stripped of all veils, perfect; destiny seems too simple, and terrible in its beauty.

We are greater when we cease to dream. To read the world's tumult closely, like the wind upon the waters, is greater than to steal chance fragments of intimacy. I have been thinking today, as I did when I first came back, that this country—full of chasms—has not changed materially since it first flowed out in its volcanic red copper. As it is today, so it has been to all the passing generations who have haunted it. Distant and half-lost, this connection with living, thinking beings must yet suffice to fix the latitudes of a human mind.

All the same,—today I passed the bounds of the desert places and went where men swarm.

The season is in full swing—the festival of those who pass. The vast establishment that rises above the sea in dazzling sheets of white paper, in terraces, in balustrades and quays, is overflowing with customers. In the green-blue water lies a scattered reflection of white chips. There are no natural shores in Joyland.

After a week of storms, (a week, a child's span of time!) the sun fills the heavens. It purifies this architectural lingerie. It sharpens the angles of the whiteness. It lubricates the fibrous agave—that squat explosion—and the cramped stomachs of the cactus, and puts bunches of brutal gold upon the sober foliage.

The negro porter wears a blue frock-coat: I can see the slope of his back through the arch of his sentry-box, and his collar covered with gold braid, and the turn of his fat sausage of a nape; and all around him, yachts dance like butterflies on the sea's blue circumflex accents, and laid tables glitter and sparkle.



While upon the band-stand frenzied music pours from the fingers of the agitated, black-coated conductor, sundry gentlemen have sat down to table. One of them is dressed with impeccable elegance—worked out on paper, theoretic—and the dentist has re-covered his gums with gold crowns. Another, cut out with scissors from the shadow of a presbyterian temple, protrudes the jaw of a savage dressed in the latest fashion: the most intelligent, noble and able of men, this? Not at all: the richest; the only really, solidly rich. He comprises a medley of fag-ends of ideas, and has an evangelical cloud which he holds by a string in his gold bludgeon of a fist. The barbarian! The old barbarian!

That large soft woman seems to secrete pearls. A stuffed-looking man, his waistcoat spongy and perspiring, the stale radiator of his body—buries his thick forefinger in his snail of a nose. A sudden gust buffets a woman with a stringy figure and an uninteresting hat, and moulds the thick tweed of her sports skirt upon her legs like a huge pair of trousers. The nations do not differ from each other save in a few privileged absurdities.

Upon a bench some exotic beauties are talking before me, incomprehensibly: then these goddesses laugh, high above all languages.

Numbers of young women, digitigrades, are walking up and down; they have collars of pearls by which men hold them. One of them stands erect in sun and wind against the chalky balustrade, flat and willowy in white draperies: a sketch for a fashion drawing, all white, and as if blown out with light, against the blue aquarium of the sky. The body, with its vertical bosom and head nonchalantly posed, is diaphanous save for the long central pivot which one discerns slightly

darker. She wears a straw hat whence blond, transparent-looking hair comes down, paling gradually, as far as her cheeks.

At the foot of the over-white balustrade, that is forced to the last degree of whiteness that the eye can bear,—a black balustrade—a negress, crawls, flat as a gridiron, upon the sunlit gravel; fixed there by the laws of optics.

By means of fortune's metallic mechanism these birds of paradise are maintained in a fairy-prominence which makes all the details of existence sparkle round them. In all the world's great cities, the "merchandise de luxe" jumps out of the shops, drawn by these birds of passage as by a magnet. And they turn about and about even to wearing themselves out, in the double vanity of amusing and being amused; actresses in a destiny whose end, alone, is grave.

I remain here in the midst of the conversations that are broken into a thousand pieces amidst the crowd that sits on round stained and disordered tables. I doze, in a sweat, my face bathed in acrid water. I follow with my eyes a mosquito blundering along in the air with its bag of blood. It is a kilometre off. It is a sea-plane: the cosmic sphere of trembling organ-notes pierced in its central cause: the black hieroglyph (like the symbol of addition) which rolls, driven by its stormy propeller, adown the diagonals of space.

I look at the colours of things with blinking eyes, confused by the heights, with sudden bouts of a colourless headache. I cannot adjust myself to the flow of normal life; I am too small, or too big.

The distress, like a blind man's, that I suffer before this woman's mantle. . . . I am assailed by the sun. I wish . . . I wish. . . . Man is a god in nothing but desire and destruction.

I walked on and on in the violent sun; in that splendour, everywhere distilled, which prevents one from seeing nature face to face.

After nearly an hour of walls and railings I saw the castle through a curtain of trees: such expanse of white that one might have thought it the sky's calico waistband glimpsed between the branches.

It is the old château of the Barons of Elcho. The modern building is raised upon the foundations of the old precincts. Here, at the foot of these descending forests—of these vast tree-clad triangles which connect the peaks of the mountain chain; above the sea, and set in this carven cliff of porphyry, was the eyrie whence the Seigneurial bird of prey overlooked his lands and his souls—(I have seen only one of them!).

The day is dying swiftly. The exaggerated glare of the sun disappears in a few moments. Already the vermilion after-glow, that makes volcanoes of the peaks, is folded up and fled. My eye surveys the domain. The château adapts all styles with lordly abandon. Above and within, equally, art is multiplied tenfold by luxurious splendour.

Below are the home farm and the cottages—a whole domesticated, scoured, polished, continually repaired village. The kitchen-factories send up a busy hum, and overflow with warm smells; there too are the corrugated-iron curtains of the petrol-scented cages, which growling cubes enter backwards under the flickering gas-light, spreading a double embroidery upon the velvet that covers earth's ribs.

The castle itself is filled at this moment with a sumptuous throng. As the sad blue twilight spreads abroad, the whole building is lit up as by the touch of a magic wand. The façade is riddled with all the jewellery of modern lighting, that festoons, too the arcades. We

are in the age of fire, when evening and night are fuller of festive light and warmth than day itself.

I went into the thronged, darkening trees. I found myself in a clearing so thick with stones that it seemed as if a whole city had fallen into ruins. A *chevaux-de-frise* of pine skeletons cumbered the ground, some standing, others fallen: branches like broken pinions, dry silvery ribs—the wood in places still gilded with life—a layer of shed bark like shreds of cloth.

I had been through this chaos before at the end of a nocturnal climb. . . . Then too I had felt my way with arms extended as now, to avoid the sharply broken stumps which bristle on the trunks of conifers. I picked my way among the greyish blocks that discoloured the night, and made of it a kind of half-light. First one, then another. It is the place that kills trees. I was warmly wrapped in my cloak and in the thick prudence of the bourgeois-adventurer in quest of castle secrets. This night, buried deep in nights, stood out vividly not so long ago, and the memory of a memory is still whole in my mind.

As I advanced mechanically, head bent, finding and losing my way among hollows and byways, I thought of that night long ago when, huddled in my mantle and humped like an extinguisher, I made my way to the Talking Well. Those words without faces which had filtered through the earth to me,—I had not forgotten them, nor the tone of bitter irritation in which they were spoken. That night I had heard the two vast protagonists growling that the old loyalty to authority was departing, and the people betraying their masters. And the sovereigns, those above the law, who stood face to face over the world's wide extent, had cursed the stifling of their feudal lordships and their right to

glory in the French peace: and they said: "Against this vast France who is spreading her net over us, we must have war!"

"Authority is departing!"

It must be the buzzing of my memory, or rather the beating of my pulses under the skin, that fills my ears with these words.

No; it is not a whisper in my bones. . . . I hear the echo of voices. . . . I am hemmed in with voices! Voices assail me on all sides. In truth I seem to stand, blind and invisible, in the midst of a crowd!

I stretch out my arms. With brutal suddenness a wall takes my hand unawares: cold sweating stone.

Shut in! Without noticing it, I have found my way underground.

The secret passage! Underneath the lordly dwelling above-ground, that had several times risen and fallen again like the waves, the secret passage still survived!

Such emotion swept over me that I staggered from one wall to the other.

And these are the same growling, male voices that I heard when I was the tool of an epoch that is fallen to dust. More: the same exasperation vibrates in the broken words that reach me. They are talking of the same thing!

They said, up there: ". . . destroying the established order of things!"

They said, still more furiously: "Perpetual peace!"

". . . strangling national rivalry. Strangling all our schemes in world-peace!"

I had hardly time to construct any definite theory: this must be some gathering of business men, whose

discussion was growing generalised and feverish. Enough! What matter?—I glued my ear to the earth: but I could only hear very badly.

Several men were talking at once. Breathless I strained to isolate and follow what they said. Certain syllables struck on my ear too roughly and were not distinct, and from time to time the voices dropped and I could catch nothing but the whistle of the S's.

Now and then the voices would melt away altogether. I stood on tiptoe (like a fool), the better to capture the sounds in my skull . . . and it seemed to me that someone had inquired what would become of palaces, if, all of a sudden, the caryatids were to lift their heads?

*"These criminals of the International and of humanity!"*

*"We must have a new Ministry: a new public opinion: War."*

"War!" It burst out at last, above the others—that voice, the sharpest of all:

*"The immediate future! You get hold of them all with the immediate future, which is always with us. . . . The immediate future, double quick to demolish the over-great things that are in preparation, so that this humanist contagion may not spread everywhere. By bringing into play our command of immediate necessities, we shall be able to get hold of the masses of young people whom we fear, and lead them wherever we like,—without even paying them!"*

Someone else said: *"The monopoly of the 'fait accompli'!"* and laughed. . . . I heard the recoil of his laughter.

Their extraordinary meeting-place emptied noisily.

As for me, I plunged once more into the passage and presently came out upon the pitch dark road along

which I went with my two invisible arms stretched out before me.

I felt suddenly heavy with all I had heard since I began listening to men. I knew enough to know everything. I perceived the solid continuity of things. . . . ("The Whole!—Hast thou really seen it, this time?") . . . Distantly I perceived the way life takes, and how the world goes round. Nothing, nothing has ever changed.

I came out upon cross-roads, stony and shrouded in darkness: I had to throw myself back. A siren cried out as with lungs, and—travelling at fullest speed and gathering size and sound with every moment—a car filled one of the roads,—was here—passed me—a blinding, echoing shape. It contained a glabrous man with white, pasty flesh, muffled in furs. I saw in the distance, reaping in their passage a broad swath of light, and making the fringes of whole forests phosphorescent, the piercing headlights which had been thrown on me. Still further away along the cornice of the sea rushed the comet shedding a glare upon the waters.

Another luminous chariot bore down upon me from afar. With its two enormous funnels of light and the strident hiccup of its Klaxon, it drove me back, flattened me against the bank, and ragingly set me behind it in the darkness. The distance disgorged another, and then another, in single file, like a lighted fuse leading from the château. Night's shadow dimmed the resplendent guests, whose rich voices I had heard refusing the peace of the world; even as those others in a bygone age had refused the peace of France.

The very road bellowed: a monstrous trumpet, straight and clean, enclosed between banks; raked by

these great geometrical carriages with the scream of shells, explosive wheels, and a weaponed gleam.

A black spot, bearing two white spots that project themselves violently before my eyes in the middle of the wide halo they shed—lies open to me for a moment as it passes on its great muscular wheels: and, behind the dark chrysalis in dimly lucent leather that drives—a veritable nest, nicked and electric-lit, full of light and glass and cushions. It is the carapace of a Personage: that fellow with the double chin and pockets under his puffed eyes as by two bee-stings, and an idiotic circumflex accent in black on his lip—(I know him and his mentality: jollification, sport and royalist orthopaedy). This one with the chalky, unwholesome face is the banker, Clément Massard; with a wife—an exquisite animal, the product of luxury, glittering with slavery—who smiles at his shoulder. And beholding this vanquished prey of wealth, that had proved harder than she, I thought of Clairine when Baron Egbert fell upon her.

The series of automobiles winds its way into the mountains like an endless chain of vertebrae. Each one disappears with its illuminated freight, reappears as brilliant as ever, and glides down the defiles. One would say the roads they follow are lifting themselves up and lengthening themselves out. The cars and the mountains have exchanged movements.

For a long time they succeeded each other. Soft things like some kind of viscera, armored in their alarming, metallurgic carriages that whistle like cartridges and whence come, point first, two spires of light—they ate up the miles of road round the Mediterranean: the Mediterranean of the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Romans.

The faster the thunderously-rolling millions hurl



themselves through space—the more lazily the entrails of the machine plumes itself, immobile because of others' work, smiling upon others' pain; trampling upon their prone servility.

Speed is abstract and military. It sweeps the world. It is the royal style of our day. It covers the land it never sees with a black pattern, empty of significance: it turns it into a staff-map.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE END

The return train. In the rumbling and the hammer thud of the black square bulk I feel the grandeur of returning to achieve.

The engine, ahead, perpetually clinging to the streaming vestments of rushing Speed, draws toward it the towns in the evening dusk, then casts them down behind it. At the apex of the noise, I am borne swiftly over bridges, and the metal furrows of stations. The world contracts, simplifies itself, things approach nearer, nearer, then depart, like people.

The open space of the carriage door, where the speed is felt, invites me out into all the inhabited space around. It gives and takes away the blossoming cherry trees, whirling their flowers like snow in the rushing transit.

It shows me the towns in the evening shadows. I am drawn toward the long life of the streets, I think great thoughts. I ask myself as I skim over the earth: "What are we here to do?"

Outside the living towns I dominate wide uncertain ways and worn plains. It is like the populous approaches to Jerusalem or Rome, which I have seen at the same hour of the day: when, work done, peace creeps in from all sides, holding all. Twilight in towns illumines the end of all history, since it is evening.

As I left the station I saw from the top of the iron door, through a row of poor and thickly scattered

trees, some recruits drilling in an exercise ground at the foot of a barrack's wall.

This simple sight that the workman swallows open-mouthed in the very midst of the complex, perfect town that is lit up, builded high, hollowed deep, which the shopkeeper, the old man, the child, the paralytic in his carriage, and the whole body of passers-by, think fine, that puts into the mouths of mothers the word which is the corporal cause of human sacrifice:—"It must be so"—this simple sight explains all.

There all begins, there all ends.

Shame to those who obey the laws, shame to those who live in this day.

I feel this extraordinary certitude: that I had plumbed the depth of the abyss. I know that I have seen all, and perhaps I shall see all again, in a single flash. Like the Italian monk who dug long ago in the common grave, or like the gigantic Florentine, who, enthralled by the memory of a dead one, copied the world with the fullness of damnation, I can say:—"Summum collegi"; I have recomposed the unity of things. I am too great—with a greatness that cannot endure.

#### DAY AND NIGHT

"Truth," said he to me, raising his head from the written pages that threw a pallor upon him, "is only intelligible when unfolded, for it is only real in a double aspect. He who first placed a finger on the mysterious knot of phenomena was Zoroaster: then Manes.

"There is no light without shadow, nor shadow without light: the buried roots of the oak are not seen. There can be no happiness in the present without sorrow yesterday or today, or tomorrow. And what sor-

row has no joy therein inclosed? Good and Evil strive together hand to hand, eternally. Desire is both riches and poverty, and the conception of this relativity of desire spreads a light which discloses the utmost limits of the domain of sensibility in its inexorable searching-out. O ye lovers, poets, sages! Every inner impulse takes its spring from its opposite, and every mental construction is built up of the molecule: yes + no.

“We are moulded by one stroke of the Present—Time—and of the Past—Space. The past is death and all the varieties of living death: regret, satiety, formalism, oblivion, are of the essence of the past, and take a spatial mode. The present is the name of life, but the future is the life of the present. There would be no internal world were there none external, and no external world without the spirit which gives it life—as there are no dead save buried in the living. No observer has ever been able, *and never will be*, to fix objectively the reality of what he sees, and cut himself off from space. We shall go, doubtless, to the stars, but we shall come not forth from ourselves. Great Descartes, thou erredst at thy second step!

“No society without the individual, the absolutely isolate,—but the individual could not stand without the mathematical diminution imposed on him by organized numbers. Individual life and social life are episodes of one another, turn and turn about. No action without thought at the other end; and the Revolutionary is he who sees all, and dares to add: ‘No thought without action!’

“The strength of language—the transformer placed between reality and ideation—is a question of life or death, for the idea, and for reality. The creative cry is only understood by the cry of intelligence—the

creative echo; and the usurpation of words has filled with phantasmagoria, with devastation, and with ruin, the material, moral and intellectual history of the human species."

He said, in conclusion, his head already drawn towards his reading:

"But duality is only the technique of the work of explanation. Truth, which appears to us contrasted, from the depths of density to the furthestmost limits, already confused, of hypothesis and diffuse hope, is the phantasm of a reality which is single: to penetrate one must divide, but to understand one must unite. On every side a new phase of the spirit extends its boundaries, and makes all exclusively verbal combinations return to the sphere of sophism: it drives the phantoms from metaphysics as it has driven them from science, and as it will drive them from morals, and sociology,—that applied science of human cyphers, that *industry* of logic. Thus shall we leave the cycle of infernal complication, and go toward absolute realism."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THAT WHICH HAS BEEN, WILL BE

With closed eyes I listen to them reciting verses. In the confused syllables I see machinery, lifts, dances, the whole exotic tissue—the panorama of the present projected fragmentarily.

A little before I had been seized with faintness in Ariés' studio. I had stretched myself on a divan. Now I doze, I listen with throbbing head. I seem filled with noises.

Now they argue. Systems. Fashions. Art and its superficial profundities. . . .

My friends, my companions, my own people! I judge them. Different at first sight, they are all alike: humming and empty. They are ignorant and perceive only the surface significance of things and of ideas. Writers and artists, technicians of forms, copyists of and in the mode, they think themselves thinkers (thought is the intellectuals' Ingres' violin). I see them through my closed lids, using their verbal facility to juggle with the great entities.

"Force is a virtue," proclaims a powerful voice.

"The national awakening,"—"the idealisation of sport,"—"the army,"—"war,"—one and then another boom these words in disturbing tumult. What exaltation showed itself in every movement of Sirody and Siébert, who now vociferate, when together we went through mobilisation—manœuvres in the East, facing

the enemy, by the Clénarcisse, all three at the Command Post of an Army Corps!

They are nationalists because they have never thought to check their course down nationalism's slippery slope. They are militarists—or revolutionaries—because they like all that explodes loudly, or shines (the tribune with Napoleonic scintillations!) Others have found for themselves a humanitarianism, or a more-or-less humanism, which cannot, even theoretically, hold water; or else, the *panache* of paradox sweeps the decks; or, acrobatic, they rejoice in their enlightened detachment from all worldly concerns.

They are the functionaries of the dominant middle opinion, the amusers, but also the servitors, of ancient public custom and of authority: its echo and reflection.

The great voice that I have gone forth to hear afar off castigates them and all the men of letters and of decoration: "If humanity is to be described by one word, that word is: Obedience." How tremendously those of the slaves with accursed flesh who have profound gleams of conscience and rebellion must despise them!

He has cried out like an embittered prophet against rules too long maintained, against romantic complaint, naturalistic dilettantism that has nothing scientific except the formula of its own veneer, limited and abstract classicism—that literary accountancy of the *Grand Siècle*—which would make French a dead language preserved between the pages of books: and against the monotonous purring—degenerated to second childhood—of the Alexandrine metre, and impressionism—that photography of the emotions, that scum—art, vacillating and volatile, that dams up with its imitation

fire-works nature that is original, enormous, vigorous, and compact.

I half-opened my eyes and saw his bony forehead and his flat pinkish nose outlined in the lugubrious urban half-light—whilst he declared that an age should respect itself sufficiently to create its own modes of expression.

“We accept tradition, but we set it up around its immutable axis, scraped, salient and worn, like the guardian of the *naos* of Nitocris, that the athletic rightness of a true ancestor planted in the full green breach three thousand years ago. Art is an open, merciless struggle against masterpieces (genius innovates, but the masterpiece conserves). Our *directism*. . . . Unseal all the old rubble—declare for a simplicity which smashes all. Let a primitive anger fling us in hand to hand struggle upon the very substance of light!”

“The beginning!” says Siébert.

“Tragedy, the whole tragedy!” says Ariés.

I raised myself on my elbow the better to listen to them. I must be careful. I must not mistake them.

They know not what they say as soon as their artisan heads are raised and turned toward moral and social perspectives; but what they do with their hands is what ought to be done. In vain they follow the ideology which drags and the defeatism of irony; within the limits of their descriptive work they are still rebels, since they break a worn-out ritual and, to recover the wind of syllables and reconstruct once more in the world fragile exactitude, draw straight lines from the real to the real.

“Against idols made with words.” . . . Begin afresh. A period of rupture—the first revolutionary period.



I know now that those too short-sighted specialists of form with whom I have grown up will succumb to verbalism more easily than the rest: the intricacy of process, the diseased facility of attracting notice by the resection of images and the newness of fracture, by self-parody. These whom the demagogic terror of being out of fashion disturbs will, quickly, become so, —but they will have prepared virgin artistic epochs by liberating style, and by relegating the consecrated material which surrounds them.

Anew! Such is the monotonous name of life. Life, great life, today outspread at the summit of the years, seeks expression.

The beginning: the child in whom one sees the elementary units of the thinking frame undergoing classification and notation: The governing lines of the savage, for a real book, black and white: The virtuous, schematic animal, the pure touch-stone: the insect that is a black, strong summation, an accumulation. The interior of the body: the weight of the image of men and women with transparent skin: the substance of the heart, sportive, and of the liver, industrial—and the phenomena of life in the flesh of vegetable and mineral. The collective microbe—health and disease—the product of multitude: the atom, the astronomical grain of all forms—the pyramidal atom of carbon, the first discovered stone of the organic edifice. The polygons of the lands of earth with the crowds that spot them and the cities that blot. . . . The beginning, cleared away and free, the beginning!

What will fill the theatre of the future? We cannot foresee, we can only create. And yet, I grope on toward what is to come, unseeing as the poor mother, or the poor maternal people to whom, despite their wish, they bear partial resemblance.

I try to fold close upon my heart the small shoot of austere poverty of the shining crowd that has discovered, in one point, all the profundity of new beginning.

"The cinema, Esperanto, internationalist liquefaction," Ariés growls it out angrily.

Even the cinema which, despite all its baseness, can but depict accurate detail, and which is capable of showing all that surpasses us in grandeur and littleness; and even this manufactured international language which adds together words that are without history, words that have the elasticity of cyphers, words mechanically sacrificed to meaning: all you artists will come to this language that is the obverse of all others as it becomes steadily more difficult to draw forth harmony from the traditional orchestras and to resuscitate what now is living speech.

There are moments of intense clearness when the basic elements of life are seen in movement. . . . To start not from yesterday but from the beginning of time. . . . To take hold again of the full, open outlines that are risen, timeless, from the deeps of the masses, from the gleanings of the fields and the mud of towns that is shining, vivid. To renew the great poems, revive the songs of the driven heart of the people, and the measureless mysteries, the storied nightmares of prayer! . . .

Between two darkened shapes of trees is the smooth wall upon which leant the supple and rigid original tragedy. In the middle of the wall is the door of the palace, the heart of things, attracting all the world. Before the wall, the masked actors cut out in black and white by the sunlight, with their high shadows thrown upon the wall. Above, between two rows of terraces, in the opening of a gap, enveloped in his



cloak and in the wind, is a man, almost visible in the distance. And higher still, above the edge of the crater,—seen only when one's head is thrown far back and one's neck tensed—an alignment of specks of sand upon the clouds, the ultimate, charged rank of spectators. We are brought back to the great beginning, and turn about it. But beyond all that the theatre has already attempted, tragedies, developed by the ideal in the real, will spread over limitless space: the microscopic life of the masses from east to west. Visible at a glance are the several territorial divisions of the world, coherent in government and speech, and—one enormity to the other—the vividnesses of similarity and difference. The scenic poet will have a thousand hands, like Senju-Kannon, the manifold saviour of men. He will be the happy victor whom a great voice has promised me in the deepest of my dreams.

But what is the theme of the drama of man!

The scene represents the eternal Mediterranean *décor*. . . . He must pierce the mirage of appearance who comes after all the others to look upon the pullulating, vivid details, and to seek the true content of the drama. He discerns the wide moving sea that ebbs and flows—the vertical sea—and, far away in the piled depths (where sight almost fails) circling lands arise beneath the sun: the sea surrounds the land and the land surrounds the sea. . . . The prostrate beauty of the sea: the gleaming skin of the sea in the sun. Boats flash with oars; and one of them in the quiet bay is a living cross, drawing after and all about her upon the mirror her halo that is woven of fine, increasing supple lines. Near the shore a fisherman sleeps, illumined by the shining breath of his boat. In the

corner, a lighthouse, that monument with a head. Nearer still, on the threshold of the incessant line of billows, there comes from each bursting wave a wave of noise, which, obliquely ascending, builds a sonorous heaven. Over there the train which fills a narrow pass with white smoke suddenly screams out: the receding frontiers of grandeur. . . .

What is the subject of the drama of man? It is war. The ladder leading to it still stands, and cannot be cut out from the heart of things, and that which has been, shall be. The world of today *demonstrates* war from top to bottom, and the future is linked rudely to the past, and I, dominated by what I have seen, the prophet of the past, see therein only war. Memories, memories; the war of the future!

Events, by the will of the little, will obey the great, in extravagant and perfected forms, at first strange in the ancient moulds of earth. . . . They speak eagerly, and return to their mobilisation—manœuvres on the Clénarcisse. All these aerial squadrons; the new uniforms of dulled colour, and the darkened helmets: rockets to light the plain like a room: Balkan-war trenches; sharpshooters, multitudes of negro flies; the enormous cannon sunk like tunnels in the earth. What limitless gunfire there will be! . . .

I am lying stretched out amid the hum. All that remains of the round of daylight lies low upon the horizon. I am near them, and far from them, as always. I think upon the world mystery of the passion, of the great play of the poor, of the Shakespearean thing of universal history.

All that has been made will be made again. I half close my eyes upon this genesis. War is man athwart. . . . The drama of a man against war. A man, I,

the centre-point: I, the resultant of time. I am the recommencement.

The moon was gone. Night stretched at my feet, and all the black abyss was awake with heavy lightning.

After stifling and painful hours with the typewriter under the crude electric bulb in the Command Post, I had left for a moment my scribe's task: once through the little door of the barracks, I was swallowed up by space, and there I stood leaning to the expanse of night, refreshed by the boundless winds. From the top of the clayey hill, called Perron, where was concealed the Command Post of the Army Corps, I overlooked, yet without seeing, this long valley of the Clénarcisse that was traversed by a spacious rumbling, and flashing with shooting stars.

Here and there, in the flash of shells and of batteries, a few scattered points of the immense valley were made visible, then once more overwhelmed by darkness: parts of the horizon in a confusion of thundering sound and pale light:—and parallel to the horizon, shining stretches of river riven in the depths of the abyss. Then the shadowy relics of a house close at hand, or far off masses, lit up by sudden, evanescent flashes: . . . at times the faintly illuminated lines of crossroads, drowned immediately in the depths with a murmur of echoes.

At moments, on the horizon, an unbroken gale that showed for several seconds, like a cinematograph, a picture of pale glaciers.

On the left, to the west (since I stood north), rockets whistled and drew my attention. Their stems shedding fire, flashed upwards: they intermingled, then arched in, throwing wide in their wake their lustre of

red and green sparks, or dropping the blinding blue jets of their stars of magnesium that were surrounded by fairy tissues as beautiful as day. These fireworks, against a background of intense blackness, threw up in silhouette the shape of the hill of Mareilles, held by the Thirty-third Corps in liaison with ours. At the opposite end of the panorama, to the east, in the direction of the village of Girandes, a continual conflagration showed red in the distance, springing confusedly from the darkness; shaded by the clouds of smoke touched by flames which rose in great shadows to the sky.

The detonations—some faint in the distance, others resounding more brutal and metallic—the faint but distinct sound of sniping, the flashes of the sky and the great explosions on the horizon, were drowned from time to time by the immediate tumult of automobiles and the crashing of lorries about Perron and about me. The Command Post was the centre and the vortex of a perpetual movement.

An aeroplane, far above, approached and passed on with its thin stream of noise, pursued by a series of explosions: one could guess the zone for which it headed by its encircling shrapnel. . . .

I appreciated with all my heart and all my poet's imagination the fantastic grandeur of this night of war, seeking by what original images I might render this vast, sounding illumination of the plains and valleys in poems that would amaze and astound the superstitious public behind the lines.

I knew the sector thoroughly; for three months I had studied it in my humble capacity of clerk at the headquarters of the Army Corps. Although I had never adventured there,—my continual presence being

indispensable at the Command Post—I had its geography in my mind, and retraced in the fantastic shadows before me the course of the map.

All the invisible country beyond, which the flashes of the bombardment grasped, then dropped, showing but its vastness, was occupied by the enemy. They held the river: which seemed to give a sinister and terrible aspect to its wan apparition. I seemed to distinguish the two great bombarded silences of men: the German and the French silence. I *saw*, all clearly, the separation.

But at the moment when I was trying to discern with the groping of a visionary the exact situation of the topographical signs in that stretch of night, broken up by cannon, marked by horizontal flashes and reverberating halos—beneath the pale scything of the heavy artillery that was shown upon the sky from east to west, reaching right to the zenith the line which divided this valley of shadows into two tragic halves was no longer the true line: the face of the sector that was overwhelmed by clouds was in process of changing.

We had attacked at midnight, by moonlight. The die had been cast. "*Alea jacta est*" I murmured. . . . And from the pedestal of my observatory I thought a little proudly of Cæsar. We had progressed. . . .

I was going to hear news. I returned to the Command Post. In the heavy darkness, which the transitory pallors and reddenings did not penetrate, the outskirts of the low hutments—the war-centre of the vast sector that extended in every direction—were besieged by a noisy assemblage.

The sudden lights of cigarettes in the darkness photographed faces redly, and the irritating flashes of small electric torches showed up the muddy groups with

moist-gleaming helmets. I entered the Command Post.

A low and narrow room built of planks, heated by the roaring fire from a stove. Brightly illuminated stratified clouds of tobacco smoke and along the wall pale cloaks adorned with golden buckles and the geranium-petals of the Legion of Honour bunched beneath slate-coloured helmets.

About the tables loaded with papers—the room was furnished solely with papers—the officers, in full strength, of No. 1 Section awaited the despatches and raised their heads together when the door opened, and kept heroic watch and ward.

In the corner Captain Fontanges, young, impatient, resolute, shone beneath the electric light which gilded his fair hair, his French moustache, and his stripes; nearby was a little old man in uniform with a sharp nose and a pointed beard: an attorney with an interrupted provincial practice,—lieutenant and secretary at the Council of War, detached in consequence of serious matters of insubordination from the staff at General Headquarters—for us outside the field of war—and to which this aged Don Juan, liberated late in life from the conjugal prison, was attached by many gallant affairs. In the other corner of this wooden room starred by lamps, the flat silhouette of Lieutenant Lecto, a dry, spectacled young man, with square archaic shoulders, smooth and serious face, (the brilliancy of his glasses sometimes gave a smiling air, but it was an illusion) who was responsible for the surveillance of morale, conjointly with No. 2 Section. By his side were heaps of letters, the spoils of the seizure of the soldiers' correspondence ordered by G.H.Q.

At the end of the room, a narrow cell appeared, through a swinging door whose windows shone with



watered iridescence. In this hut-office was the man who held in his hands the vast action that extended for miles all around—the general commanding the Army Corps. His energetic head showed through the diapered window whenever a movement brought it into the light. Before him on a table sparkled the nickel fittings of a despatch bag and the telephone apparatus. He was talking with personages, part of whom could be seen from time to time framed in the window.

Sometimes the door of our room in the shadowy corner at the other end was flung open, admitting creatures still benighted and stiff with cold, who stopped on the threshold dazzled by the light. With papers in their hands they were guided by orderlies over the long bending boards of the floor, shaking everything in the room. The officers, as one man, questioned them eagerly, and they replied when they could.

They were telegraphists with thin envelopes, telephonists with messages, liaison men with notes and letters, officers of all ranks and services, from the Army, the Divisions or the Artillery. The orderly sergeant, rising, introduced the newcomers into the general's sanctuary. The latter took his monocle that was suspended beside his decorations, and examined the papers. One saw him scrutinize the messenger, and heard the murmur of some question or observation. The chief-of-staff scribbled on his note-pad. Then the messenger re-crossed the springy floor of the gloomy room and disappeared at the other end. Sometimes the orderly hurried to the entrance, gave a few orders, and a messenger would hasten into the night.

The telephone rang, and from the general's monologue it appeared that the famous phantom machine

gun which was in the "Chess-board" had been discovered before the attack by a patrol of Senegalese light infantry.

"Bravo, my compliments, Colonel. Very good indeed. You see they are good for something!"

After this insignificant incident a period followed in this night when neither the telephone rang nor did anybody arrive to bring despatches or receive orders.

Over there, in the invisible unknown, great things were forward: but in the hut was only the continual vibration of the floor and the furniture because of the distant concussions.

Headquarters had decreed the attack: its work was suspended now that the action had begun and its plans were being carried out in the distance.

There under our eyes, beneath our hands, was the tragedy that was being unloosed upon the face of the earth. I rose, and drew near a lamp and a quiet table, and I saw all.

The relief-map, scaled one in 5,000.

This miniature construction—about a yard square, covered with hollows, little hills, signs, colours—was the microcosm of the sector. Reality was transposed, reduced twenty-five million times in extent and one hundred and twenty-five thousand millions in volume, allowing the field of action of the Army Corps to be seen complete beneath the light of an electric globe. It was the combined work of an accumulation of reports, photographs, sketches, maps, notes of artillery observers, observations from aeroplanes, balloons, patrols, and information from prisoners. All was crystallized at the centre of command as in a brain. Thus, sunk as we were in that infinite darkness, our eyes were opened and we could see all.

This incredibly small scale showed us in the full light of the lamp a stretch of nature: the varied green of the woods, the rectangles of fields, the small parallelopipeds of houses, the cones of churches, roads like string, paths like thread; the mechanism and the whole sweep of war was opened up before us.

It showed us, in front of the wooden town of the services and camps behind Perron, where we were,—the vital centre flying the little flag of advanced Headquarters; whence the plan of campaign had issued forth, and burst in thunder.

From there stretched the battle-field—strikingly small, a land partitioned: seven lines of French trenches right up to the parallel line of the Clénarcisse,—our first line skirting on the left the village of Vauxavennes, in the middle, that of Saint Trop (both in our hands) and cutting in two the abandoned village of Girandes—and like three hyphens, the three bridges kept intact but carefully watched. On the far side of the valley seven lines of German trenches whose geometry we knew, like ours continually retouched, from the Odin to the Bismarck line.

The dénouement was obvious: to carry up there that line of pins with little tri-colour flags. A geometrical problem to be solved with human cyphers, after the working out of the preliminary calculations (reinforcements, reserves, supplies, munitions, orders, timing and determination of objectives, artillery preparation). The work of the infantry was three-quarters accomplished: it had only to advance.

Suddenly the chief appeared on the threshold and came among us. Those who were sleeping, awoke.

“Normal progress, gentlemen!”

He continued: “The first objectives have been carried. The second attack begins in an hour and a half.”

He went towards the relief-map, followed by the steps of all (even, hobbling along, old officer-clerk from the Council of War, his face tearful and wrinkled, hardly awake). He called the head of the topographical service. His finger touched the cardboard.

"The line here, sergeant!" he pointed. Upon this order from the chief, the cartographer moved the line of the tri-coloured pins towards the river. We followed, attentive and wise as children, and with a kind of solemn amusement, this operation which was altering the countryside. We were the aviators hovering marvellously—the entire expanse illuminated—six hundred yards above the organised carcass of war.

The general, friendly and cordial, continued:

"We have advanced as on a draughts-board. When the moon set, General Trembley had two trenches dug in the marsh, right to the edge. Show them here with two chalk marks. Here, as it had been written, was the first concentration. Colonel Gaudy, not without difficulty, cleared this up with his Colonials. On the marsh side things were not undisturbed. We pricked our fingers on uncut barbed wire, and in this corner we were pretty badly had." (The general's hand flickered expressively over this region.) "The enemy nobly resisted—I must do him this justice. In the gamma triangle in the 'Chess-board' there was an unexploded mine. We knew about it. This mine could be blown up at will, which caused some hesitation in the action of those units which happened to be there. That is natural and excusable. The bridges have been destroyed by us to cut off the counter-attack. . . ."

And with his finger-nail the general ripped off the three bridges.

"The enemy had to sacrifice a line of defence. . . ."

A lieutenant in field uniform, who had just entered, saluted and handed him a letter.

"A complaint, general."

The word was ominous.

"What's this!" said the chief of staff in a hard voice, his brow contracting.

He opened the envelope. "The 75's have fired too short and held up the advance on Hill 4."

"The clumsy fools!" barked the general. "It is always the same tale. That idiot Bedorez never takes enough care. Never!" He wrote out an order and handed it to the officer.

He had taken out his watch, and seemed to be playing with it.

"Listen, gentlemen!" he cried suddenly. "The heavy artillery."

Some seconds of suspense: then a monstrous rumbling burst from the immensity which hemmed us in, and resounded as if all space were ruins of iron. The disturbance of the air struck the hut and shook it to its foundations, and we were thrown one against the other like passengers in a monotonous lorry which stops suddenly. The heavy artillery! We give a cry of pride in this force which passes through our bones. And it seems that amidst the vast sweep of the ages I feel again in the marrow of my bones the celestial resonance of a bell that traverses the chaos of corruption and desolation.

The door of the room swung open of itself and the continuous roar of the artillery poured in with the wind and the breath of night. It is the German barrage. It must be terrific to be heard here in such manner. The door slams. The general's voice is imperturbably calm in this hut of shaking boards amidst

this seismic darkness, where the map shines out like an astral world.

"It is half-past three. The action begins again at dawn, at five o'clock. We shall advance at three points—mark a wooden bridge in 273.06—and we will reform our four kilometres of line on the other side of the stream."

He indicates the operations which are to be carried out:

"At seven o'clock we shall be here."

He moves the lines like chess pawns, whole rows of pawns. His wide-open hand covers a kilometre of the shining map. Then the hero, whose greatness dazzles us amid these humble and banal surroundings, goes towards the door.

Before disappearing, he turns and salutes,—his golden crown shining.

Lying upon a stretcher, to sleep a little in spite of the stirring fever of enthusiasm—I see the disordered room, and the circle of gilded, wakeful officers. It has the appearance of a disturbing evening in a gaming room ravaged by the excitement of the players around the marked and cyphered table, where chance, like a physical thing, rolls hither and thither.

Then my eyes close and my head fills with confused ideas; thoughts of my relatives who every day tremble for my life, of the success of this offensive which would be accomplished whilst I slept, of the decorations and promotion which will repay the share we have all taken, I with the others. I feel only the calm and the repose of the universal tumult through which victory is forging out for itself a new world—as when I was King. . . .

But a voice haunts me. It says, and repeats ten times over: "King! Once, but not now."

It is the voice of an old man seated by a hearth.  
"There are no more kings, nor slaves, my friend."

"Trachel!"

The summons of the Chief of Staff woke me with a start. Two despatches to carry, one to Observation Post "B" the other to the officer commanding a battalion of chasseurs. The whole sector to cross.

At that very moment the lamps go out. It is dawn. A livid phosphorescence flows in from the narrow windows on which the vapour from our breath condenses in moist opacity. The darkness yet remains in the corners where, against invisible chairs or leaning upon shadowy tables of dead papers, are a few motionless dark forms. Dawn blurs confusedly the shape of things, the forms with outstretched legs, half in shadow.

A dark hand opens the light wooden frame of a ventilator. The cold grey air drives back the heavy atmosphere and the strong smell of tobacco. I can see the mechanical proceedings of a bent, shadowy figure who rakes and empties the cold stove in the centre of the hut.

I go out. I am going to see all that which has been so much discussed.

Outside I find a puerile disillusionment. I who am going to see everything, can see nothing. All is hidden by the mist save in the foreground, thickened figures, with cloaks soaked and spongy with dew, emerging from the steaming panorama. There, beneath the cloud of fog, the noise as of an awakening town—a murmur and a rumbling, and the rattling of a rolling

cart. One is imprisoned, diminished; one would like to tear away these pale shadows.

I continue straight before me.

I arrive upon the road at the foot of a hill which I skirt. A sentry is posted before the mouth of a tunnel that passes beneath the road like a sewer. The man, in his heavy, voluminous field kit that is like a horse's collar upon his neck, challenges those who pass backward or forward, demanding the password.

He is a veteran. His features and his face are weather-beaten. His coat, though well cared for, is stained by the rain and the wind, by the extent of space, and by time.

A captain from Headquarters passes, proceeding to the rear of the line and, repressing a yawn, speaks to the fellow.

"Well, my friend, how are things with you?"

The poor solitary soldier, condemned to his everlasting password-challenging, replies simply, fascinated by the decorated man who shines before him:

"Sir." . . .

The officer—the beginning of the yawn disappears and becomes a smile—touches the oval disc which hangs by a chain to the wrist of the soldier. The arm obeys and rises: the soldier watches it.

"Curious—we are of the same conscription group."

He shows beneath his cuff his own identity disc—a jewel attached by a golden chain.

"We are exactly the same age, my friend. We are alike: two reservists of France!"

"Ah!" said the soldier.

And despite their uniforms they are alike in this muddy corner, under the leaden mist—mud of heaven and earth! I was struck by their resemblance. The



same lines, the same type, the same stature. But the soldier's face is lined, greying, marked by weariness and I know not what stigma. His shoulders are bent—he seems like the father of the officer.

He gazes at him with round eyes as if he had never seen an officer, and I, having reached the other end of the tunnel, turned round to look at him in the little square of light—the doorway to the war zone—as if I had never seen a soldier.

Thereafter a melancholy countryside slopes ever downward. The horizon, in the direction of the fighting, is still obscured. The bombardment is concentrated there. The distant thunderings are here but heavy concussions and displacements of air—the strange, pneumatic, hollow voice of cannon speaking to the flesh.

Around me the *débris* of empty food tins and their remains, fences torn away or leaning in fragments—fanshape—and hewn stones that have so rolled about as to be worn like pebbles.

In the flux and reflux, of reliefs, the leavings of the army have been thrown there, like that which a town scatters all around in a circle of waste-lands. These fields of *débris* which stretch beyond sight are the rotted threshold of moving war.

The shell holes are filled in, but the ground is pebbled with iron.

It is strange. I, who knew these places so well, no longer recognise them. The sketch of the key map in my head is disturbed by all these actual details, by the large interminable—deceiving—presence of reality. In these ravaged fields where the deep earth has ceased to live, not a living soul. I am alone. All life has been sent ahead.

To walk exposed is no longer safe. The opening of a burrow. By it one enters what should be Communication Trench 7. A sunken ladder, very steep, leads me into half darkness, and I find myself, suddenly, in a passage, narrowed by two high walls of freshly dug earth, with the white sky as roof above.

The trench is deep. The new earth has the geometrical perpendicularity of dark masonry. The festooned frieze of tufts of grass, cut right through in the dark sub-soil, run along the top of the crumbling wall high above my head.

Down there the daylight, which even in the open was poor enough, is darker, and the few noises of the world are muffled. Now I who was a prisoner in the mist am imprisoned in the opened earth.

The corridor is dug in a succession of half-circles curving in opposite directions (Ah, yes: the wavy line of the key map) so that progress is almost backward and forward. The great earth, massed beside me and before, imprisons me at every turn. The passage is so narrow that when I collide with the heaps of stones which swell the walls of earth, or with any sharp projection dripping rusty mildew, I am thrown against the other wall, and soon my shoulders are caked with earth.

Upon the ground hard as rock two continuous furrows are hollowed out—the tracks of the right and left feet of the men who have passed here: my feet follow these trails. My hands feel an endless hollowing along the yellow walls, and I see that it is the rubbing of clothes and of skin which has caused it: the trench is less wide than the breadth of a soldier, so that he is grated at every step. All is deserted in this hollow which has seen so many regiments. I see nothing but that strip of sky-ceiling that follows me, nothing but

the walls on the passage way, the turns which imprison me, and the empty footprints of the multitude that populate the trench. Nothing but the heavy smell of earth in which I am steeped in yellow darkness, nothing but the echoes of my footsteps that follow from afar off, lost in space, the thousands who have advanced here.

I walk on for a long time. I believed I was going to see, or at least glimpse the battle. Nothing.

Suddenly, to right and left, a large opening. It is our last line, that I thought I had passed a long time since in these perpetual twistings which confuse time and distance. It lies on both sides of the communication trench: fallen-in, ruinous, abandoned. Only the beginnings can be seen, cut off by the turnings. A few gaping shelters, like woodmen's huts, are sunk in the mournful, straw-littered embankment. The grass has whitened on the poisonous slopes. Old equipment lies about, fossilised, and rubbish and rags, and bits of burnt wood and broken weapons, and a basin corroded and pierced by stress of wind and weather. Not a living soul in this sickly valley of ruin and pollution, and chaos, whose breath, for a moment, came to me from both sides.

Disconcerted by the monotony of the communication trench that mutilates space and destroys time, becoming gradually a mere thing, tired by that eternal twisting emptiness, I come out finally in the Alsace trench. Observation Post "B" is there, and I enter the trench.

All here is smashed, destroyed, gloom-tinted. It lies along a one-time village road. I remember when I see the stone of the roadway projecting above my head, cut through and smashed by the digging of the trench,

that it had been familiar upon the map. But I recognise nothing of what I had known: and then I am astonished to perceive, from the tangled strength of the dislodged stones, that this negligible little road must once have been far stronger than I had imagined when I followed it with my finger.

The cutting is deep: nothing is to be seen except the formless rubbish upon its edges and the thin stream of the sky above. Marching is difficult on the duckboards which prevent the bottom from liquefying, or upon the ground where it has been softened by recent falls of earth which block up this path of destruction. One's hand stretches out for support to the stones or stumps of wood. All is wet with the black rain.

This trench stretches almost in a straight line. Heads move in it, steps echo, voices are raised. But it is a minor disturbance that contrasts, even more than the quiet, with the great events forward. Two soldiers advance in my direction, ascending and descending the heaps of rubbish, rifles slung, arms outstretched, watching their steps. The Observation Post has been moved to an eminence rising from the plain at this spot. Questioned when we met, one of the soldiers, with his thumb, pointed to a shelter, saying: "There."

A short trench, very narrow, supported by a wooden framework sunk into the rich earth and a low shelter lit by a narrow loop-hole, a mere slit—as if the roof were removed in one place. A table and a bench, a man sitting and another standing—both against the light of the oblong fissure—are in shadow, limned in with a luminous beam.

One of the men, an artillery lieutenant, takes my note, reads it and informs me that communications

have been established, and that the necessary has just been done. This he writes on a piece of paper and gives it to me, saying:

“Come and have a look at the battle.”

I went up to the streak of light, and from the depths of this lighthouse in the bowels of the earth, I saw it all again. I saw again the vertiginous immensity of the plains spread out before me in miniature, as though I looked down from some castle tower. . . .

I regained the sense of proportion I had lost in the midst of action. Before my eyes, over the tips of the coarse grasses that fringe this deep dugout stretches the reality of the map of operations. On the map there is no movement, but here from time to time something does move in the infinite depths of space spread out before me. I lean forward a little to see more—to see everything.

Long lines of trenches, marked by the white and yellow streaks of their earth-works—an exact surgical diagram of that city of Hell that lies below the surface of the country. . . . Three villages peeping out between forests of blackened or flesh-coloured stakes—their clusters of red and blue roofs and tawny walls set at regular intervals; from west to east: Vauxannes, Saint-Trop (you can see light through pinholes in the church, and the wooden scaffolding of the belfry lies naked in the light) and last of all, Girandes, a paler, rather denser mass than the other two. Then the darker zone of the river valley . . . the liquid line of the Clénarcisse. The “Chess-board” and its lands partitioned cell-like by the white ribbons of the low walls. Traced out on the bare green slope the parallelogram of the German trenches, with its regularly

spaced communication lines, tries in vain to disguise itself, and shows up line by line of the steep-sloped, coloured page. In the far distance, Hill 36, the last curve of the panorama, a long, low cloud-island on the horizon.

In the foreground—about three hundred yards away, for the slight elevation of the gun platform prevents a view of any nearer object—a battery fires; in full daylight the glare looks dulled, like a match flame, and seems to bore into the plain. Momentary red flashes appear in other directions. The lieutenant passes me a pair of binoculars, and glues his eyes to a pair himself. In the circles of light that travel over the vast expanse at my caprice, details stand out with microscopic accuracy.

In one trench, running at right angles to the Front, a snaky chain moves forward: infantry in shrapnel helmets. In the next trench a similar movement in the opposite direction—a relieved detachment on its way to the rear—seems to balance it. In the reserve trenches, silhouetted fawn on black against a screen of low mounds of earth, what looks like a string of beads moves slowly and evenly along. On the slopes of the hills too, those lines that look like rows of dead bushes—at first the eye does not detect any movement—are detachments: in the sun I can see the bayonets gleaming like needles, bunches of them, with here and there a solitary: even in the trench that leads only to this advance post, at the end of the deep sewer, is posted a detachment: a little cluster of steel shines out. Up and down, back and forth, thousands of tiny creatures make an ever changing pattern in an anthill framework, their operations growing distinct as they come within the bright disc of the glasses. I can see men

dragging things about—Lilliputians struggling over toys. I see them making feverish haste, stretching their tiny legs to the utmost. . . . They separate, come together again, form crowds and groups.

“Our little gunners seem to enjoy it, what?”

Sometimes their petulance slackens, we have no means of knowing why, and we understand nothing of what they are doing, which is provoking. We would like to be able to stir them up.

As my glance travels upward to the horizon, all I can distinguish in the naked expanse, that is without colour and without sound, is files of ants trickling slowly downwards; then one or two splashes of ink: a steady stream that is interrupted from time to time, so that the eye loses track of its progress and significance.

Towards the top of the outspread map, where details are levelled out and colours neutralised by distance, appear little puffs of greyish dust. From this distance you can distinguish no movement. But when you look again after a moment's interval you notice that certain patches have moved a little—as imperceptibly as the shadow of a cloud—over the earth's surface.

I watch curiously the life that is revealed in these opened veins, these entrails of the sector before me. I am amused to see large-scale movements—hitherto I have known only the aridity of plans—ceteries drawn out in ink.

Leaning beside me, the observer explains the plan of campaign. When he bends his head too far forward he blots out half my universe.

“We've taken those four trenches . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . as far as that. But

on the right—by the Tourniquet—our advance has been held up several hours by the wealth of the means of defence.

“Reinforcements have been rushed up, and now the offensive is being carried through. They’re moving a bit quicker, look!”—his young voice trembles a little as excitement gains a hold on him,—“You can see them arriving from both sides on that slope. . . . Look! . . . Look! . . . You’d think they were never going to stop!”

The broad sweep of the movement outlines itself slowly before our eyes, as on a vast relief-map. We can follow almost accurately the twin storms let loose between the horizons, though we cannot see the men who are digging trenches and silently extending our lines: but we can roughly follow the alignment of the trenches by the lines of smoke and flames above them. These clouds of smoke are spread regularly, like standards over the detachments. The men we cannot see, only the storms that enwrap them, the mountains that fall upon them from the heavens, the loaded wind that drives them forward and back.

“A terrible barrage over there—against the Boche cemetery,—those terraces. All this grumbling you can hear, and the hailstorm that is rifle fire. . . . Listen! . . . Hear it now?”

There is a whole army corps down there. Naturally, all the separate points of flesh and blood are far too numerous and too tenuous for one to be able to keep each in mind. Even when you see them they make little impression, too small to be aught but phantoms. One is captivated by the problem of their masses, by perceptible numbers, by the avalanches they draw upon them.

It is prodigiously interesting to dominate the phases



of this terrestrial geometry and to watch them being fitted into one another well or ill under the lowering flame-shot smoke clouds, across the immensity where the din is drowned, and where the blazing fires, unchained afar, go out.

"Some barrage!" cries my observer, with a strange exaltation that makes his eyes bright and his voice unsteady. . . . (He almost sounds like an actor, and indeed looks like one, his chiselled profile with its long thin nose silhouetted sharply against the flickering light.) "Since midnight we've been watching them drop all over the place! You should have seen it! At night the smoke clouds turn into clouds of fire as in the Bible! But the Boches were panic-stricken, and above all desperate to block the entrance to Vancouvert Plain, on the right of Girandes, towards the end of the sector. They were mistaken, there were only a few units there."

So the whole action is reconstituted in the almost motionless, almost silent serenity of grandeur. Behind every movement lies the general plan—like fate behind the actions of men: Unity, convergence, the idea of the general. This mournful landscape, so peaceful to the casual glance, is swept by a vast and violent harmony. That is battle, that is victory.

I regain possession of this world and I am once more poised at war's summit, like a giant.

I must depart to my duty.

I return by the trench and then by a traverse, and look my last on the outer world. The secret of the general plan, revealed to me for a moment through the limitless slit in the wall of the observation post, slowly disintegrates and fades. Now I am merely one more slave, stumbling against the walls on either side, as

I follow in the wake of the countless armies who have already passed this way.

At last I come upon human beings . . . collected where the trench widens out. I had been hoping for them, and said to myself as I came up: "Here they are."

But I was mistaken: these were not fighting troops but a gang of over-age men whose business it is to keep the trenches in repair. They work, scarcely distinguishable from the soil. The ground hereabouts is chalky underneath a surface layer of black soil, and the workers seem to be covered with a mixture of plaster and soot.

On the shoulders of these labourers rests the whole weight of the architecture, of the order, of the whole campaign that I have just been watching; these are the makers of those widespread and swift-crumbling walls. With their hands, with all their strength—it must be daily and miraculously renewed—they roll up ceaselessly on either side of their forward road, these mounds that are immediately levelled.

From the builders of the slim tombs of the Delta onwards, have any done aught but raise mounds destined to crumble into dust?

And then . . . sand. The trench is shallower, more uneven, and streaked with occasional bars of light—to be avoided! In their chalky ground there are patches of flint that serve to form walls; beyond it, the parapets are uneven, eaten away. Sometimes one's head is almost level with the earth's surface!

A sound of heavy trampling. Two stretcher-bearers with their burden—a stumbling rectangle—loom up before me. Their eight limbs are tautened

to bear the weight of a stretcher, and a dead man. I flatten myself against the wall of the trench to let them pass. I watch them as they go by, crouched down over the stretcher that is swathed in a tent-cloth through which blood soaks from beneath, so that it sticks like a skin and brushes against me. The bearers do not glance at me. They plod steadily, heavily on, pale as death, their faces streaming with sweat, indistinct and lifeless: the machine-like regularity of harsh breathing that they draw in with all their strength. My eyes follow their bent backs, dislocated by the crushing weight that hangs on their tensed wrists. Where the trench curves they have to lift their pale load shoulder high—it sways and knocks against them as they raise it—and they carry it so until they reach the widened trench. One corner brings them into my sight, another hides them, but I can hear them grumbling forward.

And I realise, I feel in my own joints, the super-human effort needed to carry a dead body—that terrible load that distance so swiftly multiplies, through these yawning catacombs. I perceive how few minutes suffice to bring a bearer to the end of his natural strength. And suddenly I remember that a little further on there are corners in the rebuilt trench so narrow and so deep that the stretcher-bearers will find themselves trapped—it will be impossible for the poor monster that clings to them and battles with their will to pass through unless they stand him upright. But two men, however desperate, could never find the strength to carry another in that position, and the walls are too close together to permit the passage of a stretcher with more than two bearers. . . . As to getting out and walking above ground—if you so much as attempt to breathe the air above you, you are a dead

man. So the noise of their footsteps and of their voices, still faintly audible, echoes hellishly in my ears. The awful power of a dead man, one single man, a unity. . . . A little earlier I had seen that that is only a point. Men, each man. . . .

Ten o'clock. Two hours and a half have I been in this bestial earth . . . tramping along a street that has nothing—neither forms, nor figures.

The everlasting twists and turnings waiting to trap me, and the edges of this never-ending ditch converging and diverging above my head, exercise a hypnotic fascination. It is so narrow that the sides seem at last to meet, and only open just wide enough to let me pass. I cannot escape the dead weight of the walls; it descends on my shoulders, choking, crushing. The thick stillness makes me gasp for breath like a drowning man. My eyes grow misty and I see everything upside down; I am walking on my head in a long trench in the sky.

I know nothing—nothing at all. When I talked of the trenches I talked of what I knew nothing whatever about. Had I the slightest notion how disordered and maddening even their inertia can be! A network of roads like tentacles, roads drawing together their three sides, and unceasingly pouring away. This underground dugout system upsets and utterly destroys the meticulous accuracy of the general plan, that senseless plan!

Suddenly the trench is shut off from sight. A notice board glimmers white and grows clearer: the front line——

Ah! . . .

I knew I should arrive eventually, but expected facts

are always a revelation when you find yourself actually face to face with them. They have a significance, an importance, in excess of anything that can be imagined in advance. Everything is, once, unique in beauty.

I walk a few steps down the trench from which the first attack was launched, tonight, by moonlight.

On either side of the communication trench the front line is engulfed in darkness; the place is inexorably mean and bare—trampled, crushed by a rain of débris, and swept by a biting wind.

On the slope behind the parapet—rather unevenly machicolated—the supporting piles of sandbags make a checked pattern. The twisted pinewood props which formed the scaffolding of the shelters point in every direction like tangled bones, thrown up into the gloom above me; I can imagine them as fossils from the earth's depths—by the cataclysm; the wood itself is rotten to the core.

I lean over the ragged crest of this great wave, full of breaches, from which our front line advanced only yesterday. Something lying in the damp undergrowth catches my eye, and I pick it up to look at it; I have a mania for collecting souvenirs. I am attracted by the glimmer of aluminium fuse-caps—like big beads—trodden into the mud underfoot, paving the bottom of the trench.

Bent nearly double, I make my way down into a near-by dugout,—a little square box with the ceiling supported by heavy wooden beams. On the floor of this crypt with its scanty covering of straw lie scattered papers, rags, empty sardine-tins—all indescribably filthy and dilapidated; and in the midst, four partly blackened stones, with a few scraps of half burnt paper. I know that before they go into action they

burn their letters—in case they should be taken prisoners, or wounded, or killed and searched. Not many hours can have passed since this dugout was occupied—a faint smell of tobacco still floats in the air. The fireplace is perhaps still warm—I touch it to make sure.

In one corner a scrap of stuff is startlingly white. The shoulder-strap from a woman's chemise. I stand staring at this white mutilated confidence in my hand, then put it back carefully in its corner—a relic some man would not take with him when he went over the top, nor yet burn before the others. My grimy hands have left their mark on it, and the thought somehow wakes a faint pang. . . . Leaving the dugout I continue my wanderings through the crumbling trenches, among grotesquely shaped mounds of earth: mechanisms, pyres.

Not a soul to be seen! A strangely vivid impression comes from these empty spaces whence a living mass, at one surge, wrenched itself away.

One thing surprises me: there are no dead. I had expected there would be.

There is, however, an imprint in the soft soil which shows quite clearly where a body has lain, though it has now been removed. It is evident that a mud-bespattered corpse had lain there, and his back has left a scaly stain. Yes, they have evacuated the wounded and the dead, but now I see blood everywhere.

Nothing now can ever efface it. It has soaked into the very soil. The very stones, laid bare by a fall of earth, bleed. All these soft heaps of *débris* are wounds. The earth sweats blood and turns to decay . . . and everywhere now I sicken at the odour of death which abides here, surviving death.

I come and go seeking, I know not what in this endless succession of yawning pits and ditches; avoiding here and there the hollow greyish depths of a demolished well, on whose dusky waters float darker and more sinister shadows. On the summit of a mound, the remains of an iron pylone still stand. The trench-diggers found it there, and made use of it to prop up their parapet. It has been riddled by shrapnel, and seen against the background of the sky it is a sort of metallic lace. In a flash, it recreates before my eyes the whirlwind that must have passed over this place. . . . I understand what horrors must have swept it, continuously, thus to have pierced holes through and through the hard iron.

Through a low opening in the wall,—as between two flattened rocks,—I catch a glimpse of the long lines of the fields beyond. I hurry past that sinister peep into space.

I find myself blinking stupidly, and saying: "They attacked from here. . . ."

From this very spot, from the shelter of these shapeless and ignoble shields of mud, from behind this wall whose thickness was their salvation and which through the long dark hours had become flesh of their flesh . . . they climbed into the open—all of them—over the parapet that shuddered under bombardment like an anvil under the hammer, and hurled themselves beneath the wheels of the chariot of space. You can trace their footprints even now, where they went forth from this gloomy shelter—mean enough, and yet their only hope—to death. On the crumbling remnants of the parapet you can see very distinctly the marks of nailed boots.

Up there? I discover a deep imprint—the imprint of an open hand. Someone rested a hand here, on the

brink of the last river, and lifted it only at that ultimate moment when the solid earth heaved and breathed fire and flame as terrible as the lava from some lunar volcano. It seems as if among the débris left uncovered along all these walls that have melted away into the waste like sand dunes I can detect traces of an earlier epoch, of an earlier race. As I look, the very earth seems to become flesh. I dare not walk, I dare not think.

In the inscrutable depths of the midnight sky—paling now under the rising moon—that sacrifice of the crucified front rank is re-enacted before my eyes. I see their defenceless bodies, their pale floating robes. And I see, despite all words and despite the spasm of anger furbished up at the last moment,—despite their bayoneted rifles pointed toward an enemy, that their gesture still remains the gesture of suicide.

“The infantry moved forward at such and such an hour. Progress was normal.” So in another place was this recorded by moving forward a row of little paper flags on pins. It was done gaily, as though at cards.

But there is a grandeur and a tragedy whose vast signs appear and mould the configurations that I, who am a stranger, perceive without full understanding. Men, living men whom I no longer recognise with my maps, and my red lines, and my columns of figures. Now I see them all too closely, and the sight is pain.

I must continue my way.

I follow once more in their footsteps. But I at least have the protection of the communication trench that has been dug behind them: in this sector, before yesterday's advance, our front line was too near the enemy to permit us to undertake any trench digging, still less



keep such work in repair (trenches decompose as quickly as corpses).

The mounds on either side become lower as I progress, and soon the trench has no depth. It is no longer any use for me to bend double (I seem nothing but a grotesque caricature of myself); I am out in the open, the winds of heaven blow upon me from all sides, and before my feet lies the plain.

It is very still. On the other bank of the river, just opposite me, a few detachments move peaceably about their business. There is no danger, then. Somewhat reassured, I draw myself up to my full height—theatrically—and laugh aloud in the midst of the desolation. All the same, I prefer not to loiter. I have now completely emerged from the narrow crevasse which has for some time been only the ghost of a trench, and which now vanishes from sight and melts into the plain. But for some minutes I am still in the grip of fear. There is no sun, only the melancholy slate-grey light of a winter's day. The plain is not really a plain, but a shallow slope, covered with bedraggled grasses, wind-swept, and littered with stray tent-pegs and bundles of sticks.

I have hardly time to see, on my right, under a kind of twisted scaffolding, a long low heap of white-grey stones and dust: all that remains of Girandes. The wind is disposing of it.

The fields that lead down are full of holes—the water lying in them reflects the light; nothing but holes everywhere. One can see clearly two regular rows of them, the beginning of two narrow canals almost where the wind ruffles the surface.

Those are the first trenches dug out by the attacking force, the trenches that the General had marked on the map with two strokes of his pencil, observing

that they were the work of a General. There, after escaping the liquid fire of the barrage, the human mass had sunk down to hide at the moonset. For three hours, in silence, did flesh and blood struggle in that icy water. Nothing to fight the flood but child's tools, nothing to fight the piercing cold but their arms.

Suddenly a dead man is in my path. I saw nothing of him until suddenly I came face to face with him where he bars my road. He is embedded in the brown wall of a shell-hole, huddled-up, with his face covered by a handkerchief that is already stiffened by the cold. Just a heap of blue cloth, strangely shrunken with two sharp dislocated knees still supporting two cartridge cases from which protrudes a stiff hand, moulded in yellow and purplish wax. His boots are buried sideways from him, the legs horribly twisted. Beside the dead soldier sleeps his unharmed rifle.

And now I can see the dead everywhere. So many that, seemingly, I cannot have known how to look for them before. They are not easy to see, strangely smaller than you would expect, preternaturally small. You have to be immediately above them to distinguish the impress they make in the long grass. Three steps away you stop and say, "There's something there." Every shell-hole has its victim, like a landmark. You find them lying in every possible attitude: propped up against beds of trampled rushes beside a glimmer of water: Stretched out flat on back or stomach, hands clenched and feet twisted. Their miasma pollutes the sky, as the streams of their blood pollute the earth beneath them. They are powdered with earth, smeared with mud, and their pulpy flesh is disfigured by blue or purplish growths, swollen or withered. They lift to the stars faces that are either torn and

gashed, or very white, and smeared with copious rouge. Their staring eyes are like balls of spotted ivory. The explosions seem to have drowned some and set fire to others. Terribly greyish necks have been dislocated, and the spinal column broken and driven into the ground by the force of the explosion; some of the heads look as if some god of Chaos yet had them by the hair. And there are those who have been long dead, more tenuous, disappearing bit by bit from the face of the earth.

In most of the shell-holes, side by side with the drowned or buried men, lie fragments of geometrical designs in metal: circles and triangles of barbed wire. Those particular craters were evidently there before this last attack. . . . I call to mind the order we gave the day before the advance; fatigue parties were sent out to put up barbed wire entanglements in all the shell-holes and craters within reach—nominally to hold up counter-attacks, but actually to prevent any of the attackers from taking refuge therein. We had thought the measure natural and wise—and yet it is frightful to think of these traps that inflicted final agony on the hands that sought them out, driven down their slopes.

Torture . . . agony . . . human sacrifices. . . .  
“Once upon a time, my friend, but not now.”

What is this? . . . Six blocks in a row. . . . All black, with patches of brightness. Burnt by some passing flame . . . they were negroes. Scorched negroes. In front of them lie the remains of some kind of circular emplacement, a coronet of broken stones.

The lime-kiln! I remember someone saying this morning that that was where the mysterious machine-gun was installed. So that's it. . . . Yes, it was these

negroes who discovered the mitrailleuse last night, just before the attack. They were sent along to track it out in the dark. And the battery fired at them as they passed, thereby giving itself away. They tracked it out with their bellies.

But how were they burnt? Afterwards, perhaps, for they were first riddled by the machine-gun, clearly. All six of them are cut in two, horribly mangled about the waist; their dark skins are greased with clotted blood, and their great coats soaked in it.

The congratulations telephoned to their Colonel: "Bravo! Heartiest congratulations! So you see they are good for something after all!"—I hear them all over again as I stand beside this funeral pyre of horrors in which I count six faces masked in what looks like a thick layer of rust—six faces, each with thickened ears, and two black holes in which now lie the ashes of what once were eyes.

I began by stopping before every dead man I came across, as if each and all of them might have had a message for me. Now I don't notice them.

At last I reach the curving banks of the river. Beneath the trampled grasses the firm ground gives way to slush. Two or three sticks set up near the banks are reflected palely in the water, and there is a smell of blood and marsh. A smell I had noticed before in the front line trenches, of human blood filtering back into the earth.

On the opposite bank of the Clénarcisse (you cross it on a bridge of swaying planks) there are men: a long, long file of prisoners sitting there, fettered together in pairs, arm to arm and leg to leg. One of them has a face like a pretty doll—all pink like a baby's. A wound in his head has been tied up with a

yellow checked handkerchief. Yawning sentries guard them—and a Captain tears his hair like an officer out of comic opera, because there are so many of them—and what is more, they have to be fed.

I begin to climb the slope. It is growing darker and more threatening. A majestic mass of cloud veils the heights whither I am making my way through an ill-constructed trench full of holes and narrow corners—evidently dug in the dark, by instinct and not by sight,—entirely fantastic. An icy wind has risen without warning and sweeps across this treacherous zone. It is probably going to rain; the water lying in puddles is leaden, with gleams of steely brightness. Shells bursting at a little distance light up the trench from time to time. Up there, whither I am to go, are gathering storms, and noise.

One or two clumps of garden plants still clinging to their clods of earth show that this was once cultivated land. Through gaps in the parapet I occasionally glimpse a back-yard smothered in white dust from the crumbling walls behind it. The cells of the "Chess-board". It can only be the same thing over again in that other world towards which I drag myself and my stinking shroud.

In a flash, with a cry of horror, I saw, because I glanced round just then, a kind of abyss beyond a crumbling earthwork: a populated abyss, an indistinct pool, enclosed and in parts phosphorescent with oily mud, and set about with scarecrows. Beings twisted or standing upright. And the wind that howled over them had stripped their faces to the bone, taken their features from off them like a lifted mask. I looked upon the awful blue-whiteness of virgin bones. Yet their ragged uniforms still flapped about their frames like torn scraps of paper. Their bodies had

crumbled away, hardened, liquefied inside their stiffened garments; they were nothing but coffins set upright. The man at the end, leaning over a little as if he were planted in the ground, seemed to have a scarlet strip bound around the white stone of his skull—a crown of brightness in the stormy penumbra. Another, stooping, stretched out a skeleton hand towards a rusty skeleton of a rifle; he has remained there, face to face with a fiery Hell, fixed for ever by chemistry as though he were a photograph. The whole collection of the wreckage of war sways gently. . . . One of them claps his hands gently.

All this I saw as I passed by the gap in the parapet—in the time it takes to walk two paces. A German observation post destroyed during a bombardment. . . . Then I went on quickly. I wanted to hide. I remembered the beauty of the bombardments seen from the heights, looking down over a vast amphitheatre like a stage: all those great fireworks that we so often stared at as they soared into space and devoured the night. . . .

Before me the ground rises so sharply that it overhangs me. On the steep slope is a network of barbed wire and struggling figures caught in it—or rather, they have stopped struggling now. A little higher up a small mound bristles with slender pointed stakes, and a shrapnel-screen of sheet iron, twisted like a rag.

I turn round to get my bearings and calculate the distance. This must be a section of the Odin Line, the German front line that was shown with the little flags on pins that the Generals move so lightly.

And this is the place they attacked at dawn, on foot, with open eyes, a few hours ago.

There is no way through the entanglements! On

the steep slope that leads up to that indistinct stronghold above, the rows of wire fences and entanglements are intact,—as neat as rows of beans in a market gardener's plantation. Even now this fantastically hellish vine on the hillside is weighted with heavy shapes, half upright.

It was a lie, then, to say that "the preliminary barrage had destroyed all the enemy defences," as our officers swore solemnly to their men, swore on their word of honour in order that their morale should not be lowered.

And this particular local incident—insignificant as it was—was eventually regularised and fixed for all time in a few words from the commander-in-chief: "We got our fingers badly pricked on the barbed wire; and just there, indeed, we were pretty badly had."

There are statements that insidiously whittle down the truths they admit until their truth becomes a lie.

Those who lived so long must have seen those barbed wire entanglements as I saw them. And in them they saw the sign of their own death. Even as I climbed, stray shots were still to be heard; if I had put an arm out into the open it would have been blown away.

Several hours after the enemy had known of the attack, they went to their death, climbing a hillside. That is the unbelievable thing, the hill. On foot, openly, they came at it in the full light; and however quickly they came, they yet could only advance very slowly. There could have been no hope, no dream of escape. Impossible that anyone should do this thing, yet they did it.

They breathed in that atmosphere of lightning, that rain of stones, of steel, of fire. They advanced over that broken ground where appalling growths sprang up under their feet. They walked upon the water.

They faced the storms that would destroy whole cities with no more than the matchsticks of their rifles, the dwarfed metal of their bayonets, their clothes fragile as their own flesh, their helmets frail as the skulls they covered, and their poor wealth of lung and brain. They climbed that hill, knowing that the least bit of metal would pour out their blood upon the earth, knowing that they carried in their bare hands the sacred mystery of their lives, fair and delicate as a flower. They hurled their flesh, their thoughts, their happiness against the machines of steel, against the searing flame of torpedoes that tear out the bowels of the earth itself; they pitted their feeble heart-beats against the swift throb of the shell that swoops down on life and snatches it like a bird of prey. In full daylight they saw the short, vicious, red flame that spurts from the machine-gun and from rifles discharged point blank. All this they saw while they yet went forward—manual labourers of war—to kill rifles with bayonets, to stifle the machine-gun with their naked hands, to glut the cannon's mouth with the mass of their flesh.

This melancholy, commonplace grey countryside has been so ravaged that its wrongs cry out for redress. These men sent out to dash their heads against the stone wall of force—surely their punishment passes human comprehension. The religions explain it by saying that it is all due to original sin, and this explanation, savage in its absurdity, is yet the only one which has the immense proportions of reality. Still blinking at those ordered rows of figures in light blue, I imagine I am looking at the sky through holes in a plank. I hear my voice saying: "The original sin, of obedience."

At the top of the communication trench is one of them: something in an army greatcoat leaning against



the trench wall in the act of making a gesture. But I had no strength to look up at this destiny—I looked down on his feet.

Following the communication-trench I crossed the front line, whose nationality has changed over with its parapet. The German first line is exactly like our own: the same cavernous bareness, the same deafening dumbness, the same estuary demolished by the powers of scientific warfare. Identical. To obtain an idea of resemblance, you have only to compare the two sides of a frontier, between which there is no difference in the world except the colours on the map.

Across broken ground and half-levelled mounds I reach a strange place: a collection of tiny islets, worn away by successive floods of rain and already dissolving into formless mud . . . little reefs of straw littered about, and a few rugged lumps of muddy earth. By now I am nothing but a nerve registering fatigue. . . . The sky is nothing but a greyish steam rising from the earth, and I am nothing but walking prayer, only walking because my feet move of their own accord, mechanically.

This rocky plain with its masses of sloping débris, treacherous, steel-threaded, holds no colour as far as the eye can see save the dirty brown of gall and dried blood. Who can tell what may have happened here? Even silence is dead. A sinister wind blows, but no one knows whence. It brings a gleam of sulphur, of verdigris. And I feel my face grow livid, and my fear write itself there for all men to see, fearful.

Minute, insignificant among these vast, desolate expanses, I yet try to collect my thoughts and to find my direction in the midst of the confusion. But without success. One can try to get an idea of the size of

things by reasoning, measuring them and transposing them, building up a scale model; but the earth's horizons are not made for man's comprehension. Lamentable, ineffectual effort to seek out what space withholds. As soon as the eye has deeply probed certain fields, it finds it has only sections of reality, that contradict each other.

The dead are the real substance of the world. The owners of those charred hands that stuck out of the trench wall with a smell of scorched flesh have been scorched by the men who cleaned up the trench. The bodies that lie across the trench are hollowed in the middle because so many files of men have marched over them. And all left so carelessly, so openly, that it seems impossible that even their souls can have escaped mutilation. Bayonets bleeding with rust, heads rusty with blood. Faces formless and blackened; that lump there, an agglomeration of flints, has the baroque, terrible suggestion of the lower half of a face.

Mummified corpses with dead eyes, and hands so decayed that you can see daylight through them—whose heads are supported as if on wires, whose elbows prick through their sleeves, whose legs are no thicker than sticks—have been laid bare by the recent bombardment, together with the wooden crosses that are horribly like them. The long dead belched forth on top of the more recent corpses, whose red blood still trickles silkily. There everything new is buried under the older débris, under the whitened bones of the last generation, the dead of last year. A world turned upside down.

Tired, belated, incapable of concentration, I look at them all. They have an appalling, determined power of multiplying themselves to infinity, and finally com-

pletely block my way. A solid wall of them, each with his gesture, yet motionless. They are relentless still. They are resentful, eternally and unchangingly, like statues. Of what nationality? The fires of Hell let loose upon them have sucked all colour from their uniforms. The cry of agony from their lips is too formless and too human to belong to any language.

And I see that one of them supports with his body the whole weight of the mass that those above him have let fall; he is bent and dislocated by the load.

I can see his face, and the staring eyes much too large for it; twisted, thwarted features, on which the light of intelligence was never allowed to play, whose dull glance ever fell before another man's eye; the possessed face of the beast of burden condemned never to think of itself; the caryatid!

Through the mists of the past there rises before me the form of a living slave on a river bank, bearing upon his shoulders the whole weight of a kingdom. Today the same slave is more efficiently crushed.

"There is no slavery in our day. That is all ancient history." I find myself repeating, parrot-like and without thought, those words that I heard spoken one night by the blind, the deaf, the fool.

This face has a hole in the middle, close to the nose, a hole swollen round the edges. There is also a hole in this iron sheet erected to ward off stray shrapnel and bullets, to allow one to look out.

I climbed up on to the beams and set my eyes to this spy-hole; to reach it I had to stand against the dead man, and hold on to him. The wail of ricocheting bullets had died away a little, when suddenly one of them struck the sheet iron close to my head, and made the metal ring like a gong, and I heard the bullet bury

itself in the loose tissues of earth as if with a sigh of content.

I looked down into the gulf. A group of men fighting in the thick smoke of the corridor with gestures like javelin-throwers. I could see nothing of their adversaries. I saw only their rage. Fifty yards away, the figures of the bombing-party stood out against a great flare of vibrating light, dark shapes silhouetted on a ground of dazzling white. In spite of the distance between us I could see the sweat gleaming on their faces and necks. They shone as if in the midst of waves, as though bathed in floods of living steel.

I drew back hastily, releasing my dead support. I felt the odour of death that enveloped him, drops of blood from his shoulder trickled on to my sleeve, and I fled.

I carry away in my head, almost in my clenched hands, the spectacle of battle, of supremest hate. No! . . . what I saw was not the battle: a mere insignificant fragmentary episode. No one ever sees the whole line of battle. It is far too widespread for one man to see it save through symbols on paper. Down there they are fighting, now . . . away over there . . . always away over there.

Looking up at the sky, I realise that night is falling. Not the darkness of the storm with its clothes, but the darkness of day's end. If light gives out, all is finished. I know I cannot walk much further, I am utterly exhausted, and in fear of myself. I want to meet someone else.

A man comes towards me between the walls of the trench. A soldier, in full equipment, voluminous. As he reaches me he stumbles, and howls with laughter as

he recovers his balance. He passes on his zigzag course.

I shrank away from this animal laugh, reeking of wine.

Sometimes obedience is obtained by the lash, sometimes by alcohol, and it needs must laugh, to be driven, unwilling, though the world comedy.

I found the officer I was told to find. I rested; and set off again.

“To get back you turn to the left and follow the river bank, crossing a little wooden bridge into the plain of Vancouvert. It is quiet. The wounded are evacuated that way.”

A fine rain began to fall, in sheets, like mist.

These limitless wastes, with the rain soaking in in the dying light, are melancholy. I, who have come from shrouds of earth and smoke, am now shrouded in water.

As I walk, I pass others, who walk very slowly; wounded. The first of them says, as I pass him, “We are human rubbish!”

All—or almost all—the soldiers I had seen up to that moment had been dead. These are still partly alive, and their stirring hurts me and tracks me down. Their eyes are still dark with the memory of the horror of the bombardment of the church where they lay huddled. Some of them speak of it of their own accord.

“It was ghastly! . . . Things bursting everywhere. The pillars rocked and twisted like living things. The wounded were left under the falling stones. In a minute, one after the other, they were silent.”

He added, with an impulse of the long resignation of the people:

"They couldn't have done anything else; it was nobody's fault."

All the same, there had been a mistake. An order to advance had been given, instead of an order to retire! And it was that mistake, they told me, that strewed the hills with the dying.

One after another I overtake the survivors, since they must progress very slowly and carefully; the crowd becomes ever thicker.

There are the normal casualties (the majority of sensible men whom one finds everywhere), plodding steadily forward, arms in slings or heads in bandages, carrying their shrapnel helmets and a label at their buttonholes. They think of nothing, for it is easier to march thus.

Two of them are quarrelling, even as they support each other. They are tied together, three-legged. Their quarrel, and the jerks of irritation it provokes, makes them zigzag from side to side, but they make progress because they hold each other up, and because they are tied together.

Two others have stopped dead. Instead of getting on they are amusing themselves with studying each other. They have discovered that they are alike: both have had their noses cut off by a bomb splinter. They stare and stare at each other—and burst out laughing.

A blinded man has stopped too, sighing: "If only I had lived!"

I notice that one of these men is watching me closely. He touches my arm and holds out something for me to take. What is it? A photograph and a pencil. "You fix this. It's to send to my wife so that she won't be too surprised." He shows a photograph, and turns toward me a face horribly skinned, like the lining of

an entrail. So I set to work to scribble on this man's likeness, listening the while to a nearby conversation in praise of some ingenious scheme which made it possible "to kill as many of them as you liked." A man without hands holds out the stumps, swathed in lint that has not yet lost its whiteness. The beginning of a gesture . . . he extends his arms—his arms become infinite.

The road fills with shadows and noises; I am swept along in the midst of a crowd in the falling dusk. Round about me are men near their death, who are living their last moments on earth—and they stop here, and there, and here. . . . I have seen many last steps of life. And each one of these fallen, as I pass, seems a giant. All that is in me cannot suffice to comprehend one of them. They are as the stars for number; who can ever count them?

One of them lies down between two beams and says with a sort of smile: "I am all right." . . . His smile expands, and we realise he is dead.

Another, his face blue-white in the shadows, opens the darker shadow of his mouth, to call; but his call sounds only in some ultimate truth.

I heard one of these shapes—helpless, slowly stiffening already—say, as his head fell jerkily forward:

"She will never know, afterwards, that I lie here, between the road and the spring. Who is there to tell her?"

I said, "I." Or rather, tried to tell him so. My throat vibrated and a hoarse cry escaped me—the cry one utters in nightmare. I stretched out my hand towards him, meaning to ask his name, but there was no response. Dead. Ought I to search him? I did not dare. Propped up right between the stones he was supernatural.

All these lives, one after the other on the road, narrow, damned. This great vulture falls upon me (as if recognising in me one of those whom Death would take him from) and clings to me, dragging: he stiffens and sinks into the earth like a heavy cross. That one maltreats with his left hand his right wrist that is bloody and numbed, never noticing that his coat-sleeve is pinned to his tunic and his arm has been detached at the shoulder. Someone else says something about a mine: "Where the trenches are nothing but shallow gutters, with parapets that leave them open to everything. It went up . . . we were pulverised at racing speed. . . . What remained was in untidy heaps at the bottom of the trench—two hundred lads all the same colour, red, like a volcano. And it happened, you see—merely chance, of course, merely a chance—that at that precise moment when it blew up, all the officers were well in the rear!"

His companion replies:

"It was the 75's that killed us—not only me, but all the others."

When I arrived at the banks of the Clénarcisse the darkness hid much from me.

The banks were streaked with long, pale lines laid regularly side by side. Looking more closely I see that they are dead bodies, tied together in couples. One head is tied up in a yellow check handkerchief. I recognise him, I recognise them all: the German prisoners. There they lie, as far as eye can see, a flat, streaming line, and a dark stream flows from them into the river.

At the end of the line something moves. A gesticulating shape rises up before me and says huskily:

"They put me on guard here . . . but there's nothing to guard." And the drunken sentry goes on:



"Our company finished them all. Our Captain saw to it. He gave us a good strong dose of rum, then said: 'Look here, my little lambs, these fellows are not wanted.' Ha, ha! we had to throw them down and clasp them as if they were women! We had to love them, ha, ha!"

He chuckled, and his breath came in gasps. On each side of his red nose I could see drops trickle down.

I looked away, and left him, drunk with his drunkenness.

A man digging a grave. Like it, he was dusk-coloured, waist-deep in the earth.

"What are you doing?"

"Can't you see?"

"What . . . ?"

"A grave, of course."

"Who's dead?"

"He's not dead yet. He is to die at daybreak, and they'll bring him here directly. I've no time to waste. A reservist. Lost two nights' sleep chasing round No Man's Land looking for a pal's body. Third night he was put on sentry duty and couldn't keep awake. Colonel happened to pass that way, and as it was time to make an example of somebody, he reported him to the General, who said 'Shoot him.' He's an old fellow of forty-five or so, with three children. Of course he didn't do it on purpose. He only made a mistake, and nothing came of it. He's a good sort. I know, because he was a friend of mine, before."

He fell silent, fearful, as though he thought the punishment might be infectious. Soldiers are brothers, but too poor to claim their relationship.

"I can't believe it."

"It's to make an example, you understand. By order of the General commanding the Army Corps."

Like a musical box refrain, a sentence repeated itself monotonously: "Strong measures had to be taken. . . ." This is what all these easy phrases mean, so vague, so abstract, smoothing the terrible truth. Ah! If men only spoke sometimes to reveal and not to hide their thoughts! or if we even had the courage to face the meaning of the words we hear!

I mutter, "Of course, it's exceptional," and a voice beside me screams, "Exceptional? . . . You bloody fool!"

A man who had been sitting listening—quite quietly and peaceably—suddenly jumped to his feet, and with him sprang up two dark shadows: exact replicas of the shadowy form.

He waved his arms wildly and growled, "Damnation." And indeed, this bearer, so grotesquely muffled in his goatskin, and so hung around with saucepans and kettles and hunks of bread, was like some prophet of evil as he stood there between his two acolytes. His features were half concealed by several days' beard, his nose broken. One of his eyes was done for, and covered with a shield, round the edge of which the scarred flesh showed like crinkled paper. He could not let this eye alone—was always rubbing it with his fingers or his sleeve.

"I've seen these exceptions two or three times a day for years on end. Exceptions!"

His companion agreed with him—briefly, for he had a cold; a fine mist of sweat showed on his dark, reddened face; his nose was blocked, his voice wooden.

The bearer quoted other instances, several mixed up, as he painfully hitched up his varied load of tinned eatables. With the end of his staff he traced out the line of the grave, and carried it on and on to infinity.

"He, them, him."

“And Tonnelier, who was my friend, and handsome as I myself when I still looked something like myself—do you want to know what they did to him? With twelve bullets! And Alfred . . . can’t remember his name. And Angelino? He never had a chance. Nothing went right for him from the day he was born. All the same, one day when he was on leave—I really can’t think how it can have happened, more like a fairy tale than anything else, a pretty girl made eyes at him. And when he came back from leave he who had always been so unhappy was so gay that he sang all day long. The same evening he was on patrol, and he couldn’t help singing, and the Adjutant was afraid he would give the party away, and silenced him with a trench knife, like a porker. And Blanquat. All he said was, ‘Here come the Boches’ when the bearers came into the trench. With my own eyes I saw him, a heap of mangled flesh on the ground; the volley had smashed him up as completely as if he had been thrown under an express train. Exceptional! Before the whole regiment, too, with the Chaplain in the front rank to say Amen, and the bayonets like tapers. By order of Colonel . . . what was his name? . . . Can’t remember . . . and of the regimental court-martial.”

“There’s no such thing as a regimental court-martial.”

“What say? Very likely not. Then it wasn’t the regimental court-martial? I don’t know the names of all these things. What I do know is that there was one that they did for, and that Bellamy came to see me the night before—he was one of the firing party—to ask me whether he should fire or not. ‘If I fire, it will be the sooner over for him; but if I don’t fire—well, I shan’t have fired.’ We thought it over. I said, ‘You’ve got to fire.’ We both cried. ‘Ah! if we came

back, eh?' He said, 'You don't need to worry; we shan't!' To say that, consoled him. It was several months later that he got his metal; and I dare say, when you come to think, that what killed him wasn't more wicked than his own.

"And the room where they are examined. I saw into it once as I passed the door. They make a circle round him—most of them holding him, but one ready to take down what he says, and an older man with a coaxing manner. 'Say you did incite the men to mutiny. Say to whom you spoke. Confess, and you'll save your skin; we'll pardon you.' All lies, what they say within the four walls of the court-martial. He also will be thrown on some field one of these mornings, like so much rubbish. When I think of it . . . look out, there's a hole here, don't break your neck! . . . when I think of it, I say, it makes my gorge rise!

"Do you know what it means, you, to decimate a regiment? They draw up the companies in one long line according to height—make it quite fair. Then the officers walk down the line counting. . . . One, two . . . up to ten, and number ten falls out. And all the number ten's are taken away off (singly, not together) to some place or other, to be killed. And now you'd better leave the journalists, and politicians, and ministers to talk about the rights of peoples, and civilisation, and justice, and the republic, the mouthing swine.

"Christ! I don't say they do it just for caprice or for amusement. There was a reason behind this execution. But the reason he was killed was because he wouldn't kill others. The men in the firing party that day were shooting at themselves—their own head, their own heart. It is useless for one among millions to say, 'Man is man: all will change.' That's no good

at all. There's nothing we can do, nothing, nothing!"

He stretched out a finger to point to something invisible in space:

"There's that clerk to the Army Corps court-martial . . . what's his name? . . . Little old man he is. . . . With my own ears I've heard him trying to get a man shot. Well, if only for the way he spoke—if I had a heart at all, or was even on the way to becoming a man—I would stick a knife into him, wherever I met him . . . if I were anything like a man."

As he spoke there danced before my eyes a flickering vision of the elderly gallant, ridiculous in his uniform, whose whole idea was to run after women.

The prophet of evil went on:

"All this, and more, and more, will never be known. No one will ever know.

"They are all well covered up already. There'll be a good big space between me and you in an hour or so's time, and when we get back to civil life I shan't look out for you!

"The officers won't talk about it. Even the decent ones have too much *esprit de corps* to do that sort of thing. They'll even say: such things are not true. You see the good ones, like the rest, have to lead their men by lies, and they are all tied together, and things could not go on at all if justice were done. That's how it is. They'll never speak. There'll always be plenty scum to write books and articles. And if something should by chance come out that way, there'll always be fools like you to say, 'Oh! that's an exception.' Don't worry! They'll win the war. Soldiers forget. That's the worst of all, to forget. Yes! when you're in the middle of it, it's fresh enough; and I will make you think a bit. You say, 'It'll be a long life before I forget this.' But, all the same, you will forget.

The convict released after penal servitude is beside himself with joy when he's free to walk through the streets with his hands in his pockets. Just fancy! Hands in his pockets! It is sad to forget. It's the ruin of ruins."

His great words open up abysses of the future.

But he adds: "We shan't come back. If we come out of this little affair it will only be for another, and so no one will ever know what has happened. I'm telling you all this now, but I repeat, no one, no one will ever know."

He lights his spirit lamp and stoops as though to look for something in the confusion around us.

All kinds of filth, excremental remnants of food, scattered clothing, an old leathery sock, the foot blackened and discoloured. And a cross standing solitary—a tree's skeleton standing guard over a man's. In the distance the low-hanging smoke clouds from the bursting shells are shot with cutting flames. And everywhere the smell of death grows heavier and seems to snatch away one's breath.

The man sat down with a noise of clinking ironmongery—I could even hear the joints of his knees creak as he moved; his head is swathed in wreaths of tobacco smoke. His two companions sit down on either side of him, the heavy breathing of the man with the cold rasping out.

Suddenly he strikes a match and holds it down, with a hand that trembles, so that the light reveals two shining balls, two eyes staring up from out a blackened mask—strange eyes, prominent, striated and closely veined. He held the match so close as to singe the dead, earthy hair. The dead hand—henceforth to be empty—still clutches a newspaper: we can see the headline of one of the articles, in big print: "At the front,

the cheerful heroism of our men." And indeed the dead man is laughing; joy imprinted on the red steel.

The cook jerks out: "Well, that's a certificate for you!"

He looks around, opens his mouth to exhale a cloud of solid smoke, and turns to one of his fellows: "Agreed?"

The other, gloomily: "I don't know—till someone tells me."

"All this—because we have obeyed. What makes them march—and go on—all these foolsloggers who will never get anywhere, except the end of their lives? These acres of dead . . . the fields as full of them as forests of roots. . . . A good thing for them that they didn't see how much it was their fault, when the bad minute came.

"And the leaders, you know, they're right, too, to divide up men into herds—putting uniforms on forest trees, and giving corn-fields opinions. They're right all the time, for don't they, at the end of it all, reap the golden harvest—on their caps or in their pockets? The only people wiser than they will be the men who will one day rise up together, and smash in their skulls. Not they, but we, are the malefactors. Without you and me they could do nothing. It's you, after all, who say to them: 'Whatsoever ye dare conceive in your minds, that will I do with my hands. I am your firing party, I am your wave-of-assault, I am he who will slay my brethren whenever you bid.' And you are always on the spot to obey. All are, all. War is necessary. . . . Why? Because we allow people to say so! Even a bitch won't give up her puppies without a fight. But our mothers smile as they sacrifice their sons. I'm only a poor devil who has discovered

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things haphazard; don't you see that everywhere and always it is the same thing? Say."

He pauses to spit out a sodden cigarette-end which he has been holding between his lips, and looks straight at me:

I affirm. "Yes."

These same words have echoed down the ages, this same idea has hurled itself against the minds of men in their stony darkness, always showing them the same facts, the same criminal facts. This disordered mind who has too many things to cry, who is too wholly concentrated on the mere mechanism of slavery—so clear through the veils of lies—he too has been reborn, like all humanity. This little voice maddened by the greatness of the public dream he has within him—infinite revolution in its cage—it is ever and always the same, always!

He struggles to his feet, and prepares to move on. Every movement produces the same creaking. As he stretches himself to his full height he adds other words of eternal hope.

"All the same, all the same, believe me, it is from this blood we speak of that there will spring in years to come—before the end of the world—a truer thing than ours. It is possible, after all, that I may come through alive! We shan't all be killed, eh? And I'll speak out then. I shall be fond of myself if I do come through!"

He departs to carry fresh supplies of food to some post. Against a background of wooden ambulances, low and long, like coffins made to hold an army, I see him and his two assistants, silhouetted in black on a green ground; but he is walking with great strides, he passes them.

Soon I can see only the man himself—he draws to



himself the great, sharp wind. The luminous green of the western sky is still so bright that I distinguish the outline of his body—the arm raised to rub his eye, the elbow bent—and of his staff.

Suddenly there appears above him a dome of heavy metallic clouds, shot with flashes of light. A deafening crash—magnified by the echo—fills our heads to bursting point; a dull vibration shakes the earth beneath our feet. Bombardment!

He stopped, and stood still for a moment, almost invisible under the ragged black clouds and the rain of red flashes that pierced them. I fix my eyes upon the vertical, swaying figure: a man—a tomb of truth!

He was running now, confusedly, stopping for a moment and then setting off again in another direction, yet the dome of dust and smoky horror with its flashes of lightning seemed always to follow him. I thought I saw him cover his eyes with his hands for a moment, and then stretch out his arms before him, with the stick, like a blind man. . . . He was looking for a hole to hide in! A huge mass of white hot steel struck the running figure, and he was engulfed, together with the little raft of earth on which he had been a minute before. It was a second or two before the sound of the explosion reached me, and with it I heard—*after the man himself had been blown to pieces*—his piercing, living voice. This extraordinary cry from the beyond, this more than human call from a being who, sudden, spoke out all he contained within him, made me, for a moment, embody another soul; transmuted me from head to foot.

A great crowd, indistinct and swaying, or rather, the extreme edge of this crowd, which I glimpse stretching away to vanish in the distance. The human mass

which forms it is almost motionless. I go up to the marginal points of the great relief-column and question one of the men on the fringe of the living plain. He says: "Been kicking our heels here for six hours!"

Then he adds a phrase that recalls the words of him whose witness has now been dispersed to the four winds of heaven: "Same thing every day . . . months and years on end."

Their faces are white with fatigue—the sweat has dried on them like hoar frost. All of them are breathing hard, gasping with the effort it costs them to keep upright.

Time has no value here . . . it doesn't matter . . . nothing matters, except to move little flags on pins from here to there. To succeed you have to have waste. The Great Men say so; which of them, or of those even Greater Ones who are above them, said, "It is waste that gets the better of chance, and builds the bridge," thereby guaranteeing the peace of mind of the high command. If they had not had endless material to waste, not one but would have come to a swift, ignominious halt. It is waste of time, money, and lives, the absurd plenteousness of these three great and real things in the puerile minds of the masters that hides errors, fills up all gaps, and puts every mistake right. War goes on not because it is efficiently run—it isn't—but because it is a credit concern, entirely supported by the future; and the future is a blank:—and because nothing is counted, and there are too many men.

I only caught a glimpse of these troops on their way up—collided with a corner of that human wall, that living flood. They are young, and terrible; indistinct giants, magnified by their mud. Their officers are as muddy as they, like them and mingled with them,

scarcely resembling the Staff Officers who never came down from their thrones into *this*. But shame on all these who do nothing but obey!

While the forming up and marching off goes on, some of them find time to stare at me. They despise me because of my braided bureaucrat's stigmata. One of them as he passes me raises his tin hat by the peak—as if it were a bowler—and says, "Excuse me, sir!"

Another says in an emphatic stage whisper: "We go on because we can't do anything else. Get that well into your head, my little one!"

And embedded in the muddy rectangle of harnessed men whose leathers and burdens rub against one another, he turns round to shout something else at me. I see his mouth open in a dark circle in the twilight. But the squall carries his words away, and he too is carried away by the moving ranks—the harrow of discipline—by shameful obedience.

They despise me, because I am of the Staff; but all the same it is easy to see that they are afraid of me, because the Staff means authority, and they are slaves. We know quite well what they are thinking. We hear their confessions, without their knowing it, by our system of espionage. More completely than they dream they are under the thumb of their leaders. Methodically, authority keeps a finger on the dreams they send out toward their countrysides, their homes, and their chosen loves; their letters—poor letters and yet so rich—are stolen and read.

I had seen in the flat plain the edge of the relief giving up the line, so also fringed the undertow of the mass returning from the trenches. These are they who have been taking part in the actual fighting. The week they have just passed on the raw edge of the

sector has aged them; they are filthy with the grime of war. The poor who remain clean are saints.

A gesticulating, arguing group forms round a cart and an old horse. Men press round with heavy bundles in their hands, hoping to be able to get the cartridges (two hundred of them each; they have worn them till they feel that the weight cuts them in half) carried in the regimental wagon, which is allowed here. But the driver—sweat has traced black furrows in the grime on his wrinkled face—points to his horse:

“Look at him! I have to lead him by the head anyway. He can’t. He’s worn out. He’s a horse, and there are hundreds of you!”

And they look at the horse who sways on his feet; his white-grey seems to them the colour of a skeleton, and they see that the skin of the drooping head is nearly worn through. Then they cease their clamour, and looking at him more closely, they say, “Old chap”, as if in their worn-out beast they recognised an old friend. They put their cartridges back and fall in once more with a pathetic happiness.

Line upon line of horses as far as the eye can see. Like the rows of menhirs in eyes of the men of Nomenoë and Conan Meriadek in the Breton plain, where all is the colour of granite. It is raining. You can hear the drops pattering on their flanks. They are doing nothing.

“Been there for four days. What are they thinking about?” says their melancholy guardian through the veils of wetness.

Quite still, each one firmly planted on four legs and tied up to a stake by a rope’s rigid bar; they are mutilated and bruised. They stand like hard ghosts, with rugged heads, coats roughened and torn, and the hide

bleeding where the bones almost prick through the skin.

Looking at them in their vast stillness, one sees reality decompose finally. Their innocence cries out more loudly even than the men's. What does it matter to them which adjective is applied to Alsace-Lorraine? What does "glorious victory" mean to them? Or the treaties of peace—honour on the Front, commerce on the back—for which their flesh bleeds and wears out? What are the names of their adversaries to them?

On the dark features of the keeper—silent as the beasts themselves—I read my own thoughts.

Another likeness: no matter who rises up to command, they too will obey, all together. They are ready to set out at the first call, the first bark.

"Military heroism," they write in newspapers and books. These grave ghosts are proof that this is non-existent; that it is a virtue that is cut out of some small portion of suffering for their amusement.

These horses seem to me more human than man himself. But if they were set free they would be lost. If men were freed, they would at the last find themselves.

The tree-trunk bridge. . . . A number stands out on a level with my eyes: 27306. I repeat it aloud, and the sound of my voice comes as a shock. I am almost ashamed. This name is marginal to reality, and yet it is the name awarded by the great General who created this bridge by a line upon a sheet of paper, after destroying the others with three flicks of his thumb-nail.

The road beneath my feet becomes harder; the soil is shadowy, but the beam of a searchlight swoops down and bathes me in icy white light and a shower of frosty

dust. The ground is sprinkled with shining crystals and starry plaster. But by its light I see that I am walking over the bodies of men: *chasseurs-à-pied*. "The Boches bombarded Vancouvert Plain, but they made a mistake: there were only a few units there." I shall never escape the persecution of these words of blasphemy. I remember having seen the colours of this battalion on parade, with the Generals telling their lies in the intervals of the bands: "In three months you will all be freed": and they pranced before the massed troops in the bright sunshine.

A German and a Frenchman have fought to the death to escape being buried alive by one another. They are clasped now in death—inseparable—two eagles whose wings war has burnt. Between them is an eternal likeness—crying to heaven. When will we find a way to blazon this resemblance? In my mind a funeral march echoes faintly—I listen, captive and attent; it is lovelier far than anything I have ever imagined, and it invests me with splendour. But this hymn will remain buried, and will not speak its truth, as long as the colours of uniforms cover the flesh of men.

The country lies flat around me. Fields . . . fields of beet-root which have been left in the ground and which are dead and hollow like rotten glands. My head is heavy with the dense odour of this tuberculous field.

The trail, a shiny ruin which squeezes me in its ruts, appears to be the way to a village. That is how my fate, and all those of which it is composed, ends:—in something which is no more:—a dead street, a dead village.

A noise of horses, whips, oaths—and across the ex-

panse where I wander on a skeleton road there passes an artillery tender. In it struggles a fettered being; a corpse, a monster of phosphorescent pallor. I watch it as it flies past, held upright by the speed, kicking at the jolts.

The approaches to the village lie under a rain of cinders. In the most sublime poems of despair, in the most majestic scenes that the great poets have laid on paper, there is nothing worse than this dun waste over which my feet stumble. A little hill of rubbish left by encampments and caravans—as everywhere and always—bones, peelings, pots with holes, or broken and offensive; sharp fragments of glass, rusty cans. Over this surface of flesh and metal, urchins play;—not children but spectres.

In the square, a pool, and in its centre a square fountain. This fountain, that has drowned itself, has by it a tree-stump; the roofless broken column of a tree. Was it not there that a goddess floated, a mystic response to prayer?

It is the village, yes. I know where I am. I am home. It is cold. I have never left my road.

All roads end there; and one can see them to their finish, empty, vibrating with silence in the bareness of the countryside; the roads of traffic and requisition which have separated couples and scattered families. The net through which life has gone out and death has come in: the roads which bind all men to a few men, and which always end in sorrow.

This corpse with its strange out-thrust limbs whose gestures are beyond the limits of gesture, has been unearthed by some hooked fork of the thunder, and mixed up with dead wood. What is that to it? Beings are no longer frail—only their tombs.

The disarticulated walls have shrunk to lines of

pallid corpses. Of the ruins some are white and new; on others fire has imprinted its great darkness. Trees? One, immense, torn up, has just been set down there, then trembles and departs, broken.

However, the bombardment is almost over, and there is no movement, nothing. I regret the corpse which has galloped past and left me. All the outlines and vestments of things are black; it is the hour of day, no, the hour of fate—when all things have the same black uniform.

Houses in rows have fallen into their cellars and gardens. They are the sepulchres of houses, gratings, plans of houses like a maze. You realise that you are crossing the threshold, but nothing reveals it.

There is still the foundation and the cruelty of the framework and the torn outer walls, and this cold room turned inside out. I enter slowly, groping, embracing the emptiness of all the empty rooms, and the unceasing grief, grief so great that it becomes personal to me.

Corpses fill the ruins; heaps of them simulate groups of the living. I am sitting on a stone; when one is utterly exhausted, suffering, one creates gentleness. From darkness a kind of light is forced out, and from silence, voices. They who are here are not those who endured, for they are soldiers—and all soldiers are strangers in houses, even in their own. How they all resemble each other, these great unknown humans.

Here is a kitchen (*débris* sunken like that of an altar, and the ceiling has snowed upon it), the prison of the assembled vegetables: leeks, tibias with beards of twine, tomatoes, gourds of tinted juice, the brain-like cauliflower, and the long cucumber underneath like a cold wrinkled crocodile, and the pot with its moist, glazed lip. Here also is the cook's vermilion dress, the audible purr of the imprisoned fire and the clock



almost bleeding with its spoken angelus. In the bedroom the young couple; their new furniture like fresh sunlight.

A letter flaps and flutters on the ground, a soldier's letter which has doubtless been soiled and violated by the uniformed Jesuits, the cold hands which grope around the crowd-conscience.

The bodies around mine are each uglier than the next. Faced by the colours of putrefaction, I call on the secret night. In the grey dusk as in the north wind I call up before my eyes rosy tints, the warm colour as of a nude body of a woman veiled. I smell a scent of violets; there are somewhere beneath the gloom pensive tufts of them, and on the broken stones convolvuli completely shroud the nettles.

I have remained a long time dreaming. . . . I am held by a hand; it was not dead when I came, but it died as it held me. When I separate the fingers the whole mass falls back. The death of a creature before one's eyes makes it seem, miraculously, that one had known and loved him a long while.

This fellow has his mouth open. It is obvious that he is crying. When I raise him his weight shows me the strength of the tenderness he had for his children.

Another is naked in the corner of the room that is drowned in space, in the room whose warmth has been violently expelled. His stomach and entrails are exposed; behind his stomach the octopus of his entrails shivers and gleams. Perhaps his nails grasp the very substance of his heart.

He is like all of them; I hear his voice. What does it say? That which all voices say:—"Thou."

All of us are creatures of littleness, and whether dead or living we are killed by the dark. But we are

meant to live as intensely as possible, and it is in the ruins peopled by the slaughtered that I end, in the evening of today and of the ages, without leaving my road.

In the direction of the street goes a stiff black apparition: a woman in mourning. A widow, a mother with long dark veils. Her face is terrible, frightful, white and grinning like death itself. But this whiteness is her handkerchief which she has laid on her face to hide her grief as much as may be from the world. The pale stain alone shows amidst the creature's shadowy darkness.

I walk towards her. The débris which fills and devastates the place make me zigzag. At my approach she changes, cleaves asunder, her spirit turns to air; she is no longer a woman, but a bush with a dark and a white rag caught on it and moving in the wind; nothing moves here but things. It is an illusion: this woman in mourning is not there, she is everywhere: my eyes follow her everywhere. She is not an illusion!—with her penitential and tortured flesh, her mother's aching knees which bruise the earth as if calling heavily upon the world of the dead to open. So many soldiers, and so many mothers who have suffered to bring them into the world for nothing: so many women uselessly tortured: they will never even know the hideousness of their dead. . . . And no one will ever comprehend the number of the fallen.

Everywhere, the roads are hollowed by departure; everywhere the father, on whom the household depended, is led away. Without him it totters and falls. "It must be so!"—"Yes!" "We must even smile: it is noble!"—"Yes!"

Everywhere, as ever, idols. The totem of the eagle or of the code. Our civilisations are lies and mere

words. Germans and French, all the names of man are emptiness and lies.

Although I flee, the reek overtakes and caresses me. We are at the end of the ages. The world is in extremity, worn out by war, despite the stubborn will to live of the vast, half-conscious masses. All proper names become names of battles, advertisements of destruction, of the defeat of the poor. At every turn one encounters the thundering proof of the crime of victories.

Since the Flood the mass of human kind has been ever more fully vanquished: such is the form of suicide, of the end of the world in the eyes of a fugitive, whom charnel houses relive, who gazes with lowered head upon his sombre hands that seem as if red, red.

The old man who shivered near the fire in his wretched room—(there are millions of them)—saying: "There are no human sacrifices now," the insignificant and short-sighted *petit bourgeois* who, as he spoke thus, changed to an evil beast. . . . My father, the venerable professor who was wont to speak of "the sublime exigencies of the race" and made the word "we" the most hateful of all words. My mother, that hospital nurse who ornamented with virtue the idea of war. . . . I curse them all, I curse both father and mother.

And now I come to Headquarters, the sanctuary which (with tacit reciprocity) the enemy never shells.

I have only to cross the suburbs of crude barracks full of buzzings and silhouettes that make a fair of the immense area that spreads further every night. Ambulances—red crosses marked by bayonets on the covers of the barracks, offices, ammunition dumps, quartermasters' stores, workshops, technical sections,

all the subsidiary services, the whole artificial city of wood and paper where is centralised, registered and multiplied the industry of destruction—metropolis cancer.

When they see me the armed negroes make a gesture as of spitting a joint of meat; they grind their teeth, sneering: "French soldier!" They are posted on the fringe of operations to prevent the flight of the human fodder,—that is to say, to kill any French soldiers they may see. I pass this line of chained and unchained monsters who click their claws of steel with abysmal laughter. One of them, at the end, coughs. I understand better than he what that complaint means. That other face is so stretched by a yawn that it makes a ring of bronze. I have always known it, and am not deceived by the varying tints that pass with the centuries over the bronze statue of the slave.

I am back in the Commanding Officer's hut. Through the hubbub of victory a prisoner has been brought before the Chief; an enemy spy—an officer who had slipped in here disguised as a French soldier. As he is an officer he has been courteously left free on parole. He has resumed his Officer's superiority; every part of his person under rigid control, aristocratic and chic despite his mean attire, he presents the fixed, carnal homage of his position. The staff officers comment on it in low tones.

"I play fair," said the General. "I pardon you." The great General walked feverishly up and down as he spoke. Now his back disappeared behind others, then he is again visible. Why is this old gentleman of commonplace appearance, who so sadly resembles so many of his contemporaries, the despotic arbiter of life and death?

"I thank you, General," said the German officer

quietly in purest French, and in a voice which revealed the most perfect sense of hierarchic values.

"You have not to thank me, Captain. I do merely conform to the chivalrous traditions of France."

Emotion, coquetry. They have exchanged a glance, they cannot help showing their masonry, these two men of the same species who belong, as one can see, to the same category of actors in the theatre of the world.

Captain Fontanges, fiery and elegant, exclaims: "This Boche has been daring and I love daring above all things; after all we need noble enemies!"

He prances—the Gallo-Frankish steed. I have already noticed that the most striking differences of the peoples are in their absurdities and that the best means of showing national characteristics distinct from common human identity is by caricature.

"It is still more touching," whispered a comrade in my corner, "than when, earlier, the General himself presented the Officers' Cross of the Legion of Honour to Colonel Malen who had absolutely *insisted* that his regiment should be chosen to advance in the region of the Gamma triangle, which was known to be mined. The mine killed precisely forty-seven men; that was well worth a rosette! Or than when he accorded the accolade to General Bédorez, in command of the Artillery, to show that he attached no more importance than was seemly to all those tales of short firing of the 75's; the criticism had obviously unnerved good old Bédorez. A general cannot be held responsible for what goes wrong under his orders; he is only responsible for the good results of co-ordination, what?"

In his corner, radiant, the General was dictating his despatch: "Our casualties are slight; full stop."

Silence. They are happy and light-hearted themselves because of these light losses.

"Two thousand five hundred men," said the Chief of Staff in a low voice, pen in air.

"Too many, of course. . . . But it is not much."

There is always someone to echo that proverb so popular with Staff Officers in war: "Omelettes are not made without breaking eggs."

"Two thousand five hundred?" said the General: "Write one thousand five hundred; so, 1,500; that is quite enough!"

These strange words would have sounded like a joke if they had been uttered elsewhere than in this sanctuary. We know very well that it is final, and that this figure will be actually the definitive, historical figure which nothing will ever modify. These people irritate me. In the past the monks chronicled events to suit their superiors. Militarism imitates religious machination, and more, the militarists resemble monks in appearance and demeanour.

I observe them all with precision, with icy hostility. This English officer with his well-scrubbed air; this lieutenant glittering with his safety-pinned trophies, one per victim, like a taximeter on his breast. And there in that group an officer that I don't know, also bedizened, decorated, brilliant and charming; he is laughing and talking and making a great impression. I only hear the end of his colloquy with the Chief of Staff, who looks sheepish in his presence. Raising his arms in the air with an easy, quick, smiling gesture of powerlessness, the newcomer exclaims:

"No, no written orders! . . . I can't let you have any. So there." He laughs.

"I merely counsel the secular branch for the main-

tenance of morale. I tell what I have seen, neither more or less."

There was a very distinct hint of a threat in his fine, sonorous voice. The Chief of Staff lowered his head. We felt that something was happening repugnant to his simple integrity. But neither he nor the General could have held their own against the confidential emissary with his five stripes, the secret legate of the Ministry.

I had to shake myself, clench my fists, and watch with bitter hatred all these princes, drunk with their sudden absolute power. At that very moment I felt the glance of Lieutenant Ledo riveted on me. I left my place, uneasy at being read by this frozen creature of saurian immobility.

I go towards the plan of operations, wishing to consult it after what I have seen. I brush past the Intelligence Officer who is going quickly through the doorway. He has obtained a leave which he proposes to consecrate to Eros. Smiling in anticipation, he steps lightly, as if on wings.

The plan of operations; there are two side by side; identical. One is bordered with the tri-colour, the other with a band of red and black; a plan found in a German staff post, a trophy. The similarity of these two relief maps is striking; they are the two gaming tables which have served for the grand coup, that of the winner and that of the loser, the two mechanisms whose combinations have been transposed yonder, yonder in the vast, bleeding expanses.

And then I condemn the irritation which boils within me; I silence it. Reality is greater than that. These men are the enemies of the soldiers, but they are playing their part. They are right, agents of execution from top to bottom of the ladder. They are right to

favour in every way officers who organise, form and inspire the cannon fodder. They are right to maintain the illusions of the manual labourers of war, to eliminate secretly and irrevocably discontent and the spirit of criticism; to hide from those sacrificed the extent of their sacrifice, to consider soldiers as made of lead or even as pawns, or even as geometrical points, to crumble reality and to lie, to ply their military trade in all its amplitude and all its brutality and all its perfidy.

The General has been sent here to achieve and attack which costs a thousand millions, and he has done it; they are right no longer to realise what they say or do, for they obey and so does all else.

A man has arrived whom some have named, and they discuss him: M. Clément Massard. The General went up to him and greeted him with an eagerness and even a deference which everyone noticed. They showed him the despatch. He made them add to a sentence the word "patriotic". He has visited by car some parts of the road; he has been to see the dead, piloted by the General who apologised for the evil smell. "What can one expect, it is not their fault, poor fellows." His affectation is displeasing to the young officers and makes them smile, for he is ridiculous with his toneless voice, the skin of his face glabrous with white pimples, and the two gold circles—disgusting jewels—which keep the teeth in his mouth. . . . "He really seems to be in his element," they mutter. "One would think he had come to contemplate his own work!"

He says little, but in a voice rasped by chronic laryngitis: "Righteous war, patriotism, democracy," and: "The happiness of one depends on the unhappiness of another."



He became tender when he saw a soldier boozing alcohol from his mess tin. "Drink, my friend, drink a little illusion!" he said affectionately.

Do they know with whom they have to do?

The initiated, the best informed may discern and place the man of immense worldly wealth who has succeeded beyond all others, who tramples on all, who dominates the rest, even the military stars; he for whom the Commander of an Army Corps or a War Minister is merely an official whom one nominates. This man, in the fantastic order of civilisation, embodies personally, Attila.

He above all is right, who has forced the others to see in him a reflection of divinity, and to obey him for reasons wholly illusionary; he who has tamed nature and mankind, and the whole mathematical order of industry—the goddess of slaughter—and science and religion and morality; while every man of the crowd carries his whole wealth with him and has only his own death as his goal, he disburses millions of lives, and lives on the million dead. He is right, for he is obeyed, and in every hovel, hut and pulpit, each automaton repeats: "There are no longer slaves nor tyrants." To show themselves more right than he men must one day rise together in a great awakening of wisdom and anger and smash in his skull.

I open my eyes in the studio while one of my literary friends, subversive and conservative, makes play with words and ideas with all the resources of irony, and laughs at the world poetically, philosophically. Close to me on the sofa, I see a dead mosquito, such a tiny fragment that even the word, corpse, is too definite. And yet this speck draws me, and through the window-pane, a bird punctuating the heavens. . . . And I

know not wherefore the wandering lines of human falsehood echo obstinately in my brain. "I have taken up arms to glorify my God Assur!"

Far from human voices, I suffer. All my recollections translate: "I have suffered: how I have suffered!" If I had to endure this again I would rather die. What suffering? When, how? Physical, moral? I do not know. But I suffer from life; the pain of others has detached itself from them to fall upon me.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE FIRST MAN

Held as in a vise by the press all around me, I gazed upon the scene with craning neck.

Over the heads of the bright-lit, ill-made, bony crowd, and above the smoke that was like a ceiling to the square, I gazed up at the platform where the formless creature stammered and swayed.

He was ill-clothed, sordid; he couldn't speak. All watched him intensely.

After the Republican speeches that had carried away the youthful audience in a fine, stormy enthusiasm, the presiding trinity had asked: "Has anyone any objection to make?" Then he had appeared in the pool of light, and perched himself up, to speak.

Balanced on the edge of the rostrum he growled: "No, no!"—the word-*thing*, the violence of reality against reality: "No!" That was all he could say: No! with rage and suffering, with his clenched fist as much as with his voice, he essayed to shatter all that had been said before.

He was frightening and he was derisory on his pillory, labouring and groaning hollowly like those who have toiled until they feel the tool pierce into their flesh; a wounded, mutilated, suffocated being. In his throat he tried over the words that most stupefied him, that hurt him most cruelly and inly.

"Nothing! All that you say is nothing, nothing at all. It is all lies to put the people to sleep. Your religion of Hell, your republic of profiteers, your

patriotism stamping on the people, and your newspapers in their millions of bales of dirty linen. All in the same sack, 'right' and 'left', Royalists, Republicans, French, and German—it is always misery and butchery. Your progress is nothing, nothing!"

His furious, raucous negation fell ill upon the ears of this crowd that had been warmed and tensed by the previous speeches; all around him the mass was as crushing-heavy as a whole city.

And I trembled in every fibre. For above the sea of heads, beneath the rows of pontiffs and the busts of president and assessors, I recognised the Helot, the Father. I saw the slave stand out over the public chaos like a monument. The caryatid who has borne on his neck the whole gilded history of all other men, appeared to me as once on an evening by the shore—and since then, at other times, momentarily revealed to my eyes through the dirt and soiling of events.

This fragment of the crowd who will no longer accept what is said to him, who rejects verbal entanglements with a heave of his shoulders that is as gross and as magnificent as himself, who draws after him a grinding noise of chains—this slave shows forth his heart like a flag, and in whole singleness cries out and rises up against a world of lies. He is in a new world, he is the first man who spells out and proclaims this "No!"—the first syllable of Action.

I have heard other voices; both before this man had spoken, and continuously ever since I have heard the two other voices, amplified by all the apparatus of oratory. That which would have us swallowed up by the past with hands impotently clasped, and that of the manipulators of the present, the unceasing manipulators of the immediate moment, the opportunists who come and go like gnats in the sun.

And behold another voice that rises above past and present, crying: "No! All that, all of it, is nothing!"

Nothing—good intentions, well-meant promises, fair words; with that sort of kindness the beginning is ever put off. The way of life must be refashioned by the acts of men, no more by their mere words.

And this rough sketch of man shows by a gesture of his rending hands that we are in the stupid age of words. We are as if glued down by the great, resounding words that are massed, and spreading ever wider. Liberty, the Fatherland, Justice, Civilisation, and the whole sonorous web. We are the prey of symbols, of the currency of symbols, of the fiduciary values of language. We are in the midst of malefactors, liars and madmen, who confound the word and the deed. Our republic is republican only in its programme.

Our liberalism, our altruism, our beauty, exist only in inscriptions on walls or, if you will, in the gullets of orators; and under cover of the dazzling play of abstract formulas, the rich change the poor into beasts and into rottenness with divine ferocity.

And now it is not a voice that wails there on the wooden platform, it is a limb of all the history of the flesh, that is raised up and that bleeds, as bled once the great livid man of Golgotha—and as bled the tinted corpses of the war. The people whose only surviving human trait is its stench; and whom hunger has forced to think only with its belly. The mass, nameless as earth and water:—at last the great sleeper has come to life.

It is embodied (the body is the joy of thought). . . .  
Its head, its chest, its fist, its rock. . . .

Let the men aloft there say what they will. Let words become mere words once more, and the chains

will vanish utterly. Extremists, advance! March upon all that has been said.

I look upon this areopagus ranged row upon row in its chairs; lawyers, legislators, moralists, academicians! O ye Jesuits of Roman law and of all infernal complication, sectaries of the Via Media and the "more or less" ("Neither reaction nor revolution"—that slogan so greatly pleasing to vulgar minds! reaction too hideous, revolution too beautiful, by Christ)—ye who build complex equations on all violent or visionary cries, who waste utterly the lifetimes of the wretched by seeking to compress into a mere arithmetic system all immeasurable dreams—ye professors who await the Messiah's coming, and have attached a ridiculous goat-bell to the grand, scientific revolutionary name of Justice—ye swan-headed poets; ye armchair utopists; ye brilliant ironists who said all, and nothing; ye butterflies flitting uselessly overhead;—all ye by whom our bloody comic-opera democracy is maintained,—I say that the creature of the depths towers over you in nobility, and in clearness of spirit!

This creature who stammers out his unwanted gestures in a warm, perfect rightness that unites against him—in the wide sweep of his opened arms, from right to left—all who would preserve exploitation, all, without any exception; *his* reason is as the forces of gravity.

He is the revolt of the strongest. He shall reign, because he does reign. He will come forth—first his head—from the cycle of aborted reforms and resolutions because he will no longer be content to manipulate consequences; he will take hold on the Cause. "No!"—thundered by the sledge-hammer upon the anvil. Red logic; red truth.

And at that instant the man was swallowed up in the crowd that was armour-plated in light, amidst the

explosive silence that became a long, burning, evil laugh—in that instant I turned toward him, for ever. His voice has stirred me as, aforetime, thunder of church bells, and of cannon. His great cry. Shepherd of men!

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MUSIC

Once I saw her. She was crossing the end of a street. She disappeared. This resurrection of the dead. . . . She disappeared—naturally.

Since that evening when, weeping, she departed from me, she had not sought me out. She had had the strength suddenly to do nothing. How stubbornly she has held to it. Truly, women put all their passion into the maintenance of indifference.

I had been told she had been ill. I too am ill. I am at the end of my resources; when I try to reflect calmly I find myself up against a wall, my mind arid and empty.

It was on the last day that I was able to leave my room that I saw, by mere chance, her lovely form. This lovely body and all it held of soul had been mine—now it disappeared. Her outward form has not changed, and it is clear enough that nothing here-below has really changed. Only, upon what was, is death, translucent and perfect. She who once loved me, passed before me who love her still, with murderous restraint.

I look on while the letters I had resolved to wrench from their drawer, burn. It is mournful to destroy living beings, who resist as much as they can, and try to show forth words, and in their infinite nothingness, desire to persist, even as the first man.



The doctor has been. Between us there has been something ceremonious, solemn.

When he has gone out, when the door is shut upon him . . . finality.

Now I am alone with my fever. The sofa, the bed whereto I am bound fast, burns into me.

Over there is a mass of papers, the uppermost dusty. I smile at them, wanly; my first literary attempts—three years old.

I stretch out my hand and fan the pages, and my eye passes lightly over them, too weary with all things to enter in. But now a word flames before me, and I cry out heavily, as in the intense moments of my vaster life. . . . At the head of a page I read: *Clément Nourrit*.

I still remember, afar off, the burning evening when I wrote that, when I relieved an hour of Hell, when I imagined myself inventing the visions and sensations that coursed from head to finger-tips.

I fasten on the remaining fragments of the writing and decipher the black outlines of the complaint—the sparse tracery of the *Cry*.

*Naught save the walls and myself. All the rest had been broken, burnt, reduced to powder and thrown to the wind. My secret, grown very small now, is nowhere save in the depths of my own being. My arms are over-heavy and fall painfully like clashing iron. My neck is weighed down, and as if gnawed away. Ah, ah, faith and reason. The lapidary judgments of the white, unhearing tribunal carved in the monastery hall!*

*Pushed, jostled outside, my driven face feels upon it the breath of streets, and vociferation that is ex-*

*pectoration and, nearer, tranquil funerary psalms, a procession of the dead wherein I am ensepulchred. And in the depths below all else, I have fallen down and been set on my feet again. The vast swarm turns and pulses round me. . . . I have been set on my feet again in the middle of the hollow market-square (silhouetted gables and grouped roofs stand out against the stormy sky). And other beings of flesh and blood are held fast, standing near me, in the depths of this crater: they are aligned in front of a grumbling, smoky thicket on the ground, at our feet. . . .*

*My chin strikes my chest. The dark gleaming surface snorts, and flashes before my eyes its glittering claws. The flame that licks as it bites, ever more deeply advancing its humid voracity. I crane up toward the upper mists. There is a racketing wind as if the heavens were falling. There is so strong a wind that my head is forced round by its pressure, and by my side I see a twisted tree still attached by its middle. Further on there burns a dishevelled torch that has the lineaments of humankind, and in a great lion-like cry its whole life passes out. My struggles change my bonds into wild beasts. But the shadows are piled ever thicker upon the light of day. The scene becomes heavy, wan, livid. The black roofs merge into the spaces against which they had been silhouetted: there is no more sky, and all things dissolve into rain. The water falls in rigid torrents and puts out the fire.*

*And the water, piercing avenues through the smoke and driving it back in swathes, reveals the square as a buffeted, yelling lake, so drenched and stirred that there are rolling waves. At the edge disappear the disarrayed files of spectres, their funeral chants silenced, while the crowd flounders sullenly and howls its astonishment at the fire's extinction. . . .*

*And they whom the death-agonies kindle, who are avid to bleed with reflected crimson, stay on around those black or rosy statues with the half-severed hides, —statues in whom the fire had climbed, drying up their blood like sap in a tree. The elements had baffled them—but they devise means.*

*They fetch wood, tend each a flame: each—rich or poor, man or woman, his faggot, his flame. They spread out and rush to and fro to restore animation to this pyre that yet survives, so that the passion of the victims, that shone in their eyes, shall continue.*

*She is there . . . on the hem of this people, drenched and thrashed by the rain that is even fiercer than they in the marsh of the square, she is she. . . .*

*She comes back toward me, she who was one with the other, the others, and I tremble to see her for the last time, with the same trembling as when I saw her first. But her eyes are martyred, emptied, as if she had lost the power of sight. Grief has sculpted her beautiful face and shrunken her neck and shoulders. I call to her "Annette" very low, I call with my strangled, stifled voice that is a mere pulse in the air.*

*Broken on life's wheel she has returned, to fall as near to me as may be. Like night she sinks down, her arms outstretched before me in this desolation of the world. She whom unknown suffering has brought back again, falls upon her knees amidst the chaos of water and burning brands. I cry out—I strive to cry out: she is as deaf as I am dumb, prostrate before my muddy feet.*

Nothing more upon the paper. He it was who, three years ago, upon an evening, rose up from out all the dead, and took my shape and wrote these things.

And I watch this miracle of *rapprochement* (a sort of contagion) fade from the pages beneath my hand, fade and depart from me. For a last time I look upon myself through the fearful bars of writing, and even, in the distance, I hear again the cry of ultimate anguish that leapt from me.

Once more I feel the fire and water and icy sweat that covered me in that agonised outpouring. . . . But how, afterwards? Am I dead?

I know I cannot live. The ceremonious, intently scrutinising stranger has told me, and unmistakably, and my pain compels me to understand his words. My head is filled with an expanding torture that immures me in the prison of my room. Now I understand—I have had to think back to it twice—how truly terrible was that moment when he told me. . . . This man whom I had never seen and who, standing before me, had told me more than anyone had ever told me. . . . I set down the pages near me vertiginously, for I thought: *never more shall I see them.*

I, I am going to disappear. In a few days the whole mortal hideousness of old age will have befallen me. And do I still look like my old self? That which embraces all life strikes home to me, and seals my final countenance; even as it sealed the vast, mighty ancestor when his eyes vacillated and before him he beheld his angel, broken: broken the reliquary of his heart.

She has opened the door and come in. For the first time she has come in here, into my room.

Marthe!

Lying prone, I raise myself on my elbow, and gaze

upon her. Pain itself, watching above me, holds its breath.

She draws near, darkly clad with that divinely pale, square face, she who is much more I than I myself. . . . She has changed, her features have altered, her eyes desolate, her face like that other in the horror of the ages. . . .

She comes to me across the room to where I lie weak and chained. I call her and she smiles. But can one give a smile? She has been wretched and on her countenance one can see the stricken emptiness. Has she come back because she is suffering too terribly or because I am? I don't know. She is no longer she.

It was impossible that she should return: she returns. The scale of life is no longer relevant, but, as in the beginning, I want her to believe in me, and perceive my greatness. For myself, I do very clearly perceive my greatness; and perhaps now she, maddened by grief, will understand the madness of my thought. The madness . . . to push ever onward and forward, to search right into the depths of conflicts and, like he whose voice has been dumb for so many summers, to be the follower of thought. The fool is the fool in the midst of all the wise; but he is also the wise amidst all the fools.

She has sat down, she is lost in the shadows, in the obscurity of evening.

This woman who is here, and as vast as if still absent, was—her very heart's blood—I. I know her body as I know my own. Before me she was white and rigid as a temple. And often, her voluptuous passion imprisoned, she would bring it me in all fullness, wholly, for a little, and show herself to me returned in joy.

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She turns her lovely pallor toward me. I said: "Thou." She turned away. What she wants is to know the secret I have hidden from her.

I say to her all I am capable of saying to show myself to her.

Evening enters into my rooms in horizontal beams and sheds a glaucous dew upon the windows. Ah, my beloved, my true love, vessel that sought for freedom . . . her prow rising story-wise like a staged tapering house, her wide, leaning, firm-planted beak-head, her compact, blind, desiring figure, and her choir of glorious discontent!

What remains, today, of all that?

Something, some immense thing, that is in me, and is still seeking. But my passion is perfected. The warm moisture of my fever runs over my body; one day—I get up, despite them all, on my mattress—to see further in front there—true, veridical forms—one day, analysis was conceived bit by bit, so that an almost animal embodiment might be given by geometry to algebra, that cannot see before itself; and equally so that the rational infinity of algebra shall be given, like a phantasm, to geometry. . . . And when he wrote the first verse of the only Bible: *Admit nothing as true save that which appears to be necessarily such*—the stubborn, dark sojourner upon the Dutch ways discovered the inflexible technique for the exploitation of truth.

What now bears me on—I, the last-comer, whom their hands strive to hold at the end of days: I who have such need to find my wild conviction—what now bears me on—is not the ancient phantom-vessel but a

yawning car—storm-sealed: a pinion amid the harps of space.

The integral pinion that slides integrally into fluids: the helice, the frame wherein is embodied all muscled movement, the helice that represents in concrete thickness the theoretics of the whirlwind—and that makes the music of the spheres.

The men of old, driven on by the scourge of wretchedness, discovered the New World existing visibly in the old. . . . It is for us to discover the countries of the world as they are and as they lie waiting for us, and by careful thought to take possession of our knowledge.

The chart of the world standing out in relief above the sea is on simplified geometrical lines—the continent of Europe and its thirty-three kilometres of coast line, its sprawling limbs and bevelled, rounded form, stretching below toward the inland sea and above towards the craters united with its northern seas.

The vast old bulging plan—a lightning wish to smash it into smithereens, as one would like to smash a staff-map obsesses me—the old picture upon which the sunlight blazes down, is invested in my eyes with the mineral agglomerations that the quaternary period took millions of years to superpose upon the tertiary strata, together with the rotting, fertile layers that bring forth new life. At the heart of this continual organism are rooted the sombre beds of fibrous coal whose age has been computed four hundred and ninety million years. . . .

Let me brood over it a little longer. I must survey the whole plan. It is the splendour and virtue of man's vision that it never stops short. Like the rise and fall of telegraph wires I behold the alignment of the equatorial parallels. The perspective seems

to split up sight into different compartments, and the leisurely expanses of the foreground coalesce gradually, one behind the other, as my eyes reach the horizon and my soul becomes one with them. Holocene Europe!—as she has remained without perceptible change in time's field of vision, since sight first was. It was so brief a while ago that the glacial deluge flowed over this mound, and I myself, in person, shuddered in the icy cold. So brief a space since the time of that superior primate, that man—creature whose grinning remains are rarer than diamonds, that beast "*who knew*";—the world of today is still so sparsely peopled that if all the living were placed at an equal distance from one another, they could hardly catch sight of each other.

An end of conventionality and falsity! Of a truth we are too sad at heart to see what is not there.

But what then is the subject of man's drama!

Athwart the network of symbols I am reading, athwart all the encircling lines and the labels and the crudely painted colours—the aniline dyes of patriotism, rose, mauve, green—marking out doubtful boundaries and geographical shop-fronts, athwart all, destroying signs and symbols, the only real, the only profound thing in the world, arises like a third dimension, the black and white of the two castes. ,

White and black, dazzle and darkness of the two halves of the human race—exploiters and exploited—the war of wars! Behold the innermost reality of this motley plan.

The Gothic Dante—(was I not Dante too?—in an instant's illumination it seems so) Dante who crossed the threshold of Hell on Good Friday of the year



1300, and beheld the world plunge into space and then reappear so close to him that he could distinguish the streets of Florence. White Ghibelins against Black Guelphs? More violent, greater still—too great for even him who was the eyes of his century to behold—behind all pretexts and names and conjectures—the unequal strife of the beast of burden and his master! My eyes behold naught else vivid and living; this is not caused by the darkness: this is the bony structure of Life.

The black darkness of toil spread over the world-map like the stains of the battlefield. Human beings like clouds of dust consuming all the resources of nature, exhausting the far-ramifying deposits of primal matter, the rich spaces of the planet. The subterranean ways that now run through the midst of huge crowds. Petrol!—in that rich black region they would fain set fire to the sea itself! Vast prismatic blocks of buildings, outlines of wharves crowded with armies of men, buildings everywhere identical. The same patterns repeated *ad nauseam*; machines as like as peas. Filth soiling the prisons of production as the dark tide flowing from corpses soils the engines of war. Toil stranger to itself; work, wasted fury, joyless joy; mindless men, like sadder beasts.

On every shore of the ocean that men have driven back, behold the blackness of smoke, the leaden hue of rails,—ink, chalk; behold the great harbours, roadsteads, docks. The same monotonous array of citadels along the sea-coast walls in the great countries of the world. Various coloured flags toss at the masts of identical fleets, on smoking southern seas or at the feet of icebergs in dense Arctic oceans where the whitened vessels gleam like cathedrals.

Waters as black with traffic as streets, and streets that are a series of interlocking wheels; masses of tonnage over-riding the whole world. Everywhere the Hell of uniformity preys upon itself; mechanism—and mechanism married to human flesh. And the flare of wealth blazes to the four corners of the world, sweeping right across the theoretical divisions of nations; it lights up the palaces where by night there shines the phosphorescent glow of a *bourgeois* society; the casinos, row on row, where fortunes are mechanically lost and won: and above the temples where reigns the sign *plus*.

But I must know more; out by every way of escape!—use telescope, microscope!

Through these transparent sky-scrapers I behold the great central battery of typewriters with their scrawl of moving, converging straight lines, just like machine-beltting, and their frantic dance of figures. I penetrate into the heart of offices and through the glass lettering of the sign-boards of shops, and beneath the dominating cinematograph-display of stocks and shares and quotations, beneath the humbug of advertisements. Behold them, these jugglers with figures, these wooden puppets displaying their bald heads as proudly as if they were coats of arms.

So forsooth their writing, their signs, their great childish spiral symbol has become the centre of the universe! Beginning with the fountain-pens of the simpletons whose thick skulls enclose about as much talent as those of brass-hatted generals, right up to the pinnacle of the cogwheel, black upon white, all is geared upon the submissive mobilisation and the massacre of labour.

Mean, slavish stock-jobbing—the rising and falling

of the Market—breeds the mentality of machines enlarged by a sort of photographic process. The man who is just able to take advantage of any favouring accident and who is as devoid of ideas as of scruples, comes out on top.

These people gather together; there is an ever increasing solidarity among them. The laws of universal attraction cause bigness to become bigger still; money inflates itself like a belly swollen with wind. The trusts make a combine in commodities and the vertical trusts combine all the other trusts. Kings grow fewer in number yet more and more are they the Kings of the earth, more than ever since Kings began. Money, it is clear, has taken on a personal being; money has become the effective God.

It is plain to sight that an infinitely distorted caricature, vast as a mountain, has swallowed up all scientific progress, nay, institution itself. It has taken possession of the Press that manufactures the air we breathe and that by means of advertisements forces the consumer to eat grape-shot; of the schools where dynamic energy is dammed back with pretty little scraps of information; of the tribunals on whose walls is carved the word "justice", of the parliaments wherein is the word "republic", and the churches wherein is the word "God."

Greed without bounds, limitless, has devastated this our Europe in decline. Look around! The world is dying, overthrown by war. The regions of every continent have become the prey of the strongest and the most treacherous, the prey of individuals, of passions. The passions of the few, dragging in their wake whole multitudes, have made havoc of the world.

Under the influence of night and space, those realms

of words and abstractions, the earth is stripped of colour, and littleness slips from it as a garment. The perception of trifling nuances—so often an evil thing—is here lost. Beneath the blaze of sunset above which it seems to me I pass—we both pass, oh my beloved—we behold the configuration of the whole earth, the labouring earth—stretching towards the pale rainbow. I feel a presence whose country is the whole earth—the whole earth is some being's Fatherland. Should we hold the differences that separate men to be complicated, superficial? No! that's a fallacy meet for both laughter and tears. No! they are most simple, most profound. They are writ black and white, in flesh and in blood. It is not a question of race against race or language against language; all that is but the embroidery on the great body of life, and every new-born child of man, in every latitude, is identically the same. Nay, but everywhere it is the brutal, carnal handling of conquered brain and body. It is the ruling class trampling upon the vanquished masses, it is the exploitation of the stronger by the weaker, with all the paraphernalia of mythology and beating of drums and holy baptisms and ecstasies to cloak its enormity.

Beneath the twilight that empties the landscape of all accidental detail, this planet of ours, sinking into the abyss, is seen as clearly groaning beneath the war of white and black as if we could behold it in the distant heavens shining with all the luminous silver scales of its five continents.

From the height of the stars, what matter the infinitely petty historical vicissitudes that succeed one another here-below. . . .

But even viewed from the starry heights, the first age of humanity, wild and ravaging as it has been, is great enough to be counted! Nothing has ever been changed in the smallest degree during the entire time throughout which three hundred thousand millions of men have trampled the earth's surface, generation following generation. The earth's present is as like its past as is its east to its west, beneath all the inessential differences of names and intellectual phantasms. A little knowledge weaves garlands of contrasts between varying civilisations, but deeper knowledge demolishes them again. Shaken and exhausted by argumentation, I find myself returning to the unique tragedy of civilisation. This tragedy can never be grasped; it makes of the history of men—men who dare only whisper—incomputable mystery. Behold the work of the white man who has joined continent to continent, over-leaping the sundering seas. In this exile from the Ayran paradise behold the blood-drenched sculptor of perfection, the creator of God and the Ideal, the god-like author of ruin. So we two behold it. . . . But alas and alas! it is not so—you are not here. I am alone, tortured upon this battlefield of material progress. I must know more. My flesh must needs be torn and mangled by the searching knives of ideas. I am hurled by my poverty upon the uncertainty of tomorrow, like those other children of men.

But you who are called *the masses*, yours is the guilt! The deeds they have done are *yours*, since with your hands they have done them. Mass! You must realise that all human institutions thus far are evil.

But remorse alone will not suffice. "Nothing could be worse!" is the anathema that gives us a solid footing in the mud, but rage by itself will not suffice. To

see clearly, unprejudiced, there must be knowledge. Order, poise, justice, the physical laws of mass, reason which, even when called morality, is but the inner aspect of crushing fatality—method. Bacon, Descartes, scientific theory. Karl Marx, applied science, practical theorists. Science body and soul, integral realism and mysticism become part and parcel of logic! Surely the moment has at last come when in accordance with prophecy all the forces of salvation shall engage. At last the earth is fit ground for the greatest of the battles of Mankind.

The real destroyer is not the man carrying his bombs about like an *enceinte* woman; the real destroyer is the logician. Privilege has begun at the end; now it is time to begin at the beginning. My ears have hearkened to the mighty mutter of harmony, to the terribly sweet music, and the message that vibrates full, sonorous is this: *Rise up, all ye damned of the earth!*

The cry of spring breathes from the throats of these standing shadows; over the earth falls the splendour of a funeral march—and of funereal hue is the mêlée of creation. Everywhere the bosom of night breeds the shadows of men. In the twilight blood is black, and the tattered flag which shall never be destroyed till all men's blood has been shed has become a flag of mourning in the penumbra, that flag which verily should be a flag of joy!

One evening. . . .

One evening people will gather in the street as a foretime. The Place de la Concorde. I cannot see everything in the immense space. I see the edge of the crowd. A town, the statues of a great square, and on the edges of this crowd, a band of young men and girls, dancing.

The young are all Messiahs. These are illumined against the light. The sun throws them caresses that glance away slantingly. . . . But there is not such immense change as that after this revolution.

The town has the same look around this square which has kept its old name. The conditions of terrestrial activity are modified, but not its forms. What is new is the great bonds, which are invisible. These are straight lines from each individual to all. What appears to be dissimilar in the new crowd is only what has always differed successively in each succeeding crowd: the fashion of dress and accoutrements with which the great mass bedecks itself as with seasonal foliage. Is it not that which gives a name to each sabbath of the ages? But over the great communal buildings and masses of stone there is a unique, a giant luxuriance never before seen. And this luxury is in accord; makes a canopy above the crowd like the pealing bells.

The man I meet at the corner of a street like some shore, is the artisan of the revolution. He has made it with his hands.

This victor stands in front of me exactly like the vanquished apostles of all time: great, simple. He is not a thaumaturgist: he is a man, a man, a man.

First he says: "Suddenly we saw what we had never seen.

"It is in these superhuman days of new things that the word 'Republic' should have been born. This word would have extended itself; we should have seen, without deceiving ourselves as we have done, that Republic is the Commonwealth.

"To have waited so long to see and to do!

"We were seized by a trembling, and we said very low: 'I am ashamed!'

"We have perceived that none are strangers.

"We did not see it; and we have seen it. . . .

"At that moment when the first lines of troops at the front obeyed the *Idea*, and threw their arms into the inferno, when those who had hastened out on to the field, offering their hearts, their muscles, all they possessed—met others there, likewise utterly disarmed, coming *en masse* from another direction in the world—all the milliennary machinations were smashed because they were artificial, and we found in war's stead nothing but a few gilded personages, inflating their cheeks to blow the winds of massacre. As soon as we had made sure headway against the stream of military obedience, we felt the full nausea of all our worm-eaten and stupid democracies, and their crowned apes. But that moment when the universal transformation was in progress, yet incomplete, *that moment* was the most dramatic in all history.

"The people have at last called by their real name, crimes, those greatest crimes whereby humanity dies of baseness. They are: Not to understand: to forget, to deceive oneself. It has understood all that understanding meant. Then it was a final, majestic question of force: the charity of discussion was no more: head against stone: the victory of the proletariat, that miracle of good sense.

"The plan thought out, then its execution. That was all."

He then said, in the calm tone of those who from the ultimate heights proclaim and do justice:

"We had to destroy those who stabbed us from behind as well as those who shot us down from in front.

"Yes, it had to be so: I know. Man has scarcely changed in the midst of all changes."



Scarcely changed. . . . Looking down into the street, I wonder whether, if I could look close into the eyes of one of those blossoming young women, I should find there the strange mirror in which, once again, I would recognise myself wholly!

A woman, myself. I return to my senses.

"What are we here for, here on earth?" To be happy? Ah. . . . The creatures raise their arms to the sky.

Five o'clock strikes. Evening is already upon us (though scarce perceived). A beggar sings in the court without. His weary voice moans: "One always returns to one's first love."

Terrifying banality. . . . I am sorry for myself.

Regret comes to tempt me. A supreme effort to hide myself silently in whatever there may be of peace and morning freshness in the world. To flee away . . . and naught else.

No, I will not flee away, I will conceal myself deep, deep. And I tried to cover my face with my hands, and weep.

It is your face that sheds warm tears on mine in the bed's stuffs. Ah, your love tries to make me believe that it is you, not I, who weep.

A form? All is eclipsed. "Nothing. I sit up, alone, as always.

My head is full of heavy, stifling blows which grip my throat, and through my breathless asphyxiation faces appear.

My room is full of people; the familiar figures all

about me, including even *he*, who has come express from the land of the bowed peaks. My room has never been so full. My giant eyelids close like night upon the margin of this crowd.

These presences that draw near me—more and more truly themselves—are of such sweetness that I *see* a faint sweet warmth before my eyes.

All the dogs I have ever possessed, and that each died, one after the other, are here before me; here, all around me, approaching very near to me, searching with tense, longing eyes, searching for me.

And a little higher than this, the height of mankind, with kind and lovely faces, the sweet remorse of familiar faces flows before me—Clairine, Odon, Clément, and he, and she, and she. . . . Their forms and faces remain distinct while dusk darkens to night. All, all are there. My hands that no longer hope to touch, that have need of something to support them, that seek and draw in to them, suddenly stop, checked violently, their direction reversed; gropingly I discover presences. We are each all alone, and supported by all men. I, I who have done everything, and I who have been near damned by my precision, I who have been passionate to persuade, I know, I know full well the abyss that lies between each and all. I know that the absolute is each: that our reality is created within ourselves. (Just now she came in, and I had joy to crown all my grief); and yet, one needs must emerge from the conflict of oneself, from the rule of two contrary heads,—Love united by a fissure—and go out into the swaying impulses of the crowd. Because this too central heart is immutable and formless and it sports furiously with the passing moment, and slays the days with the days. The heart has no

future. Can one be happy? Yes, and then no. There is no answer; the law of the heart is that everything, always, is lost, and the law of All is that nothing is lost, ever.

"It is for us alone"—the first supernatural spirit he evoked cried to Faust—"it is for us alone, to plunge into the whirlpool of action, into those eternal waves of life that are raised up and cast down, urged forth and drawn in again by birth and death: we it is who are made for this work of God and time. But you, who can conceive only yourself. . . ."

For you "seek their joy"!

Today, this evening, give yourself with her to others, forgetting your own trouble.

Your egoist dreams of the destiny of all other men. Set others in your thought, and take pleasure therein. In this task, to discover is a thousandfold more than to embrace: effort is added ceaselessly to effort and is enriched, and ignorance is hourly released.

"Only that which lives exists," you must say, to find a deeper peace:

"Only that which *shall* live exists." There is no future save for the whole.

These younger ones who sing and dance to be yet more closely united, whilst evening ripens all colours, and makes the flowers more truly flowers;—these younger hearts know they fulfil some predestined part in the great joy of life.

A partial abandoning of self—not complete—that way is wisdom and attainable splendour. Partial abandonment. Thence shall wonders arise. The fanatic super-egoism of lovers and artists will be surmounted, maybe. To break away from solitary toil and the jealous coupling by which the infinity of love is ever imprisoned. Perhaps, even, one day, men will

dare it, for the beloved work; perhaps even from the strong chains of caressing. But emotion cannot be created! Yes, emotion can be created. Every new order of society has imposed upon the soul new, palpitant rhythms, and faith has obeyed. Therefore must intelligence reign. Therefore must we come forth from social lies.

I see he whom I have not been, but towards whom, in certain moments, I have been impelled fragmentarily,—I whose dreams have escaped from the void only to return thither, but who have sometimes heard a *Cry* from the heights and the depths. You who listen to me here because my drama has fallen here, behold that which I have not been: the man wholly honest, the logical conscience, the pure soldier who enters in strongly, hostilely among shadowy men, among these clowns of grandiose force: nor he who is able to loose the hold of bestial consent from the all powerful litness of words: nor he who is utterly gnawed by shame to be the contemporary of this apotheosis of grotesque ignominy: the active, the violent who has no prayer in his heart nor weapon in his hand save the knowledge and the joy that have been stolen from him.

I am assailed by the breath that was sustained by me when a little before my time, fire burnt the ardent hearts of the heretics and their bodies lit up the joy of the crowd—discovery in science, in Fate. Pioneers. . . . And like Jeremiah I suffer tortures yet to be undergone: is it possible that the living flesh of those who demonstrate the simplicity of chains will yet be crucified? Have pity, O people, have pity on thyself. Be thy true heart, thy true genius. Rise up, shake thyself free of the ignoble *respect* that is still riveted upon thee with thy suffering. Become the colossal

destroyer, and never let go thy hold upon the world. Take hold on the sacred vestments of the pontiffs of patriotism, democracy, religion, and defile them in the dust.

Subjugate the herd that is thyself, the herd of brute beasts. Are men evil? I know not. Evil, like good, is a melodramatic spectre. But they are stupid. For wisdom's, for pity's sake, revolt!

THE END



## NOTE

*I judge it pretentious to give a list of those documentary works I have made use of for this book. But it is pleasant to discharge an obligation of gratitude by mentioning, at the very least, besides specialised historical treatises, Rambaud's "Histoire de la Civilisation," Dreyss's monumental "Chronologie Universelle," and the six admirable volumes of "L'Homme et la Terre" by Elisée Reclus, the great master of universal history.*

H. B.











