LITTLE POEMS

IN PROSE

at the sign of the black manikin

MADE AND PRINTED PARTLY IN
GREAT BRITAIN, PARTLY IN FRANCE

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

LITTLE POEMS IN PROSE

TRANSLATED BY
ALEISTER CROWLEY

With several added versions of
the Epilogue by various hands
and twelve copper plate engravings
from the original drawings by

JEAN DE BOSSCHERE

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

No bolder task can possibly be undertaken than the translation of prose so musical, so subtle, so profound as that of Charles Baudelaire. For this task I have but the one qualification of a love so overmastering, so absorbing, that in spite of myself it claims for me a brotherhood with him.

Charles Baudelaire is incomparably the most divine, the most spiritually-minded, of all French thinkers. His hunger for the Infinite was so acute and so persistent that nothing earthly could content him even for a moment. He even made the mistake—if it be, after all, a mistake!—of feeding on poison because he recognized the banality of food; of experimenting with death because he had tried life, and found it fail him.

The thought of Baudelaire has thus been universally recognized as highly unsuitable for the suburbs, as incompatible with any view of life which advocates spiritual complacency, mental and physical contentment. His writings are indeed the deadliest poison for the idle, the optimistic, the overfed: they must fill every really human spirit with that intense and insufferable yearning which drives it forth into the

wilderness, whence it can only return charioted by the horses of Apollo and the lions of Demeter, or where it must for ever wander tortured and cast out, uttering ever the hyaena cry of madness, and making its rare meal upon the carrion of the damned.

This yearning has made all the saints and all the sinners; it severs man from his fellows, and sets his feet upon a lonely road, where God and Satan alone, no lesser souls, commune with it.

This yearning is the mother of all artists; in Baudelaire it reaches its highest and most conscious expression. It is for this reason that I tremble and weep, being as it were the bearer of his ashes into those smug lands where the noblest of al languages is prostituted to no other uses than those of gluttony, snobbery and greed.

The condition of England and America today makes it a profanation to translate Baudelaire; yet such is his virtue, and such the innate virtue of humanity, that if this volume only fall into the hands of the young, it may produce a crop of saints and artists even in those barren fields.

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED TO

Anna Wright

FOR HER BRILLIANT AND INTOXICATING
ASSISTANCE IN THE TASK
OF REVISION.

A.C.

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THE STRANGER

WHOM do you love best, man of enigmas?
Tell us:—Your father, your mother, your sister, or your brother?
“I have neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother.”
“Your friends?”
“There you employ a word whose sense I have never understood.”
“Your country?”
“I do not know its latitude.”
“Beauty?”
“I would love it willingly, Goddess and Immortal.”
“Gold?”
“I hate is as you hate God.”
“Ah, what then do you love, strange man?”
“I love the clouds . . . . the clouds that float . . . down there . . . the marvellous clouds.”

II

THE DESPAIR OF THE OLD WOMAN

THE little shrivelled-up old woman felt herself happy again in looking on the pretty child, to whom everyone was paying court, whom everyone was trying to please; a pretty creature, as fragile as the little old woman herself, and like her, too, without teeth or hair. And she approached it, wooing it with baby-talk and pleasing faces. But the frightened baby struggled in the arms of the hag, and filled the house with its screams. Then the good old woman withdrew herself again into her eternal solitude, and wept in a corner, saying to herself, “Ah, for us unfortunate old women the age is past when we can please even the innocent, and we frighten the little children that we wish to love.”

III

THE ARTIST'S CONFESSION

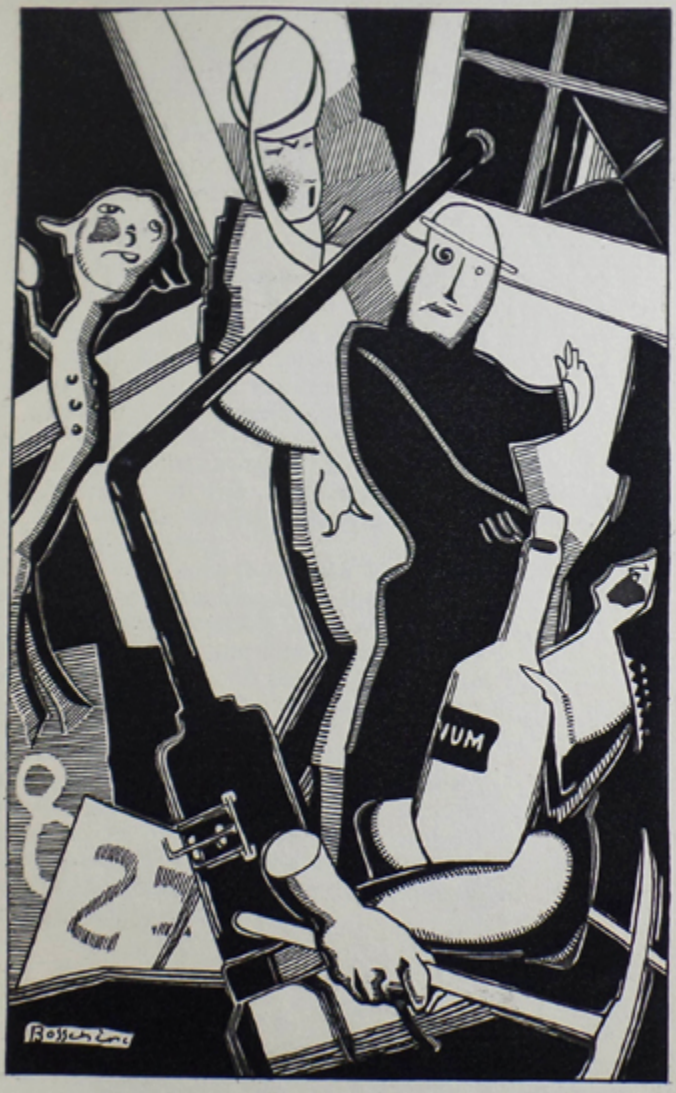
HOW penetrating are the ends of autumn days! Ah, keen like pain! For there are certain delicious feelings whose vagueness does not prevent them from being intense, and no point is sharper than that of the Infinite.

How great is the delight of drowning one's look in the vastness of sky and sea; solitude, silence, incomparable chastity of the blue; one little sail shuddering on the horizon is like a reflection of my irremediable existence; the melodious monotony of the swell; all these things think by virtue of me, or I think by virtue of them (for in the vastness of the reverie the Ego is soon lost)—they think, I say, but musically and picturesquely, without quibbles, syllogisms, and deductions.

At the same time these thoughts, whether they arise from myself or dart forth from things external, soon become too intense. Energy in pleasure creates uneasiness and positive suffering. My nerves, too highly strung, no

more give forth any but scolding and painful cries.

And now the depth of the sky affrights me; its limpidity exasperates me. The insensibility of the sea, the changelessness of the prospect, revolt me. Ah! must one eternally suffer, of fly eternally before the face of beauty? O! no, pitiless enchantress ever victorious rival, leave me alone' cease to tempt my passion and my pride! The study of the beautiful is a duel where the artist cries with fear even before he is conquered.


IUM
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IV

A JESTER

THE New Year broke in a chaos of mud and snow, crossed by a thousand carriages, sparkling with joys and sweetmeats, swarming with greeds and with despairs; the official delirium of a great city in conspiracy to disturb the brain of even the strongest solitary.

In the midst of this topsy-turvyness and hubbub an ass was trotting smartly, tormented by a knave with a whip.

As the ass was about to turn the corner of a pavement, a fine gentleman gloved and groomed, in a glossy suit, uncomfortably fashionable, bowed ceremoniously before the humble animal, and said, taking off his hat, “A happy New Year to you,” then went back to his comrades, whoever they were, with a fatuous air, as if to ask them to ass their approbation to his self-content.

The ass did not perceive this would-be wit, and continued to run zealously where his duty called him. As for me, I was seized suddenly with immeasurable rage against this magnificent imbecile, who appeared to me to concentrate in himself the entire spirit of France.

V

THE DOUBLE ROOM

A ROOM which resembles a reverie; a truly spiritual room, where the hushed atmosphere is faintly tinged with rose and blue.

The soul takes therein a bath of laziness, rendered aromatic by regret and by desire. It is something like twilight; somewhat blue, somewhat rosy. A dream of pleasure at the hour of the eclipse!

The articles of furniture have long, low, languid shapes; one would say that they dream; they seem endowed, as vegetables and minerals are, with a somnambulistic life. The coverings speak with the same silent language as flowers, skies, and sunsets.

On the walls no artistic abomination; as compared with pure dream, unanalysed impression, definite and positive art is a blasphemy. Here everything has the suffering clearness and the delicious obscurity of harmony.

An infinitesimal scent of the most exquisite kind, in which is mingled a very slight moisture, swims in this atmosphere, where the

slumbering spirit is cradled by hot-house feelings.

Muslin weeps before the windows and the bed; it spreads itself in snowy waterfalls. Upon this bed is couched the Idol, the Queen of Dreams. But how is she here? Who has brought her here? What magic power has installed he on this throne of reverie and of pleasure? What does it matter?—There She is; I recognize Her.

Look! See those eyes whose flame shoots across the twilight; those subtle and terrible Mirrors-of-Venus that I recognize by their terrifying malice. They attract, they subjugate, they devour the glance of the rash man who contemplates them. I have studied them often, those black stars which compel curiosity and admiration.

To what benevolent demon do I owe it that I am thus surrounded with mystery, with silence, with peace and with perfume? Oh blessedness! what we ordinarily call Life, even in its happiest expansion, has nothing in common with this supreme life which I now hold, and which I taste minute by minute, second by second.

No, there are no more minutes, there are no more seconds. Time has disappeared; it is Eternity which reigns, an eternity of delight.

But now a terrible and heavy blow is smitten on the door, and, as in infernal dreams, it seems to me that I receive the blow of a mattock in the midriff.

And now a spectre has come in. It is a bailiff, who comes to torture me in the Name of the Law, an infamous harlot who comes crying pity, and to ass the frivolities of her life to the sorrows of mine, or the guttersnipe errand-boy of an editor who wants the continuation of my manuscript.

The heavenly room, the Idol, the Queen of Dreams, the Slyphide, as the great René calls her, all this magic has disappeared at the spectre's brutal knock.

Horror! I remember, I remember! This hovel, this dwelling-place of ennui eternal, is indeed my own. Here is the foolish, dusty, battered furniture, and here the fire-place without flame or ember, befouled with spittle; the sad windows where the rain has traced furrows in the dust; the blotted or unfinished manuscript, the almanack where the pencil has marked the disastrous days.

And this other-world perfume, in which, with a sensitiveness made perfect, I grew drunk—alas! is replaced by the smell of stale tobacco mingled with I know not what sicken-

ing damp; one breathes here now the rancid air of desolation.

In this world, so narrow, yet so filled with loathing, one single well-known object smiles on me,—the phial of laudanum; and old and terrible mistress; like all mistresses, alas! fertile in caresses and in treacheries.

Oh yes, Time has reappeared. Time lords it now, and with the ugly oldster has returned all his devilish rout of memories, regrets, spasms, fears, agonies, nightmares, rages, nerve-storms.

I swear to you that the seconds now tick off like a mighty and a solemn bell, and each one leaping from the clock cries: “I am Life, Life intolerable, Life implacable, Life!”

There is only one second in human life whose mission it is to announce good news—the good news which breathes into every heart an inexplicable fear.

Yea, Time reigns; he has resumed his brutal dictatorship, and he drives me on, as if I were an ox, with his double goad. On, then, thick-head!—Sweat, slave! live, damnèd wretch!

VI

EVERYONE HAS HIS CHIMERA

BENEATH the great gray sky, in a vast and dusty plain that hath no road nor grass, without one thistle, without one nettle, I met several men walking, bowed over.

Each of them bore upon his back an enormous chimera, as heavy as a sack of corn or coal, or the heavy marching of a Roman infantryman.

But the monstrous brute was not a dead weight. On the contrary, it wrapped round and oppressed the man with its powerful and elastic muscles. It clutched with its two great claws at the breast of its mount, and its fables head crowned the forehead of the man like one of those horrific helmets by which the warriors of old time hoped to add to the terror of the enemy.

I questioned one of these men, and asked him where they were going. He answered me that neither he nor the others knew anything of this, but that evidently they were going

somewhere, since they were driven by an invincible need of going on.

A curious feature of the affair was that none of these travellers appeared to be irritated at the frightful beast hung at his neck, glued to his back. One would have said that he considered it as an integral portion of himself. All these weary, serious faces witnessed to no despair; under the splenetic cupola of heaven, their feet plunged in the dust of a ground as desolate as that heaven itself. They went on their way with the resigned look of those who are damned to hope eternally.

And the caravan passed beside me and hid itself in the atmosphere of the horizon, at that point where the rounded surface of the planet withdraws itself from the curiosity of man.

For some moments I obstinately strove to understand the mystery; but soon irresistible indifference settled upon me, and I was more heavily weighed down by it than they themselves were by their own crushing chimeras.

VII

THE MADMAN AND VENUS

WHAT an admirable day! The vast park swoons under the burning eye of the sun like youth under the dominion of love.

The universal ecstasy of things expresses itself by no noise; the very waters seem to sleep; how different from human festivals! Here it is an orgy of silence.

One might say that an ever-increasing light makes things glitter more and more: that the excited flowers burn with desire to rival the sky's blue by the vigour of their colour, and that the heat, making their perfumes visible, sends them up before the altar of the day-star like clouds.

Nevertheless, in all this enjoyment I beheld one suffering.

At the fool of a colossal Venus, one of those artificial madmen, one of those professional buffoons whose duty it is to make kings laugh when remorse or weariness sits heavy upon them, muffled in a startling and ridiculous costume, with the horns and bells of a fool's cap,

hunched up against the pedestal, lofts tear-filled eyes towards the pedestal, lifts tear-filled eyes towards the immortal goddess.

And his eyes say: I am the least and the most solitary of men; deprived of love and friendship, and in that respect how far below the least of brutes! Yet I am made, I too, to understand and to feel beauty immortal. Ah, Goddess, have pity of my sadness, of my madness!

But the implacable Venus looks afar off upon I know not what, with marble eyes.

VIII

THE DOG AND THE FLASK

“HERE, pupsikins, good doggie, nice doggie! Come and smell this delicious scent; it is by the best perfumer in town.” And the dog, wagging his tail, which is, I suppose, for these poor creatures the sign which corresponds to smiles and laughter, comes near and with great curiosity rests his nose upon the unstoppered flask; then, suddenly recoiling in fright, he barks at me reproachfully.

Ah, wretched dog, if I had offered you a parcel of ordure you would have sniffed it with delight and very likely eaten it up! Unworthy companion of this sad life of mine, how you resemble the public, to whom one must never present the delicate perfumes which only exasperate it, but carefully selected scraps of nastiness!

IX

THE BAD GLAZIER

THERE are natures which are purely contemplative and altogether unfitted for action, yet which, under a mysterious and unknown impulse, sometimes act with a rashness of which they would have believed themselves to be incapable.

One such, fearing to find some disappointing intelligence at the porter's lodge, hangs about for an hour without daring to go home; another keeps a letter for a fortnight without unsealing it, or only makes up his mind after six months to take some step which was necessary a year before: such feel themselves sometimes hurried brusquely into action by an irresistible force, like the arrow from a bow. The moralist and the doctor, who set up to know everything, cannot explain whence comes so suddenly so mad an energy to flood these lazy and self-indulgent souls, and how, incapable as they are of accomplishing the most simple and necessary things, they find, at a certain moment, an ecstatic courage to exe-

cute the most absurd and even the most dangerous acts.

One of my friends, the most inoffensive dreamer that ever lived, once set fire to a forest to see, he said, if it would catch fire as easily as people generally say, Ten times running the experiment failed, but at the eleventh it succeeded much too well.

Another will light a cigar close to a barrel of gunpowder in order to see, to know, to tempt Fate, to force himself to give proof of his energy; to ape the gamester, to know the pleasures of anxiety; and this incited by caprice, by idleness, by nothing at all.

This kind of energy springs from boredom and reverie, and those in whom it so obstinately appears are in general, as I have said, the most indolent and dreamy of all beings.

Another, so mightily timid that he lowers his eyes even before the glances of his fellows, so that he must pull together all his little will to enter a café or a box-office, where the clerks seemed to him clothed with the majesty of Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus, will suddenly throw himself on the neck of an old man who happens to be passing and will kiss him enthusiastically before the astonished crowd.

Why? Because . . . because this countenance was irresistibly sympathetic to him?

Perhaps; but it was simpler to suppose that he himself did not know why.

I have been more than once a victim of these cries and impulses, which give ground for the belief that malicious demons may possibly be asleep within us and cause us to perform, unknown to ourselves, their maddest whims.

One morning I got up in a bad temper, sad, tired of idleness, and impelled, it seemed to me, to do something big, a brilliant action; and I opened the window. Alas!

(Observe, I beg you, that the spirit of mystification which, with some people, is not the result of a preconceived plan but of a chance inspiration, participates very much, though it were but through the intensity of its desire, in this humour which doctors call hysteric, and which those who have a little more sense than doctors call Satanic, which compels us unresisting towards a crowd of dangerous or inconvenient actions.)

The first person that I saw in the street was a glazier whose piercing and discordant cry came up to me through the heavy and contaminated atmosphere of Paris. It would be utterly impossible for me ever to tell you why I was suddenly seized with a hatred, as sudden as it was despotic, against the poor man.

“Hullo, hullo,” I called to him to come up. At the same time I reflected, not without some amusement, that my room being on the sixth story, and the staircase extremely narrow, that the man was bound to find it rather difficult to make the ascent, and to catch in many a place the corners of his merchandise.

At last he appeared. Having examined all his glasses with curiosity, I said to him: “What, you have no coloured glasses?—Rose glasses, red glasses, blue glasses, magic glasses, glasses of Paradise! You impudent fellow; you dare to walk about in the poor quarters of the town, and you have not even glasses which make life look beautiful!” And I pushed him vigorously towards the staircase, where he stumbled and swore.

I went to the balcony and seized a little flower-pot; and when the man reappeared in the doorway I let fall my engine of war on the back edge of his shoulder straps, and the shock overthrowing him, he broke beneath his back all his poor walking stock-in-trade, which uttered the crashing cry of a glass palace split by lightning.

And, drunk with my madness I cried to him furiously: “Let life look beautiful, let life look beautiful!”

These nerve-gambols are not without danger, and one may sometimes have to pay heavily for them; but what does the eternity of damnation matter to one who has found in a second the Infinity of enjoyment?

X

ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

AT last alone. One hears no more of anything but the wheels of some belated and exhausted cabs. For some hours we shall be lords of silence, if not rest. At last the tyranny of the human countenance disappears, and I shall not suffer except from myself.

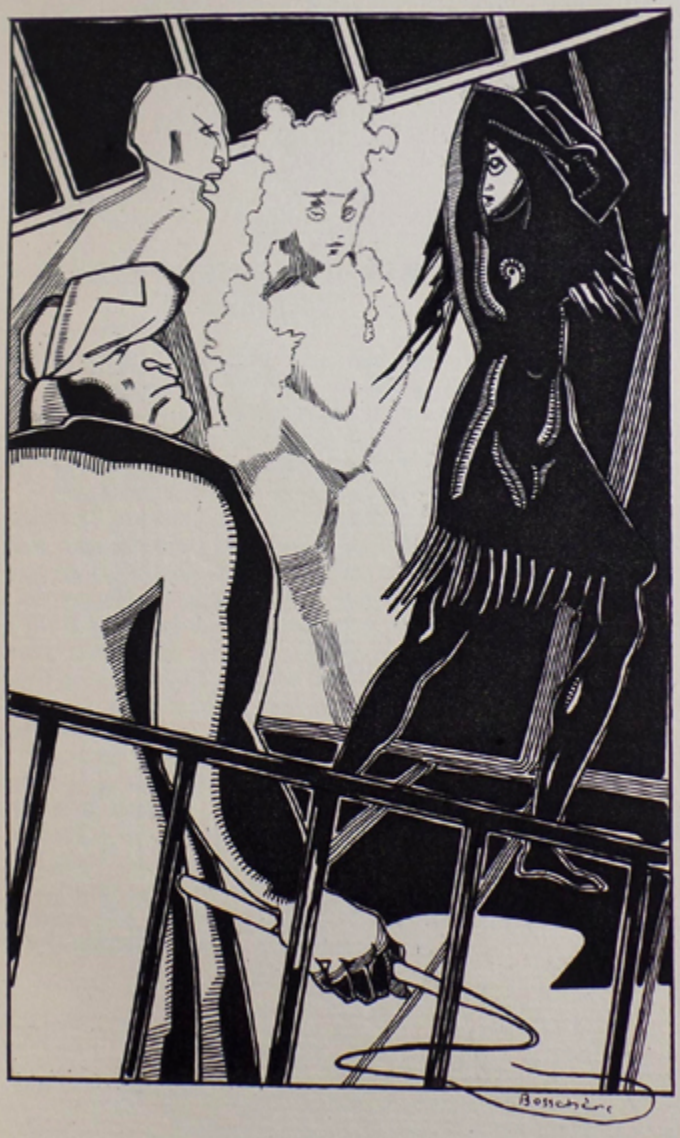
At last! it is then allowed me to take mine ease in a bath of shadows. First let me double-lock the door. It seems to me that this turning of the key will intensify my solitude and strengthen the barricades that separate me from the world.

Horrible life; horrible town! Let us go over the day's work. I saw several men of letters, one of whom asked me if it was possible to go to Russia by land. He doubtless thought Russia was an island. I disputed enthusiastically with the editor of a review who replied to every objection: "This is an *honest* newspaper;"—implying that all other newspapers were edited by scoundrels. I saluted a score of people, of whom I do not know fifteen. I scattered hand-

shakes in the same proportion, and that without taking the precaution of buying gloves. To kill time during a shower I ran up to the rooms of an acrobat who begged me to design for her a costume as Vénustre. I paid court to a theatre manager who said, on saying good-bye: “You would do well perhaps to address yourself to Z.; he is the dullest, the most foolish and the most celebrated of all my authors; with him you might perhaps arrive at some arrangement. See him, and then we shall see.” I bragged (Why?) of several dirty actions that I have never done, and cowardly denied several other misdeeds that I joyfully performed; thus committing the fault of boasting and the crime of respecting man. I refused to a friend an easy kindness, and gave a written recommendation to a perfect ass. There! is that enough?

Discontented with everybody and with myself, I should like to rehabilitate myself and regain my pride a little in the silence and solitude of the night. Souls of those whom I have loved, souls of those whom I have sung, strengthen me, sustain me, drive far from me falsehood and the corrupting vapours of the world, and Thou, O Lord my God, grant me Thy favour that I may make some good verses to prove to myself that I am not the meanest

of mankind, that I am not inferior to those whom I despise!



XI

THE WILD WOMAN AND THE SPOILT DARLING

“REALLY, my dear, you tire me without measure or pity! One would say, to hear you sigh, that you suffered more than sixty-year-old gleaners, or the old beggar women who pick up broken crusts at the doors of dirty inns.

“If at least your sighs expressed remorse, they would do you some honour; but they only interpret your satiety of well-being, and that you are overwhelmed with rest; and then, you go on for ever spreading yourself in vain words: “Love me well; I have so much need of it; console me here, caress me there.” Come, I will try to cure you; we shall perhaps find the means for a brace of half-pence in the middle of a festival.

“Let us consider carefully, I beg you, this solid cage of iron. Within it, howling like a lost soul, shaking the bars like an orang-outang made furious by captivity, imitating—and how perfectly!—now the tiger’s circular leaps, now

the stupid waddlings of the polar bear, excites himself this hairy monster—whose shape imitates, vaguely enough, your own.

“This monster is one of those animals which one generally calls ‘My angel’; that is to say, a woman. The other monster, he who, a stick in his hand, cries loud enough to break your head in, is a husband. He has put his lawful wife in irons like a wild animal, and he is showing her in the suburbs;—on fair days, needless to say, with a licence from the magistrate.

“Pay close attention. See with what voracity (perhaps genuine) she tears to pieces the living rabbits and the cackling fowls which her keeper throws her. ‘Come,’ says he; ‘one must not eat all one’s fortune in a single day’; and with this prudent speech he cruelly tears from her the prey whose torn guts remain for an instant clinging to the teeth of the savage brute. I mean of the woman.

“Come, a good whack to quiet her! for she darts eyes terrible with greed on the food that he has snatched away. Great God! the stick is not a fool’s bauble; did you not hear the flesh smack, despite the hide? And now too, her eyes jump out of her head; she howls more naturally than before. In her rage she sparkles all over, as when one beats hot iron.

“Such are the domestic matters of these descendants of Adam and Eve; these works of Thine hands, O my God! This woman is incontestably unhappy, although after all perhaps the titillating pleasures of glory are not unknown to her. There are more irremediable misfortunes; there are misfortunes that have no compensation. But in the world into which she has been thrown she had never been able to believe that women could ever deserve another fate.

“Now, between ourselves, my affected darling; to see the hells with which the world is crowded, what do you wish me to think of your pretty hell? You who rest only upon materials as soft as your own skin; eat nothing but well-cooked food, carefully carved by a clever servant.

“And all these little sighs which swell your perfumed breast, what can they mean for me, great strong coquette that you are? And all these affectations that you have learned from books, and this indefatigable melancholy, fit to inspire who looks upon it with quite another sentiment than pity? In truth I sometimes feel that I should like to teach you what real unhappiness is like. To see you thus, my beautiful invalid, your feet in the mire and your eyes turned dimly towards heaven, as if you wanted

a king to play with, one might compare you with great accuracy to a young she-frog invoking the Ideal. If you despise King Log (as I am at present, you know well) beware of King Stork, who will crunch you and swallow you and kill at his pleasure!

“Poet as I am, I am not the dupe that you would like to think; and if you weary me too often with your affected complainings I will treat you like a wild woman of the woods or throw you out of the window like an empty bottle.”

XII

CROWDS

IT is not given to everybody to bathe in the man-ocean; to enjoy the crow is an art; and he only can revel in their vitality at the expense of the human race in whom, while he lies in his cradle, a fairy has breathed the taste for travesty and masquerade, the hatred of home and the passion of travel.

Multitude—Solitude: these terms are equivalent, and are convertible by the active and fertile poet. He who does not understand how to people his solitude is equally ignorant of the art of being alone in a crowd.

The poet enjoys this incomparable privilege, that he can be at his pleasure himself or another. Like those wandering souls which seek for an embodiment, he enters where he will into the personality of each. For him alone all houses are to let: and if certain places seem to be closed to him it is because in his eyes they are not worth the trouble of being visited.

The solitary and pensive stroller draws a singular intoxication from this universal com-

munion. He who easily weds himself to the crowd becomes acquainted with feverish enjoyments, of which the egotist, closed up like a strong-box, and the idle man, shut up in his shell like a mollusc, are eternally deprived. He adopts as his own all the professions, all the joys, and all the miseries which chance brings under his notice.

What men call love is very small, very restricted, very weak compared with this ineffable orgy, this holy prostitution of the soul, which gives itself altogether, all its poetry, all its good will, to every unexpected object, to the stranger who passes by.

It is sometimes well to teach the happy of this world, were it only to humiliate for a moment their foolish pride, that there are pleasures superior to theirs, pleasures more vast and more refined. Those who found colleges, who teach peoples, missionary priests exiled to the end of the earth, without doubt know something of these mysterious intoxications, and in the bosom of the vast family which their genius has made for themselves, they must sometimes laugh at those who compassionate them for their troubled fortune and for their life so chaste.

XIII

WIDOWS

VAUVENARGUES says that in public gardens there are alleys chiefly haunted by disappointed ambition, unfortunate inventors, abortive glories, broken hearts; by all those stormy and imprisoned souls in which still groan the last sighs of a tempest, and who recoil from the insolent gaze of the joyful and the idle: these shadowy retreats are the meeting-places of life's cripples.

It is above all to these places that the poet and the philosopher love to direct their eager guesses, which find there an assured pasture. For is there is a place which they disdain to visit, as I insinuated in the last story, it is above all the gaiety of the rich. That turbulence of emptiness has nothing to attract them. On the contrary, they feel themselves irresistibly drawn towards all that is weak, ruined, saddened, orphaned.

An experienced eye never deceives itself. In those set or languid features; in those eyes, either hollow or dull or shining with the dying

lightings of their struggle; in those deep and many wrinkles, in those steps so slow or so dragging, he instantly deciphers innumerable legends of love deceived, of devotion misunderstood, of effort unrewarded, of cold and hunger humbly and silently endured.

Have you sometimes noticed widows upon these solitary benches? Widows who are poor; whether or no they be in mourning, it is easy to recognize them. Besides, there is always in the mourning of poor persons something lacking; an absence of harmony which makes it more heartbreaking. Poverty is obliged to haggle over its sorrow; Wealth weeps, regardless of expense.

Which is the sadder and more saddening widow? She who drags, holding his hand, a brat with whom she cannot share her reverie, or she who is quite alone? I do not know. . . . Once upon a time it happened to me that I followed during long hours a mournful old woman of this type; stiff, straight, under a little wordout shawl; she bore herself in all her being with stoical pride.

She was evidently condemned by absolute solitude to the habits of a celibate of long standing, and the masculine character of her manners added something mysteriously piquant to their austerity. I do not know in what

miserable café and on what she dined; I followed her to the reading-room, and I watched her a long while, while she sought in the newspapers with quick glancing eyes, long since burnt out by tears, some news of powerful and personal interest.

At last, in the afternoon, under a charming autumn sky, one of those skies whence descend the armies of regret and of remembrance, she seated herself in a garden, aside, far from the crowd, to listen to one of those concerts whose regimental music the people of Paris so enjoy.

That was doubtless the little debauch of this innocent old woman, or shall I say of this purified old woman; the well-earned consolation of one of these heavy, friendless days, conversationless, joyless, bare of intimacy, these days which God let fall upon her since many days which God let fall upon her since many years may-be; three-hundred-and-sixty-five times in the year.

And yet another. I can never prevent myself from casting a glance, if not wholly sympathetic, at least curious, upon the crowd of outcasts who press upon an enclosure of a public concert. Across the night the orchestra throws festival chants, chants of triumph or of pleasure. The dresses fall glittering, glances are in-

terchanged, the idle, fatigued because they have done nothing, waddle about pretending an indolent enjoyment of the music. Here is nothing but riches and happiness, nothing which does not breathe and inspire carelessness and the pleasure which life takes in allowing itself to live. Nay, nothing, unless it be the aspect of this mob which leans down there upon the outer barrier, catching, without payment, at the will of the wind, a shred of music, and gazing upon the sparkling throng within.

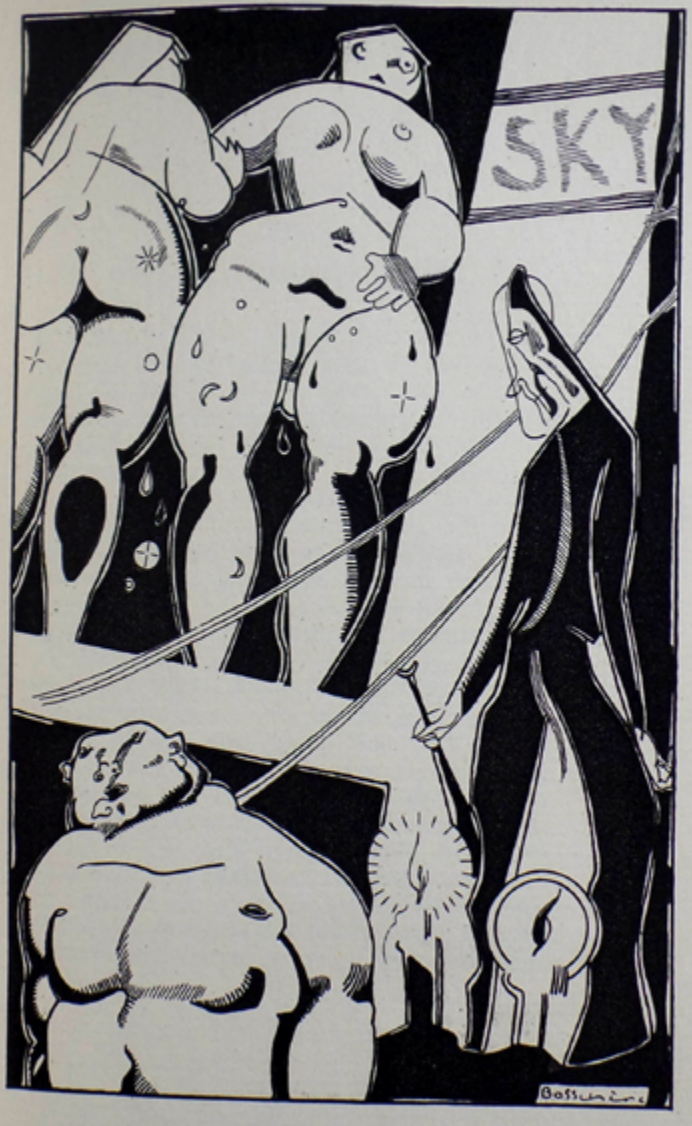
It is always interesting, this reflection of the rich man's joy in the depth of the poor man's eye; but this day, among this populace clad in blouses and calico, I saw a being whose nobility made a startling contrast with all the surrounding triviality.

It was a tall and majestic woman, so noble in her whole bearing that I do not remember to have ever seen her equal in the galleries of the aristocratic beauties of the past. A perfume of haughty virtue emanated from her whole person; her face, sad and thin, was perfectly in keeping with the full mourning in which she was dressed; she too, like the Plebs with which she had mingled, and which she did not see, she too gazed upon that glittering society with a thoughtful eye, and nodding gently her head, listened to the music.

Strange vision! Surely, said I to myself, this kind of poverty, if poverty there be, would not tolerate sordid economy; so noble a countenance is the guarantee of that. Why then does she remain willingly in a set of surroundings where she makes so startling a stain?

But my curiosity leading me to pass close to her, I thought that I could guess the reason. The tall widow held by the hand a child, clothed like herself in black. However moderate might be the charge of admission, it might perhaps be sufficient to pay for one of the necessities of that tiny being, or better still, a superfluity, perhaps a toy.

And no doubt she went home on foot ever meditating, ever dreaming, alone, always alone; for a child is troublesome, selfish, without sweetness or patience; and could not even, as a dog or a cat could, serve her as the confidant of her solitary sorrows.


SKY

XIV

THE OLD MOUNTEBANK

EVERYWHERE spread and moved and frolicked the holiday folk. It was one of those festivals on which, since long, mountebanks, trick performers, menagerie proprietors, and pedlars count to make up for the slack seasons of the year.

On such days it seems to me that the people forgets everything, both sorrow and toil; it becomes as children are; for the children it is a holiday, for the frown-ups it is an armistice concluded with the maleficent powers of life, a respite in the universal strife and struggle.

The man of the world himself, and the man engaged in mental labour, escape with difficulty from the influence of this popular jubilee. They absorb, without wishing it, their part of this happy-go-lucky atmosphere. For myself, like a true Parisian, I never miss passing in review all the booths which flaunt upon these solemn occasions.

They were in truth trying to outdo each other in hubbub; they chattered, bellowed,

howled; it was a confluence of cries, opposing detonations, and sharp explosions; the ‘Merry Devils’ and the clowns twisted up the features of their weathered faces, hardened by the wind, the rain and the sun. They flung forth, with the confidence of trained comedians, witty sayings and jests as solidly and heavily comic as those of Molière. The strong men, proud of the size of their limbs, without either forehead or cranium, like orang-outangs, were strutting majestically beneath the tights which they have washed on the previous evening for the grand occasion. The dancing girls, beautiful as fairies or princesses, leaped and skipped under the lanterns whose flame crowds their petticoats with spangles. All was light, dust, cries, joy, tumult. One set was spending money, another making it; both equally happy. The children clung to their mothers’ skirts, begging for sugar-sticks, or climbing on to their fathers’ shoulders so as to get a better view of some juggler who seemed as dazzling as a god, and everywhere, dominating every other scent, was wafted an odour of frying, which was as it were the incense of this holy festival.

At the extreme end of the range of booths, as if, ashamed of himself, he had pronounced his own exile from all these splendours, I saw a poor mountebank, with bowed back, infirm,

decrepit, a ruin of a man, leaning against one of the posts of his cabin: a cabin more wretched than that of the most brutish savage, and whose two candle-ends, guttering and smoking, yet lighted only too well his distress.

Everywhere joy, money-making, debauch; everywhere the certainty of to-morrow's bread; everywhere the frenzied explosion of vitality. Here only, absolute wretchedness; wretchedness dressed, to crown its horror, in comic rags, where necessity, far more than art, had introduced the contrast. He did not laugh, poor wretch! He neither leapt nor danced, nor gesticulated nor cried. He sang no song, either merry or sad; he made no supplication. He was dumb and motionless. He had given up the game; he had abdicated: his fate was come upon him.

But what a gaze (how profound, how unforgettable!) he cast upon the crowds and the lights, whose moving flood stopped a few paces from his repulsive wretchedness. I felt my throat caught by the terrible hand of hysteria, and it seemed to me that my gaze was dimmed by these rebellious tears—which would not fall.

What could I do? What good would it be to ask of that unfortunate one what curiosity what wonder he had to show within his stink-

ing shadows, behind his torn curtain? In sooth I did not dare, and, though the reason for my timidity will make you laugh, I will avow it: I feared to humiliate him. At the end I brought my courage to the sticking point; I resolved, as I passed, to lay some money on one of the boards, hoping that he would divine my intention, when a great eddy of people, caused by I know not what disturbance, bore me far away from him.

And, on my homeward round, obsessed by this sight, I sought to analyse my sudden sadness; and I said to myself: I have just seen the image of the old man of letters who has survived the generation which he so brilliantly amused; of the old poet, without friends, without family, without children, degraded by his misery and by public ingratitude, into whose booth the forgetful world will no longer come.

XV

THE CAKE

I WAS travelling. The landscape which spread around me was irresistibly great and noble. Something of it doubtless passed at that moment within my soul. My thoughts flitted with a lightness like that of the atmosphere; vulgar passions, such as hate and profane love, seemed to me as far away as the clouds which defiled at the bottom of the abyss under my feet. My soul seemed to me as vast and as pure as the cupula of the sky which covered me. The memory of earthly things reached my heart weakened and diminished, like the sound of the bells of the unseen cattle which were feeding far, very far, on the slope of the opposite mountain. Upon the small unstirred lake, black by reason of its immense depth, there passed sometimes the shadow of a cloud, as if it were the reflection of the cloak of some giant of the air that flew across the heaven, and I remember that this solemn and rare feeling, caused by a motion vast in its utmost silence, filled me with a joy which was not untinged

with fear. In short, thoughts of the beauty with which I was surrounded filling me as it did with enthusiasm, I felt myself at perfect peace with myself and with the Universe. I even believe that, in my perfect happiness and my total forgetfulness of all terrestrial evil, I had arrived at no longer thinking so ridiculous those newspapers which pretend that man is naturally good; when, immedicable matter renewing its importunities, I thought I would repair the ravages of fatigue and quench the appetite caused by so lengthy an ascent. I pulled out of my pocket a big chunk of bread, a leathern cup and a flask containing a certain elixir which chemists at that time were in the habit of selling to tourists, to be mingled, as opportunity arose with snow-water.

I was calmly cutting up my bread when a very slight noise made me raise my eyes. In front of me was a little ragged, tousled creature whose hollow, fierce, and as it were supplicating eyes, devoured the piece of bread, and I heard him sigh in a low, hoarse voice the word “Cake.” I could not prevent myself laughing at the big name by which he dignified my plain bread, and I cut off a large slice for him and offered it to him. Slowly he came near, never letting his eyes leave the object which he coveted; then, snatching the piece with his

hand, re recoiled actively, as if he had feared that my offer was not made in earnest, or that I might already be repenting of it.

But at the same instant he was overthrown by another little savage, risen from I know not where, and so exactly like the first that one might have taken him for his twin brother. They rolled together on the ground, disputing the precious prey, neither wishing to give up half to his brother. The first, exasperated, seized the second by the hair, but the other caught his ear with his teeth and spat out a bleeding morsel of it, with a superb oath in his uncouth dialect. The lawful owner of the cake strove to dig his little claws into the eyes of the usurper; the other used all his force to strangle his adversary with one hand, while with the other he tried to slip the prize of the fight into his pocket. But, re-animated by despair, the bitten one got up again and sent his conqueror rolling to the ground by butting him in the stomach. But why should I describe the hideous struggle, which lasted indeed far longer than their puerile powers had led me to expect? The cake journeyed from hand to hand and changed from pocket to pocket at each instant, but alas! it changed also in size, and when at last, exhausted, panting, bleeding, they stopped for lack of strength to go on,

there was not, to tell the truth, any longer the bone of contention. The piece of bread had disappeared, and was scattered in crumbs like the grains of sand with which it was mingled.

This sight hard darkened the landscape for me, and the calm joy, in which my soul danced before it saw these miniatures of men, had vanished utterly. On that account I remained sad for a long while, saying to myself over and over again, “There is then a sublime country where bread is called cake, and is so rare a delicacy that it may beget war between brothers.”

XVI

THE CLOCK

THE Chinese can tell the time by looking in the eyes of a cat.

One day a missionary, while walking in the suburbs of Nankin, found that he had forgotten his watch, and asked a little boy what the time was. The gutter-snipe of the Flowery Kingdom hesitated at first, then, recollecting himself, he replied, “I will find out for you.” A minute later he reappeared, holding in his arms a fine big cat, and looking, as the saying is, in the white of its eyes, he unhesitatingly affirmed, “It is just a little before noon.” This turned out to be the case.

As to me, if I bend over towards my beautiful Féline, so well named, who is at once the glory of her sex, the pride of my heart, and the incense of my spirit, whether it be night, or whether it be day, in broad daylight or thick darkness, in the abyss of her adorable eyes I always read the hour most clearly. This hour is always the same; vast, solemn, wide as space, without division into minutes or seconds; a

motionless hour which is not marked on clocks, and yet is light as a sigh, swift as a glance. And if some importunate person where to come and disturb me while my gaze rests on this delicious dial, if some false and intolerant spirit, some demon of unlucky accident, were to come and say to me, “What are you looking at with such intensity? What do you seek in the eyes of this being? Do you see there the time? Ah, spend-thrift and do-nothing mortal!” I should reply unhesitatingly “yes, I see the time; it is eternity.”

Now, Madam, is not that a really meritorious madrigal, and as pompous as yourself? In good sooth, I have taken so much pleasure in embroidering this pretentious piece of gallantry that I shall ask you for nothing in return.

XVII

A WORLD IN A MANE

LET me breathe long, long, the scent of thine hair; let me plunge my whole face into it as a thirsty man does in the water of a spring; let me stir thy tresses with thy hand like a perfumed kerchief to wave memories in the air!

If thou couldst know all that I see, all that I feel, all that I hear in thy hair! my soul goes journeying upon the wings of perfume like that of other men upon the wings of music.

Thy hair contains a world of dream, full of sails and masts; it holds great seas whose winds bear me to charming climates, where space is bluer and deeper, where the atmosphere is scented with fruit, with leaves, and with the skin of man.

In the ocean of thy man I see a harbour, bust as an ant-heap with melancholy songs, with vigorous men of every nation, and with ships of every style, whose fine and complicated architecture is silhouetted on a vast sky where stalks forth the eternal heat.

In the caresses of thy mane I find once more the langours of long hours passed on a divan, in the cabin of a tall ship; hours rocked by the imperceptible roll of the cradling harbour, among jars of flowers and cooling fountains.

In the blazing hearth of thy mane I breathe the scent of tobacco mixed with opium and sugar; in the night of thy mane I see glitter the infinity of tropical azure; upon the swan-soft banks of thy mane I intoxicate myself with the mingled odours of tar, of musk, and of the oil of coconut.

Let me bite long, long, thy black and heavy tresses; when I nibble thine elastic and rebellious hair it seems to me that I am eating memories.

XVIII

WILL YOU COME WITH ME?

THERE is a superb country; a country of Cockaigne, they say, which I dream of visiting with an old friend. Singular country, drowned in the fogs of our northern marches, which one may call the east of the west, the China of Europe, so much does warm and capricious fancy there take the bit in its teeth; so much has it been patiently and obstinately made illustrious by its wise and delicate flora.

A true country of Cockaigne, where all is beautiful, rich, quiet, straightforward. Where luxury takes pleasure in admiring itself in the mirror of good order; where life is easy and may be softly breathed; from which disorder, turbulence, and the unforeseen are shut out; where happiness is wedded to silence; where the food itself is at once poetical, rich, and exciting; where everything resembles you, dear angel.

You know the feverish malady which takes possession of us in times of wretchedness and cold; this homesickness for unknown coun-

tries; this pang of curiosity; it is a land which resembles you, where all is beautiful, rich, quiet, straightforward; where Fancy has built and adorned a Western China; where life may be softly breathed, where happiness is wedded to silence. It is there that we much go and live, it is there that we must go and die.

Yes, it is there that we must go and breathe, dream, make long the hours by reason of the infinity of sensations that they hold; a musician has written, “Will you dance with me?”; who will compose “Will you come with me?” That one may offer it to the beloved one, the soul’s sister!

Yes, it is in this atmosphere that life is good—down there, where the slower hours contain more thoughts, where the clocks strike happiness with a deeper, a more meaning solemnity.

Upon glittering panels or upon gilded leather, darkly rich, live pictures; pictures blesséd, calm and deep as the souls of the artists which created them. The setting suns which so richly colour the dining-room or the ‘drawing-room are sifted by fair stuffs or by high windows of stained glass; the furniture is vast, curious, bizarre, weaponed with locks and with secrets, like refined souls. Mirrors, metals, stuffs, jewelry, porcelain, play a silent and

mysterious symphony for the eyes; and from all things, from every corner, from the cracks of drawers and from the folds of the curtains escapes a strange perfume—a “Come-back-to-me” from Sumatra—which is as it were the soul of the place.

A true country of Cockaigne, I tell you, where all is rich, clean, glittering like a beautiful conception, like magnificent plate, like splendid gold-work, like a mosaic of jewels. All the treasures of the world flow to it as in the house of a man who has well toiled and has deserved well of the whole world. Strange country, superior to all others, as Art is to Nature, where nature is re-formed by dream, where she is corrected, beautified, re-moulded.

Let them seek, let them still seek; let them ever push back the limits of their happiness, these alchemists of gardening; let them propose their prizes of sixty and one hundred thousand florins for whoever shall solve their ambitious problems; for me, I have found my black tulip and my blue dahlia.

Incomparable flower, re-discovered tulip, allegorical dahlia! It is there, is it not, in this lovely country, so calm and so dreamy, that we must grow, live, and flourish? Are not you framed in your analogy, and can you not ad-

mire yourself, to speak as the mystics do, in your own *correspondence*?

Dreams, always dreams! and the more ambitious and delicate is the soul, the more its dreams bear it away from possibility. Each man carries in himself his dose of natural opium, incessantly secreted and renewed. From birth to death, how many hours can we count that are filled by *positive* enjoyment, by successful and decisive action? Shall we ever live, shall we ever pass into this picture which my soul has painted, this picture which resembles you?

These treasures, this furniture, this luxury, this order, these perfumes, these miraculous flowers, they are you. Still you, these mighty rivers and these calm canals! These enormous ships that ride upon them, freighted with wealth, whence rise the monotonous songs of their handling; these are my thoughts that sleep or that roll upon your breast. You lead them softly towards that sea which is the Infinite; ever reflecting the depths of heaven in the limpidity of your fair soul; and when, tired by the ocean's swell and gorged with the treasures of the East, they return to their port of departure, these are still my thoughts enriched which return from the Infinite—towards you.

XIX

THE POOR MAN'S TOY

I SHOULD like to tell you of an innocent amusement. There are so few amusements that are not guilty ones!

When you go out in the morning with the intention of lounging in the streets, fill your pockets with halfpenny toys, such as the flat Punch, moved by a single thread; blacksmiths beating the anvil; the horseman and his steed whose tail is a whistle. And, as you walk by the inns below the trees, make presents of them to poor stranger children that you may meet. You will see their eyes grow great out of all knowledge. At first they will not dare to accept; it will seem too good to be true; then their hands will fasten lively on the present, and they will dash off as cats do, who go far away to eat the morsel you have given them, having learned to distrust man.

On a road, behind the pale of a large garden, at the end of which shone the whiteness of a pretty house bathing in the sun, was a

beautiful, fresh-looking child, dressed in those country clothes which are so full of coquetry.

Luxury, freedom from care, and the custom of seeing wealth on all sides of them, make these children so pretty that one might think them made of another clay than the children of the middle or the poorer class.

Beside him lay in the grass a splendid toy, as fresh as its master; varnished, gilded, dressed in a purple robe and covered with plumes and beads; but the child was paying no attention to his chosen toy. And here is what he was looking at. On the other side of the pale, on the road, among the thistles and nettles, there was another child, dirty, puny, soot-begrimed; one of those outcast brats, whose beauty an unbiased eye would discover, if, as the connoisseur's eye divines an ideal painting under a coachmaker's varnish, he were to clean it from the repugnant rust of wretchedness.

Across these symbolic bars that keep apart these two worlds—the main road and the castle—the poor child showed the rich child his own toy, which the latter greedily examined as a rare and unknown object. Now the toy which the little gutter-snipe was teasing, worrying, and shaking in a wire box, was a living rat. His parents, doubtless for economy's sake, had

chosen his toy from life itself, and the two children laughed together brotherly, and their teeth shone white, the one's no whiter than the other's.

XX

THE FAIRY GIFTS

THE Fairies had met in solemn session to distribute their gifts among all the new-born, children who had come into life in the last twenty-four hours.

All these old-fashioned and capricious sisters of Fate, all these bizarre mothers of joy and sorrow, were of many different kinds; some had a gloomy and sombre expression, others, a mischievous and clever one; some were young, who had always been young; others old, who had always been old.

Every father who believed in fairies had come, each one carrying his new-born child in his arms.

Their gifts, aptitudes, good luck, armouries of circumstance, were heaped up on one side of the Judge's box like prizes upon the platform at a school feast day; but this case was different in this particular respect, that the gifts were not the reward of any effort, but quite on the contrary a favour accorded to him who had not yet lived, a favour able to deter-

mine his fate and to become as well the source of his misfortune as of all his happiness.

The poor Fairies were extremely busy, for the crowd of clients was great, and their middle kingdom, placed as it was between man and God, is like us ruled by the terrible law of Time, and of its infinite posterity,—days, hours, minutes, and seconds.

In good sooth they were flurried as are ministers on a reception day, or the assistants in the Government pawn-shop when a national festival allows redemptions without interest. I even believe that from time to time they watched the hand of the clock with as much impatience as human judges who, in session since the morning, cannot prevent themselves from thinking of dinner, of their families, and of their comfortable slippers. If in supernatural justice there is a little hastiness and luck, let us not be surprised that it should sometimes be the same with human justice, for in that case we ourselves should be unjust judges.

Thus some blunders were committed on this day, which one might consider very strange if prudence rather than caprice were the distinctive and necessary character of the fairy folk.

Thus, the power of drawing fortune magnetically to himself was given to the sole heir of a very rich family, who, not being endowed

with any sense of charity or with any greed for the visible goods of life was doomed to find himself one day terribly embarrassed by his millions.

So, too, a love of beauty and poetic power were given to the son of a dirty rascal, a quarryman by trade, who could not in any manner assist the development of the gifts, or supply the needs of his unlucky offspring.

I forgot to tell you that the distribution in these solemn cases is without appeal, and that no one may refuse a gift.

All the Fairies rose, thinking that their spell of hard labour was at an end, for there remained no more presents, no more bounties to throw among all this human trash, when a brave fellow, a poor little tradesman I think, rose, and catching her by her robe of many-coloured smoke the Fairy who was nearest to him, cried, “Ah, dear Lady, you are forgetting us, there is still my little child; I should be sorry to have come here for nothing.”

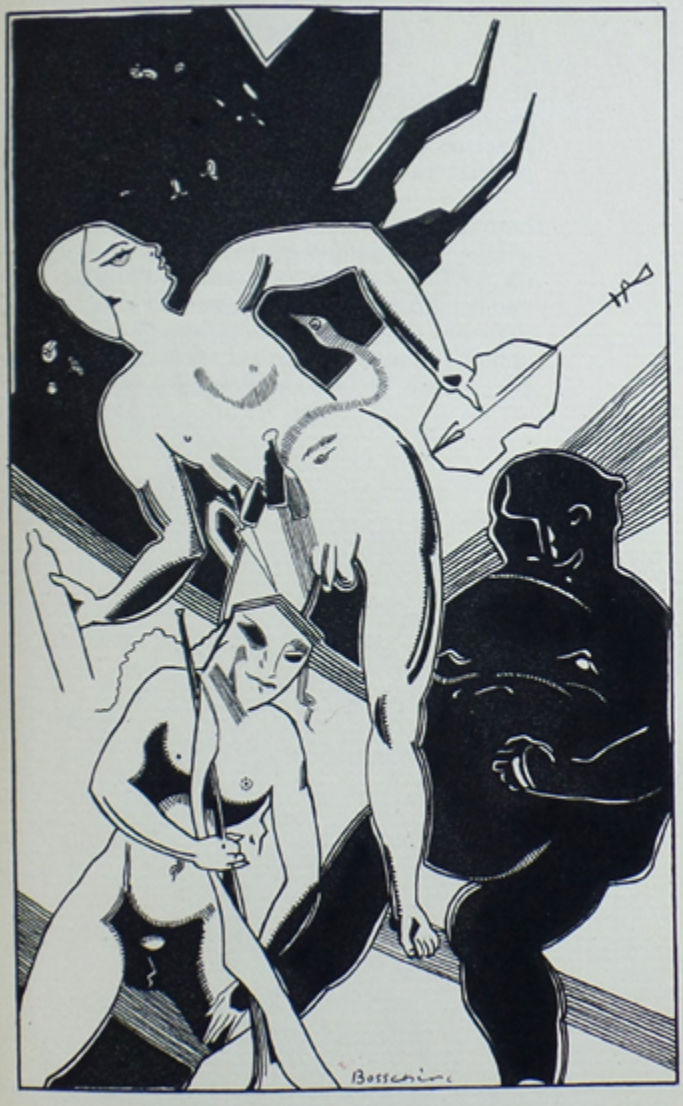
The Fairy might have been embarrassed, for there remained no longer anything at all; however; she remembered in time a law very well known, though rarely applied in the supernatural world inhabited by these impalpable deities, friendly to man, and often constrained to yield to his passions, such as the Fairies, the

Gnomes, the Salamanders, the Sylphides, the Sylphs, the Nixies, the Undines and their women-folk,—I mean the law which allows the Fairies in such a case as this, when all the gifts are gone, the power of giving yet one more additional and exceptional, provided always that she have sufficient imagination to create it on the spur of the moment.

The good Fairy then replied, with a self-possession worthy of her high rank, “I give your son—I give him—the gift of pleasing.”

“But please how?—To please?—Why to please?” the little shop-keeper obstinately asked, for he was doubtless one of that very common class of reasoners who are incapable of rising to the height of the *logic of the absurd*.

“Because, because!” replied the incensed Fairy, turning her back upon him, and rejoining her companions, she said to them, “What do you think of this empty-headed little Frenchwoman who wishes to understand everything; and who, having obtained for his son the best of all gifts, still dares to ask questions and to discuss the inscrutable?”


Bosschère

XXI

THE TEMPTATIONS:

OR,

LOVE, RICHES AND GLORY

TWO superb Satans and a She-Devil not less remarkable than they, last night climbed the mysterious staircase by which Hell emerges to assault the weakness of a sleeping man, and secretly communicates with him. In their glory they came as it were erect upon a platform and stood in front of me. A sulphurous splendour emanated from these three mighty Beings, cutting them from the thick darkness of the night. So proud and so masterful was their manner that at first I took them to be indeed gods.

The face of the first Satan was epicene, and he had also in every line of his body the softness of old Bacchus. Lovely were his eyes, and languishing, of a shadowy and undecided colour, resembling violets still wetted with the heavy tears of the storm, and his half-opened

lips seemed like warm caskets of perfume, whence he exhaled a subtle scent, and every time he signed, musk-scented butterflies gat light, on their winged way, from the ardour of his breath.

Around his purple tonic was twisted as a belt a gleaming serpent, who, with raised head, turned languorously toward him eyes that were like glowing coals. From this living girdle were suspended alternatively phials full of deadly liquids, shining knives, and surgical instruments. In his right hand he held another phial, filled with a luminous red liquid, and which bore these strange words: “Drink, this is my blood, the perfect cordial.” In the left hand he bore a violin, which he used, no doubt, to sing his pleasures and his sorrows, and to spread the contagion of his folly on the nights of the Witches’ Sabbath.

From his delicate ankles dragged some rings of a broken chain of gold and when the constraint which this occasioned him made him lower his eyes to the ground, he contemplated vaingloriously the nails of his feet, brilliant and polished like well-worked stones.

With his inconsolably sad eyes he looked upon me, with his eyes whence flowed an insidious intoxication. And he intones these words: “If thou wilt, if thou wilt, I will make

thee the Lord of Souls, and thou shalt be the master of living matter, more so even than the sculptor can be of his clay, and thou shalt know the pleasure, ceaselessly re-born, of leaving thyself to forget thyself in another, and to draw other souls, until thou dost confound them with thine own."

And I answered him, "Thank you for nothing. What should I do with this parcel of beings, who doubtless are worth no more than my poor self? Though I have sometimes shame in remembering, I wish to forget nothing. And even if I did not know you, old monster, your mysterious cutlery, you ambiguous phials, the chains with which your feet are cumbered are symbols which explain clearly enough the inconveniences of your friendship. Keep your presents to yourself!"

The second Satan had not that air at the same time tragic and smiling, nor those insinuating manners, not that delicate and scented beauty. It was a hulk of a man, with coarse, eyeless face, whose heavy paunch hung over his thighs, and all whose skin was gilded and as if tattooed with the images of a crowd of little moving figures to represent the innumerable forms of universal wretchedness. There were little lank men who had hung themselves from a nail; there were little mis-

shapen gnomes, exceeding thin, whose pleading eyes demanded alms even more than did their trembling hands, and then there were old mothers carrying abortions slung at their wasted breasts, and many another was there.

The great Satan knocked with his fist on his enormous belly, whence came a long, resounding clangour of metal, which ended in a vague groan as of many human voices, and he laughed, showing shamelessly his decayed teeth in an enormous and imbecile guffaw, just as do certain men in every country when they have dined too well.

And he said to me: “I can give thee that which obtains all that which is worth all, that which replaces all;” and he beat upon his monstrous belly, whose sonorous echo made the commentary on his coarse utterance.

I turned aside with disgust, and answered him: “In order to enjoy myself, I have no need of the wretchedness of anyone, and I refuse a wealth saddened like a soiled tapestry with all the misfortunes represented on your skin.”

As to the great She-Devil, I should lie if I did not admit that at the first sight I found a bizarre charm in her. To define this charm, I know nothing better to compare it to than to that of very beautiful women who, though in their decadence, no longer grow older, and

whose beauty has the penetrating magic of ruins. Her air was at once imperious and loose; and her eyes, although heavily ringed, were full of the force of fascination. What struck me most was the mystery of her voice, at whose sound I recalled both the most delicious contralto singers, and also a little of that hoarseness which characterizes the throats of very old drunkards.

“Wilt though know my power?” cried the false goddess with her charming and paradoxical voice; “Listen!” and she put to her mouth a gigantic trumpet covered with ribands like the reed-pipe, on which were written the titles of all the newspapers in the world, and through this trumpet she cried my name, which thus rolled across space with the noise of a hundred thousand thunders, and came back to me on the echo of the most distant of the planets.

“The Devil!” cried I, half conquered, “there is a precious thing!” But, in examining more closely the seductive Amazon, it seemed to me vaguely that I remembered having seen her drinking with some fools of my acquaintance, and the raucous sounds of the brass bore to my ears I know not what remembrance of a venal trumpet.

So I replied with all my scorn: “Be off with you; I am not the man to marry the mistress of certain persons whom I will not mention.”

Certainly, of so courageous a self-denial I had every right to be proud; but unfortunately I awoke, and all my strength deserted me. “Indeed,” said I to myself, “I must have been very soundly asleep to show such scruples. Ah, if they could return now that I am awake I should not play the prude.”

And I called aloud upon them, beseeching them to pardon me; offering to give up my honour as often as must be to deserve their favour; but I had doubtless bitterly offended them, for they have never returned.

XXII

THE TWILIGHT OF EVEN

THE day falls; a great relief comes over the poor minds that are wearied with the day's toil, and their thoughts now take on the tender and uncertain colours of the twilight.

Nevertheless, from the level of the mountain to my balcony across the transparent clouds of even there comes a great howl, composed of many discordant cries, which space transforms into a mournful harmony like that of a rising tide or of a tempest which awakes.

Who are these unfortunate ones to whom evening brings no calm, and who, like the owls, take the coming of the night for the signal of their sabbath? This sinister ululation comes to us from the black asylum perched upon the mountain side, as I invoke the evening, smoking and contemplating the repose of the great valley dotted with houses whose every window says "Here now is peace; here is domestic joy." When the wind blows from above, there can I cradle my thought, that wonders at this imitation of Hell's harmony.

Twilight excites the mad. I remembered that I myself have had two friends that twilight positively afflicted; for the first, he lost understanding of all the relations of friendship and politeness and ill-treated the first-comer as a savage does. I have seen him throw an excellent fowl at the waiter's head because he thought he saw in it some insulting hieroglyph—how should I say what? The evening, forerunner of profoundest pleasures, spoilt the most toothsome things for him.

The second, a man of wounded ambition, became, as the day fell, more bitter, more gloomy, more teasing; indulgent and sociable enough all day, in the evening he was pitiless, and it was not only upon others, but upon himself also, that his twilight mania was wont to wreak its rage.

The first died insane, unable to recognize his wife and child; the second bears in himself the inquietude of everlasting little-ease, and though he were dowered with all the honours that republics can bestow, I think that the twilight would still inflame in him a burning desire of imaginary distinctions. The night which brings shadows, which brought shadows into their minds, makes light in mine. And though it is not so rare to see the same cause beget two

contrary effects, I am always puzzled and alarmed by it.

Oh Night, Oh refreshing shadows! You are for me the signal of an internal festival, you are deliverance from anguish. In the solitude of plains, in the stony labyrinths of a great city, twinkling of stars or outbursting of lamps, you are the fire-work of the Goddess Liberty.

Twilight, how sweet thou art and tender! The rosy lights which linger still on the horizon like the death-spasm of Day trampled by the victorious car of Night; the torch-like flames which stain with their dull red the expiring glories of the setting sun; the heavy curtains which some invisible hand draws from the depths of the East:—these are but imitations of all the complex feelings which struggle within the heart of man in the solemn hours of his life.

Or lone like liken thee unto one of those strange dresses that dancing girls wear, where a dark transparent gauze lets glimmer the slain splendours of a shining skirt, as through a black present pierces the delicious past, and the vacillating stars of gold and silver with which it is sown represent those flames of fancy which do not truly kindle save under the deep mourning of Night.

XXIII

SOLITUDE

A PHILANTHROPIC journalist tells me that solitude is bad for man, and, to support this thesis, quotes, like all unbelievers, the sayings of the Fathers of the Church.

I know that the devil gladly haunts barren places, and that the spirit of murder and of lust inflames itself miraculously in solitudes; but it is just possible that this solitude is only dangerous for the idle and dispersed soul, which peoples it with its passions and chimeras.

It is certain that a wind-bag whose supreme pleasure consists in speaking from a platform or a rostrum would run serious trouble of becoming a furious madman on Robinson Crusoe's island. I do not demand from my journalist the heroic virtues of that adventure, but I do ask that he should not pass sentence upon those who love solitude and mystery. In our chattering race there are individuals who would accept with less repugnance the last penalty of the law if they were allowed to make a lengthy speech from the scaffold free from

the fear that Santerre's drums might cut off their talk untimely.

I do not pity them, because I can see that their oratorial effusions procure for them pleasures equal to those which others draw from silence and contemplation; but I despise them.

I wish above all that my cursed journalist would allow me to amuse myself as I like. "You never feel then," says he to me, with a slightly apostolic snivel, "the need of sharing your enjoyments with others?" Look what a subtle form of envy is his; he knows that I disdain his pleasures, and he wishes to sneak into mine, the ugly spoilsport!

"This great misfortune of not being able to be alone," says somewhere La Bruyère, "as if to shame those who run to forget themselves in the crowd, fearing doubtless that they will be unable to tolerate their own company."

"Nearly all our misfortunes come to us from our not having the sense to remain in our chamber," says another wise man, Pascal, I think; thus summoning back into the cell of meditation all these wrong-headed persons who seek happiness in movement and in a prostitution which, if I were willing to speak the beautiful language of my epoch, I might call *fraternitatal*.

XXIV

PLANS

HE used to say to himself as he walked in a vast and lonely park, “How beautiful she would be in a Court dress, complicated and luxurious in the lovely evening air, coming down the marble steps of a palace opposite the broad lawns and the fountains; for she has naturally the air of a princess.”

Passing by a little later in a city street, he stopped in front of a print-seller’s shop, and finding a print representing a tropical landscape, he said to himself, “Ni, it is not in a palace that I should like to possess her dear existence; we should not be at home there; besides, those walls are so cumbered with gold that there would be no place to hang her picture. In those solemn galleries there would be no corner for intimacy; decidedly it is there, in that landscape, that one ought to dwell, to dream one’s life-dream with due worship.”

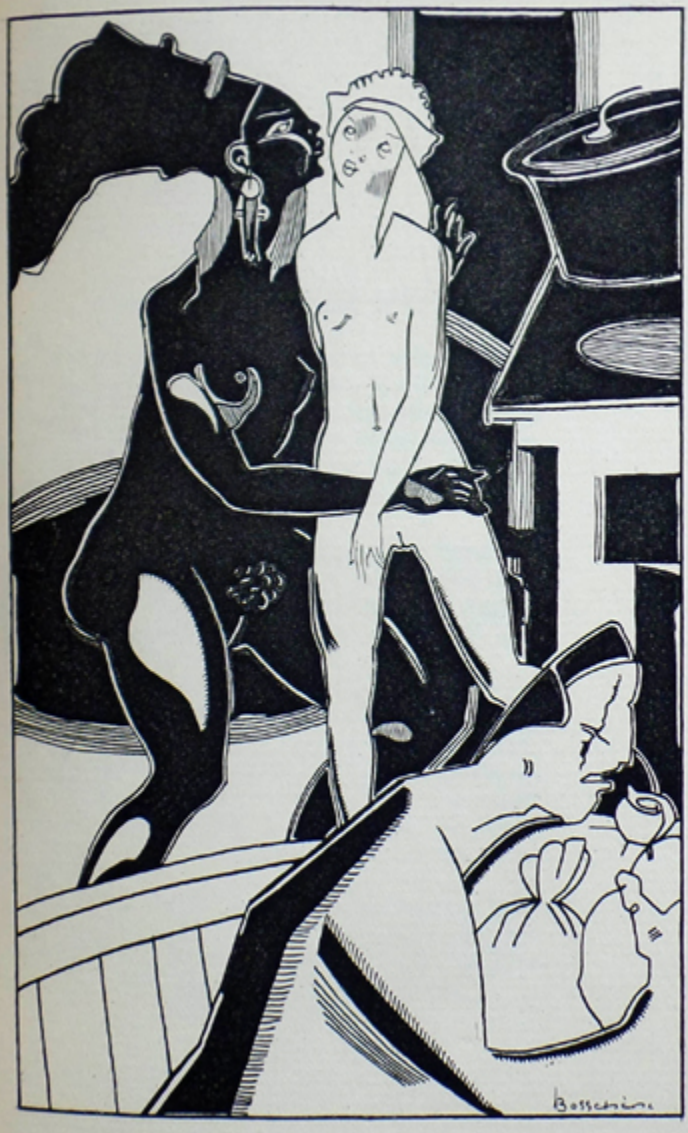
And, analysing the details of the engraving, he continued in himself, “At the edge of the sea a beautiful pleasure-house of wood, sur-

rounded with all these strange and shining trees whose names I have forgotten; an intoxicating, indefinable perfume in the air; a powerful scent of rose and of musk in the house, and further, behind our little estate, tall masts swinging on the swell; around us, at the end of the room lighted by a rosy light filtered by blinds, decorated with fresh mats and heady flowers, with seats here and there in Portuguese rococo style of a heavy dark wood, where she would rest herself, so calm, so well at ease, smoking tobacco slightly flavoured with opium; beyond the compound, the noise of light-intoxicated birds, and the chattering of little negresses, and at night, to accompany my dreams, the plaintive song of musical trees, the melancholy *filaos*; yes, indeed, there is the surrounding which I looked for; what do I want with a palace?"

And further, going down a broad avenue, he saw a tidy little inn, where, from a window made cheerful by curtains of many-coloured calico, two laughing heads leaned out. At once he said to himself, "My thought must indeed be a vagabond to go so far to look for what is so near me. Pleasure and happiness live in the first inn one comes to; in the chance inn; is not chance the great mother of pleasures? A big fire, gaudy porcelain, a passable supper, rough

wine, and a great bed with linen, a little coarse, but clean; what better is there in the world?”

But returning alone to his house at that hour when the advice of wisdom is no longer suffocated by the roar of the exterior world, he said to himself: “I have had to-day in dream three dwelling-places, which have given me one as much pleasure as the other; why inflict the trouble of travelling upon my body since my soul does it so easily, and why carry out plans, since planning is itself a sufficient pleasure?”



XXX

BEAUTIFUL DOROTHY

THE sun overwhelms the town with its direct and terrible light; the sand dazzles and the sea glitters; the tired world has given up its work and is taking its siesta; a siesta which is a kind of sweet-savoured death, where the sleeper, half awake, tastes the pleasures of his annihilation.

Dorothy, however, as strong and as bright as the sun, walks in the deserted street; at this hour she is the sole living being under the mighty vault of blue; she makes a startling black blot upon the light.

She moves forward, softly swaying her delicate torso on her broad hips; her robe of clinging silk, bright rose in colour, makes a lively contrast with the darkness of her skin, and moulds exactly her tall figure, her hollowed back and pointed breasts. Her red umbrella, filtering the light, throws on her dark face the blood-red tint of its reflections.

The weight of her forest of hair, almost blue in shade, draws back her delicate head and

gives it an air at once triumphant and idle. Heavy earrings tinkle secretly at her dainty ears.

From time to time the sea-breeze lifts her floating skirt by the corner and shows her splendid shining leg, and her foot, like the feet of the marble goddesses that Europe puts into museums, makes a faithful print of its shape on the fine sand, for Dorothy is so prodigiously coquettish that the pleasure of being admired is more to her than the pride of the freed-woman; and although she is free, she walks bare-foot.

Thus she moves on, a harmony; happy in living, smiling an ivory smile as if she beheld afar off in space a mirror reflecting her movement and her beauty.

At the hour when the very dogs groan with pain under the biting sun, what powerful motive can have sent the idle Dorothy, beautiful and cold as bronze, upon her journeyings?

Why has she left her coquettishly arranged little house, whose flowers and mats make so cheaply so perfect a boudoir; where she takes so much pleasure in combing her hair, in smoking, in fanning herself or in looking at herself in the mirror of her great feathered fans, while the sea, beating on the shore a hundred yards away, makes its powerful and

monotonous accompaniment to her vague reveries, and while the iron pot, where a dish of crabs with rice and saffron is cooking, sends its exciting perfume from the bottom of the courtyard.

Perhaps she has a tryst with some young officer, who, on distant shores, has heard his comrades speak of the famous Dorothy; no doubt the simple-minded girl will beg him to describe the Opera ball to her, and ask him if one may go there bare-foot, as one may on the Sunday dances, when the old Kaffir women themselves get drunk and furious with joy, And then again she will ask if the fair ladies of Paris are all more beautiful than she.

Dorothy is admired and petted by everyone, and she would be perfectly happy if she were not obliged to put aside copper after copper so as to buy the freedom of her little sister; who has all of eleven years and who is already a woman, and so beautiful. She will succeed, no doubt, this good Dorothy; the child's master is so miserly, too miserly to understand any other beauty than that of gold.

XXVI

POOR FOLKS' EYES

AH, you would like to know why I hate you to-day; it would doubtless be less easy for you to understand than for me to explain, for you are, I think, the finest example of feminine denseness that one might meet in a long day's march.

We had passed a long day together which had seemed short to me; we had promised ourselves that we should have all our thoughts in common, and that thenceforward our two souls should be no more than one. A dream which has nothing original about it, after all, unless it be that, imagines by all men, it has been realized by none.

In the evening you were a little tired, and wanted to sit down in front of a new café at the corner of a new boulevard; still full of rubbish, and already proudly displaying its unfinished splendours. The café sparkled; the gas itself flamed with all the enthusiasm of a *first night*, and lighted up with all its power the walls blinding with whiteness, the glittering

surfaces of the mirrors, the gold of the rods and the cornices; the plump-cheeked pages dragged along by leashed dogs, the ladies laughing at the falcon perched upon their wrists, nymphs and goddesses carrying fruits, pastry and game on their heads, Hebes and Ganymedes offering with outstretched arms a little vase of soothing drinks, or the two-coloured pyramid of mixed ices, all history and all mythology dragged into the service of gluttony.

Directly before us on the pavement stood fixed a fine fellow of forty years old, with tired face and beard gone grey, holding by one hand a little boy, and carrying upon the other arm a little creature too weak to walk. He did a servant's office and took his children to taste the evening air. All were in rags. These three faces were strangely serious, and these six eyes looked fixedly upon the new café with equal admiration, but coloured differently by age.

The eyes of the father said: "How beautiful it is, how beautiful it is; one would say that all the gold of the poor world has come to plaster itself upon these walls." The eyes of the little boy: "How beautiful it is, how beautiful it is; but it is a house where people like us cannot enter." As to the eyes of the smallest, they

were too fascinated to express anything less than a deep, dull joy.

Our song-makers tell us that pleasure makes the soul kind, and softens the heart; the song was right that evening as far as I was concerned; not only was I made tender by this family of eyes, but I felt a little ashamed of our bottles and glasses, that were greater than our thirst. I turned my looks to yours, dear love, to read my thought therein. I plunged into your eyes, so beautiful and so strangely sweet; into your green eyes, indwelt by caprice, and inspired by the moon; when you said to me, “Those people are unbearable, with their eyes staring out of their heads; could you not ask the proprietor to send them away?”

So difficult is it to understand each other, my dear angel, and so incommunicable is thought, even among people who love one another.

XXVII

AN HEROIC DEATH

FANCIULLO was an admirable buffoon, and, what was more, on terms of something like friendship with the Prince. But for people who are devoted by profession to comedy serious affairs have a fatal attraction, and strange as it may seem that ideas of patriotism and freedom should possess themselves masterfully of the brain of an actor, one day Fanciullo joined a conspiracy which had been got up by some discontented noblemen.

There are everywhere good people ready to denounce those atrabilious individuals who want to depose princes and reconstitute society without consulting it. The nobles in question were arrested, and with them Fanciullo; there was no doubt that one and all would be condemned to death.

I would gladly believe that the Prince was annoyed at finding his favourite comedian amongst the rebels. The Prince was neither better nor worse than another man, but his excessive sensitiveness made him in many cases

more cruel and despotic than any of his peers. A passionate lover of the fine arts, and moreover an excellent connoisseur, he was truly insatiable of pleasure. Indifferent enough where men and morals were concerned, himself a true artist, he knew no enemy so dangerous as boredom, and the bizarre efforts that he made to flee from or to conquer that tyrant of the world would certainly have endowed him (on the page of a severe historian) with the epithet of monster; if in his dominions it had been permitted to write anything at all whose sole tendency was not towards pleasure, or towards wonder, which is one of the most delicate forms of pleasure.

The great misfortune of this Prince was that he had never possessed a theatre vast enough for his genius. These are young Neros who are stifled within too narrow limits, and whose name and goodwill posterity will ignore; an unforeseeing Providence had given to this Prince capacities larger than his dominions.

Suddenly the rumour ran about that the Sovereign intended to pardon all the conspirators, and the origin of this rumour was the announcement of a grand night when Fanciullo should play one of his chief and best *rôles*, and at which would be present (the rumour ran) even the condemned noblemen, a clear sign,

added superficial minds, of the generous intention of the offended Prince.

From a man so naturally and wilfully eccentric, everything was possible, even virtue, even clemency; above all, if perchance he hoped to find therein unexpected pleasures. But with those who like myself were able to pierce more deeply into the depths of this curious sick soul, it seemed infinitely more probable that the histrionic talents of a man doomed to death; he wished to profit by his opportunity to make a physiological experiment of capital interest, and to discover to what point the habitual talents of an artist might be altered or modified by the extraordinary situation in which he found himself. But beyond that, was there in his soul a more or less well defined intention of clemency? That is a point which has never been cleared up.

At last, the great day being arrived, this little court displayed all its pomp, and it would be difficult to imagine, unless one had seen it, all that the privileged class of a small State with limited resources can exhibit in the way of splendour on an occasion of royal solemnity. This was doubly true, first of all by the magic of the luxury displayed, and secondly by the mysterious moral interest which was attached to it.

Signor Fanciullo excelled above all in silent parts, or those of few words, which are often the principal parts in those fairy dramas whose object is to represent symbolically the mystery of life. He came upon the scenes lightly and perfectly at his ease; a fact which tended to confirm in the mind of the public the idea of grace and pardon.

When one says of a comedian, “There is a good comedian,” one employs a formula which implies that beneath the person represented the comedian may still be found; that is to say, there is art, effort, will. Now, if a comedian succeeded in being, relatively to the character which it is his duty to express, that which the best statues of antiquity (miraculously animated, living, walking, seeing, as they are,) are relatively to our general confused idea of beauty; that would doubtless be a singular and altogether unexpected case.

Fanciullo was that evening a perfect idealization, which it was impossible not to suppose living, possible, real. The buffoon went and came, laughed and wept, gesticulated, with an indestructible aureole about his head, an aureole invisible for all except for myself, where mingled in a strange amalgam the rays of art with the halo of the martyr. Fanciullo, by I know not what particular grace, introduced the

divine and supernatural even into his most extravagant buffooneries. My pen trembles, and tears of an ever-present emotion rise to my eyes, while I seek to describe to you this unforgettable evening. Fanciullo proved to me in a peremptory and irrefutable manner that the intoxication of art is apter than any other to veil the terrors of the abyss; that genius may play its part upon the edge of the tomb with a joy which prevents it from seeing the tomb, lost as it is in a Paradise which excludes all idea either of death or of destruction.

The entire audience, right world-word and frivolous as it may have been, soon surrendered itself to the all-powerful domination of the artist. Nobody thought any more of death, of mourning, of execution. Each one abandoned himself without anxiety to the wave upon wave of pleasure which the sight of a living masterpiece of art always gives. Outbursts of joy and admiration shook and shook again the roof of the building like the rolling of continuous thunder. The Prince himself, carried away, mingled his applause with that of his Court.

Yet, for a far-seeing eye, his intoxication, his own, was not unmingled with other elements; did he feel himself abased, his despot's power broken? Humiliated in his art, that of

terrifying hearts and stupefying minds; frustrated of his hopes and deceived in his foresight; such suspicions, not exactly justified, yet not altogether without justification, shot across my mind as I looked upon the countenance of the Prince, upon which a new-found paleness ceaselessly increased upon its ordinary paleness like snow falling upon snow. His lips tightened more and more, and his eyes flamed with an interior fire like that of jealousy and bitterness, even while he ostensibly applauded the talents of his old friend, the strange buffoon who made such excellent fun of death. At a certain moment I saw His Highness lean back towards a little page-boy who was standing behind him and whisper in his ear. The merry countenance of the pretty child lit up with a smile; then he hurriedly left the royal box as if to execute an urgent commission.

Some minutes later a sharp and prolonged hiss interrupted Fanciullo in one of his best moments, tearing asunder at one and the same moment every ear and every heart, and, from that part of the room whence this unexpected sound of disapproval had leapt, a child, stifled with laughter, ran into the corridor.

Fanciullo, shaken, awakened in his dream, first closed his eyes, then opened them almost at once, enormously enlarged; then opened his

mouth as if to breathe convulsively, staggered a step forward, a step backward, and fell stone dead upon the boards.

Had indeed the hiss, swift as a sword, really cheated the hangman? Had the Prince himself divined the murderous efficacy of his ruse? One may suspect so.

Did he regret his beloved, his inimitable Fanciullo? it is pleasant and admissible to believe it.

The guilty nobles had enjoyed the comedy for the last time; in the same night they were wiped out of life.

Since then many a mime, justly appreciated in divers countries, has come to play before the Court of His Highness, but not one has been able to equal the marvellous talent of Fanciullo, nor to obtain the same degree of *favour*.

XXVIII

BASE COINAGE

AS we moved away from the tobacco shop my friend made a careful partition of his small change. In the left-hand pocket of his waistcoat he slipped small pieces of gold; in the right, silver coins; in the left-hand pocket of his breeches, a lot of coppers, and finally, in the right, a silver two-franc piece which he closely examined.

Curious and careful disposition, said I to myself.

We met a poor man who, trembling, held out to us his cap—I know nothing more disquieting than the dumb eloquence of these beseeching eyes, which contain, for the sensitive man who understands how to read therein, both so much humility, and so much reproach. There is therein something approaching this depth of complex sentiment in the watery eyes of whipped dogs.

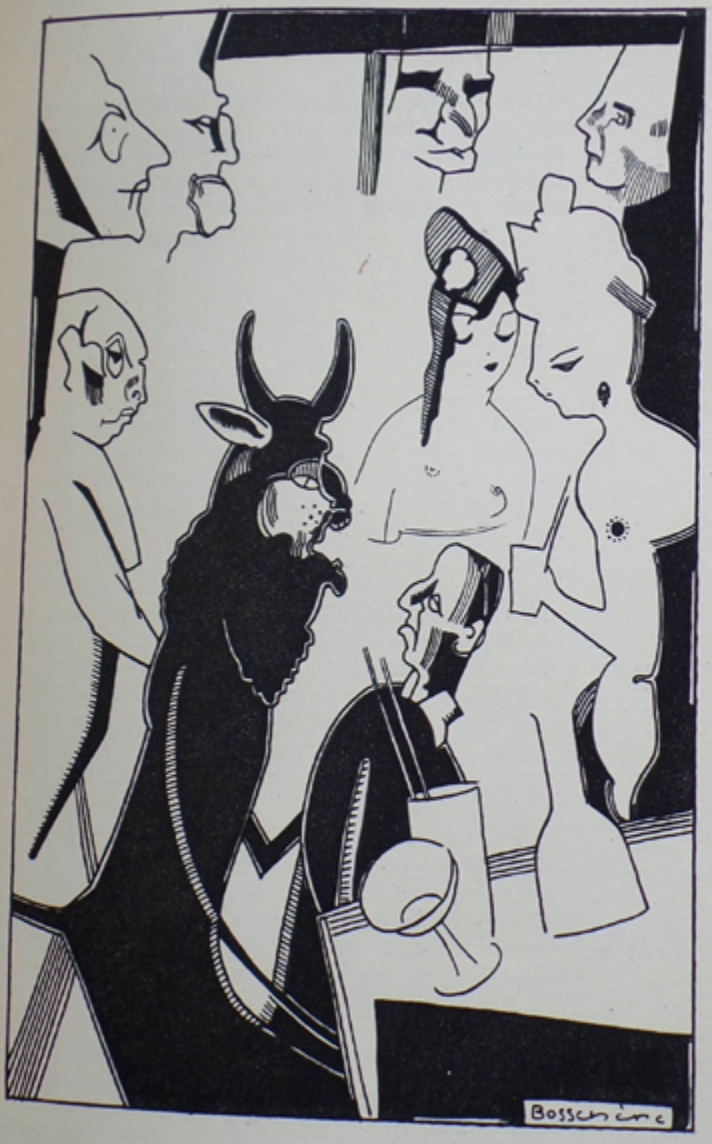
My friend's alms were much more considerable than my own, and I said to him, "You are right; after the pleasure of being aston-

ished there is none greater than that of causing astonishment." "It was the bad coin" he answered calmly, as if to excuse his extravagance.

But in my unhappy brain, always busy with tilting at windmills, (with how exhausting a gift has Nature endowed me!) this idea suddenly entered; that such conduct on the part of my friend was only excusable by the desire of creating an event in the life of this poor devil, perhaps even of discovering the divers consequences, unfortunate or otherwise, which a bad coin in a beggar's hand may produce. Might it not multiply itself into genuine pieces? Might it not, on the other hand, bring him to gaol?—An inn-keeper, or a baker for example, might perhaps have him arrested as a coiner, or utterer. Equally well the bad coin might possibly be in his poor little speculations the germ of several days' wealth, and so my fancy went journeying, lending wings to the spirit of my friend, and drawing every possible deduction from every possible hypothesis.

But he brusquely broke into my reverie, repeating my own words, "Yes, you are right; there is no sweeter pleasure than that of surprising a man by giving him more than he expects."

I looked sharply into his eyes, and was astounded to see that they shone with the lustre of incontestable sincerity. Then I saw clearly how it was; he had wished to combine philanthropy and business, to gain a florin and God's heart; to acquire Heaven at a bargain-counter and the title of philanthropist free of charge. I could almost have pardoned him the criminal enjoyment of which I had just supposed him capable; I should have found it curious, singular, that he should amuse himself by placing a poor man in a false position; but I will never pardon him the stupidity of his calculation. It is never excusable to be wicked, but there is some merit in knowing that one is so; and the most irreparable vice is to do evil by stupidity.



XXIX

THE GENEROUS GAMESTER

YESTERDAY, among the crowd of the Boulevards, I felt myself brushed by a mysterious being whom I had always wished to know, and whom I instinctively recognized, although I had never seen him. Doubtless there was in him an analogous desire as regards myself, for as he passed he gave me a significant wink which I hastened to obey. I followed him attentively, and soon I descended at his heels into a subterranean dwelling-place where shone a luxury of which none of the above-ground dwellings of Paris can show a rival. It seemed strange to me that I should so often have passed this wondrous den without ever perceiving its door. There an exquisite though heavy atmosphere reigned, which made one forget almost instantly all the fastidious horrors of life. One breathed there a sombre happiness, somewhat like that which the lotus-eaters must experience when, disembarking upon an enchanted isle, lighted by the gleam of eternal afternoon, they feel born in them to the soothing and me-

lodious sounds of waterfalls the desire never to see again their household gods, their wives, their children; never again to confront the lofty billows of the sea.

Strange faces were there, of men and women, marked with a fatal beauty; it seemed to me that I had known them long since, at times and in countries whose exact remembrance I could no longer fix, and which rather inspired me with a fraternal sympathy than with that fear which usually arises at the sight of the unknown. If I wished to try to define in any way their strange expression, I would say that never have I seen eyes that shone more forcefully with the horror of boredom and with the immortal desire to feel themselves alive.

My host and myself were already by the time we sat down old and good friends. We ate, we drank outrageously every sort of extraordinary wine, and, a thing no less strange, it seemed to me after several hours that I was no more drunk than he was; nevertheless, gambling, that super-human pleasure, had interrupted at different intervals our frequent libations, and I must tell you that I played and lost my soul in a rubber with heroic carelessness and lightness. The soul is so impalpable a thing, so often useless, and sometimes so troublesome, that at this loss I experienced lit-

tle more emotion than if I had dropped my visiting card in the course of a walk.

For a long time we smoked cigars whose incomparable flavour and aroma gave both homesickness and craving for joys yet undiscovered to the soul; and, intoxicated with all these delights, I had the audacity to cry, in an access of familiarity which did not seem to displease him, as I clutched a brimming cup,—"To your immortal health, old goat!"

We talked also of the Universe, of its creation and its future destruction; of the great idea of this century—I mean Progress and Perfectibility—and in general of every form of human infatuation. On that subject His Highness was inexhaustible in light and unanswerable jests, and expressed himself in a suavity of speech and a calm in jest-making that I have never found in any of the most famous of mortal talkers. He explained to me the absurdity of the different philosophies that have till now obsessed the human brain, and condescended even to confide to me some fundamental principles whose advantages and propriety it is inconvenient to discuss with the first-comer. He did not at all complain of the bad reputation which he enjoyed in every part of the world, and assured me that he himself was the person most interested of all in the destruction of su-

perstition, and acknowledged to me that he had never had fear as to his own power but once; and that was one day when he had heard a preacher, more subtle than his colleagues, bawl from the pulpit, “Dearly beloved brethren let us never forget when we hear boasts of progress and light that the cleverest stratagem of the devil is to persuade us that he does not exist.”

His recollection of this famous orator naturally led us to the subject of Universities, and my strange companion assured me that he did not consider it beneath him in many cases to inspire the pen, the tongue, and the brain of dons, and that he was almost always present in person, although invisible, at all academic gatherings.

Encouraged by so much affability, I asked him for news of God, and if he had seen Him lately. He answered me with an indifference shaded by a certain sadness, “We bow when we meet, but like two old noblemen whose innate politeness cannot altogether extinguish the memory of ancient ill-will.”

It is doubtful whether His Highness had ever before given so lengthy an audience to a mere mortal, and I feared to abuse his kindness. Finally, as the shuddering dawn whitened the window panes, this famous personage,

hymned by so many poets and served by so many philosophers, who laboured to glorify him without ever suspecting it, said to me, “I should like you to remember me kindly, and to prove to you that I, of whom people say so much evil, am sometimes—to employ one of your vulgar phrases—a devilish good fellow, to compensate you for the irremediable loss of your soul, I will give you the stake which you would have won had you been lucky, namely, the power to sustain and conquer during your whole life the strange malady called boredom, which is the source alike of all your diseases and of your wretched progress. Never shall you form a desire but I will help you to realize it; you shall reign over your vulgar fellows; at your service shall be all flatteries, even all adorations; silver and gold and precious stones, and fairy palaces shall come to seek you, shall beg you to accept them without your making a single effort to win them. You shall change country and climate as often as your fancy bids; you shall be drunk with pleasure without weariness, in charming countries where it is always warm, where the women smell as sweet as flowers—and the rest, and the rest—” he added, rising and dismissing me with a friendly smile.

Save for the fear of making a fool of myself before so great an assembly, I would gladly have fallen at the feet of this generous gamester to thank him for his unheard-of munificence; but, little by little, after I had left him, incurable mistrust entered again into my bosom; I no longer dared to believe in such prodigious happiness, and, as I lay down to sleep, kneeling once more in prayer (a tag of imbecile custom!) I repeated, half asleep; “Oh God. Oh Lord my God, do Thou grant that the devil keep his word to me!”

XXX

THE ROPE

TO EDOUARD MANET

ILLUSIONS, my friend was saying, are perhaps as innumerable as the relations of men between themselves or those of men with things; and when illusion disappears, that is to say, when we see the being or the fact as it exists outside ourselves, we experience a curious sentiment; complex, half of regret for the vanished phantom, half of pleased surprise at the novelty before the actual fact. If there be one evident, trivial phenomenon invariably like itself, and about whose nature it is impossible to make a mistake, it is maternal love. It is as difficult to suppose a mother without maternal love as light without heat; is it not then perfectly legitimate to attribute to maternal love all those words and actions which a mother says or does in the matter of her child? And yet, listen to this little story; where I was strangely mystified by the most natural illusion possible.

My profession of painter impels me to look attentively at every face which I see in the course of the day, and you know well what enjoyment we draw from this faculty which renders life more living and significant to our eyes than it is for other men. In the retired district where I dwelt, and where broad brass-covered spaces still separate the buildings, I often saw a child whose eager and merry face attracted me at the first glance more than did that of anyone else. He had posed more than once for me, and I have turned him at one time into a little gipsy, at another into an angel, at another into a Cupid; I have made him carry the stroller's violin, the Crown of Thorns and the Nails of Christ's Passion, and the torch of Eros. I took finally so lively a pleasure in all the droll ways of the gutter snipe that one day I asked his parents—poor folk enough—to give him to me altogether, promising to clothe him well, to give him some money, and not to impose any harder task upon him than that of cleaning my brushes and running my errands. The little fellow, once cleaned up, became charming, and the life which he led in my house seemed to him heaven compared to that which he had undergone in the paternal garret. But I must tell you that the little chap sometimes astonished me by strange attacks of precocious sad-

ness, and that he soon showed an uncontrollable taste for sugar and liqueurs, so much so that one day, having proved to myself that despite my numerous warnings he had committed yet another theft of this nature, I threatened to send him back to his parents. Then I went out, and my business kept me for a fairly long time abroad.

What were not my horror and amazement when, returning to my house, the first object which caught my sight was my good little friend, my life's merry companion, hanging from the panel of the wardrobe! He feet almost touched the floor; a chair which he had doubtless kicked away was overturned beside him; his head was convulsively crooked over one shoulder; his blood-suffused face, and his eyes, wide open, with affrightening fixity, made me think at the first moment that he was alive. To take him down was not so easy a task as you might think; he was already quite stiff, and I had an inexplicable repugnance to let him fall roughly to the ground. I was obliged to hold him up entirely with one arm, and to cut the cord with my free hand; but when that was done, all was not done; the little monster had employed a very thin string, which had cut deeply into his flesh, and now in order to free

his neck I must needs seek out the cord between the two ridges of the cut.

I forgot to tell you that I had called loudly for help, but all my neighbours had refused to come; faithful so far to the customs of civilized man, who is never willing, I know not why, to mix himself up in the business of a suicide. At last a doctor turned dup who said that the child had been dead for several hours. When later on we had to unclothe him for burial the degree of *rigor mortis* was such that, despairing of bending the limbs, we were obliged to tear and cut the clothes to take them off him.

The Commissary of Police, to whom naturally I had to report the incident, looked at me asquint, and said, “This matter needs clearing up,” moved doubtless by an inveterate desire and professional habit to frighten at any cost the innocent as the guilty.

There remained one supreme task to accomplish, whose mere thought caused me dreadful anguish; I must inform his parents. My feet refused to take to their door. At last I summoned up sufficient courage, but, to my great astonishment, the mother showed no emotion; not one tear oozed from the corner of her eye. I attributed this strangeness to the horror itself which she must be suffering; and I remembered the well-known apophthegm,

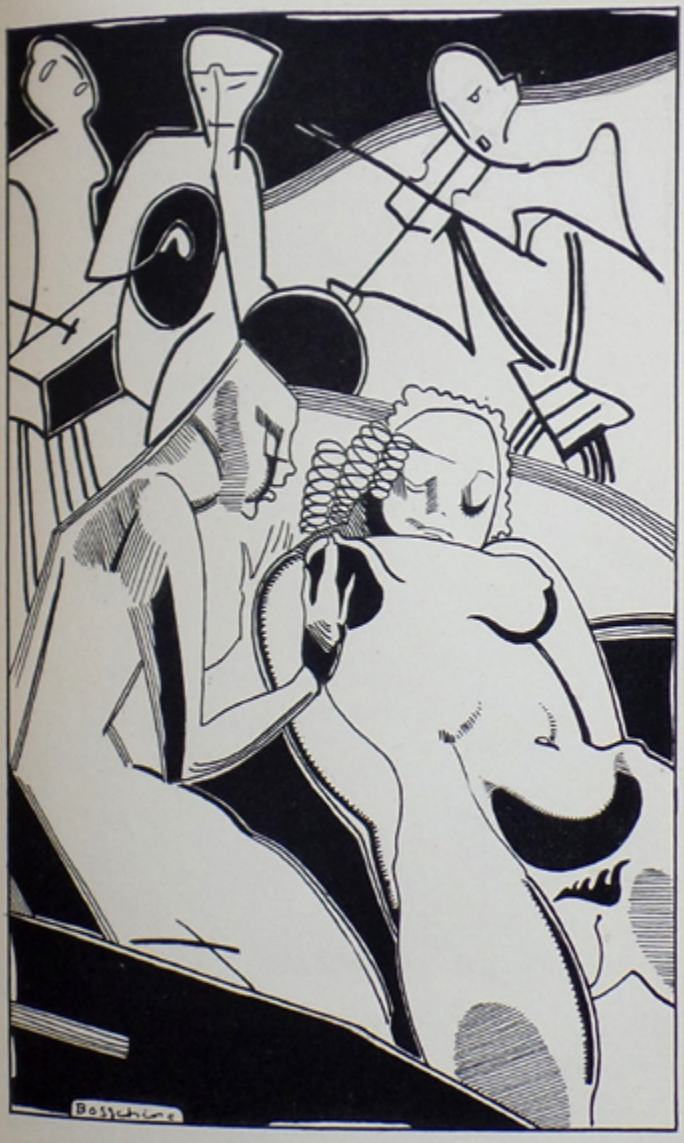
“The most terrible sorrows are those which find no voice.” As to the father, he contented himself with saying, half stupidly, half dreamily, “After all, it is perhaps for the best; he was sure to finish badly.”

However, the body was stretched on my divan, and, with the aid of a servant I was busying myself with the final preparations when the mother came into my studio. She wished, she said, to see the body of her son. I could not, of course, prevent her from intoxicating herself with her unhappiness; I could not refuse her this supreme, this sombre consolation. By and by she begged me to show her the place where her little boy had hanged himself. “Oh no,” I answered her; “that will do you no good,” and as, involuntarily, my eyes turned towards the fatal wardrobe, I saw, with disgust mingles with horror and anger, that the nail remained fixed in the wall with a long piece of rope still hanging to it. I darted forward rapidly to tear down these last traces of the catastrophe, and as I was going to throw them out of the open window the poor woman seized my arm and said to me in a voice too earnest to resist, “Oh Sir, leave me that; I beg you, I beseech you.” Her despair had doubtless, it seemed to me, so disturbed her brain that it had begotten a tenderness for the instrument of her son’s death,

and she wished to keep it as a relic at once horrible and dear—and she took possession of the nail and the cord.

At last, at last, all was over. There was nothing more to do but to go back to work even more eagerly than was my custom, so as to drive away, little by little, this tiny corpse which haunted the halls of my brain, and whose phantom with its great fixed eyes wore me out. But the next day I received a packet of letters, some from the tenants in my own house, some from next door; one from the first floor, another from the second, another from the third, and so on; some of them written in a half-jesting style as if seeking to disguise under the cloak of frivolity the sincerity of their request; others dully shameless and misspelt, but all of the same purport, namely, to obtain from me a piece of the fatal, the happiness-conferring cord. Among the signatories there were, I must say, more women than men, but not all, you may believe it, belonged to the lowest class or even to the vulgar. I have kept these letters.

And then, of a sudden, light broke in my brain; I understood why the mother was so anxious to take away the cord, and by what commerce she proposed to console herself.



XXXI

THE JOYS OF THE SOUL

IN a fair garden, where the rays of the autumnal sun seemed to linger in enjoyment, beneath a sky already greenish where golden clouds floated like travelling continents, four lovely children, boys, tired without a doubt of playing, were talking among themselves. One of them said: “Yesterday Papa took me to the theatre. There are big, sad palaces, beyond which one sees the sea and the sky, and in them there are men and women very serious and very sad too; but much more beautiful and better dressed than the people we see about, and they talk in a singing voice. They threaten each other, they beseech, they lament, they often put their hand to daggers that they have in their sashes; oh, but it is beautiful! The ladies are much lovelier and taller than the ones that come to see us at home, and though they look terrible with their big hollow eyes and flaming cheeks, you cannot help loving them; you are afraid, you want to cry, and yet all the time you are happy. . . . And then, funnier

than that, you want to be dressed like them, and do and say the same things and speak with the same voice . . .”

One of the four children, who for some seconds past was no longer listening to his talk, but with a startling fixity had fastened his gaze upon I knew not what point of heaven, said suddenly, “Look, look there; do you see Him? He is sitting on that little lonely cloud, that little fire-coloured cloud that moves so softly, and He too—one would say that He was looking at us.”

“But who then?” asked the others.

“God,” he replied, with an accent of perfect conviction. “Ah, He is already very far away—in a moment you will not be able to see Him any more; I think He must be travelling, to visit every country.—There, there! He is going to pass behind that row of trees that is almost on the horizon; and now He is going down behind the steeple. Ah, I cannot see Him any more.” And the child remained for long turned in the same direction, fixing upon the line which cuts earth from heaven a pair of eyes which shone with an inexpressive expression of ecstasy and of regret.

“Silly baby, with His God that nobody but he can see,” then said the third, all of whose little personality was marked by a strange vivacity

and vitality. “I am going to tell you something happened to me which never happened to you, and which is a little more interesting than your theatre and your clouds. Some days ago Father and Mother took me away with them, and as in the inn where we stopped there were not enough beds for us all, it was decided that I should sleep in the same bed as my nurse.” He drew his comrades nearer to him, and lowered his voice. “Oh, you do not know what a strange feeling it gives, not to be alone in bed, but with one’s nurse in the shadows. As I was not asleep, I amused myself while she slept in passing my hand over her arms and her neck and her shoulders. Her arms and neck are ever so much fatter tan those of all other women, and her skin is so soft, so soft, that one would say it was letter paper, or silk paper. I had so much pleasure in this that I should have gone on for quite a long time if I had not been afraid, afraid of her waking up, and afraid too of I do not know what. Afterwards I pushed my head among her hair, which hung down her back as thick as a mane, and it smelt as nice, I assure you, as the flowers in the garden do now. Try, when you get a chance, to do as much as I, and you will see.”

The young author of this prodigious disclosure, as he told his story, had his eyes strained

open by a sort of stupefaction called up by what he still felt, and the rays of the setting sun, slipping through the red curls of his tangled hair, enkindled as it were a sulphurous aureole of passion. It was easy to guess that he would not waste his life looking for Divinity in clouds, and that he would find it often enough elsewhere.

Finally the fourth said, “You know that I hardly ever play in the house, they never take me to the theatre; my governor is too stingy. God takes no trouble over me and my weariness, and I have not a pretty nurse to cuddle me. It has often seemed to me that my pleasure would be in going always straight in front of me without knowing where, without any person troubling themselves about it, and seeing always new countries. I am never comfortable anywhere, and I always believe that I should be better anywhere else but where I am. Well, let me tell you! I saw at the last Fair in the next village three men, who live as I should like to live. You never noticed them; they were tall, almost black, and very proud, although in rags, with the air of having need of nobody. Their large dark eyes became quite brilliant while they made music; a music so surprising, so exciting, that it makes one want first to dance and then to weep and then to do

both at once, and I think one would become quite mad if one listened too long. One of them, drawing his bow across his violin, seemed to tell the story of some grievance, and the other, making his little hammer dance upon the strings of a little piano that was hung to his neck by a strap, seemed to be laughing at his neighbor's complaint, while the third from time to time clashed his cymbals with an extraordinary violence. They were so pleased with themselves that they kept on playing their wild men's music even after the crowd had dispersed; finally they gathered up the half-pence that had been thrown them, slung their luggage on their backs, and went off. I wanted to know where they lived, so I followed them a long way off, right to the edge of the forest, and only then did I understand that they did not live anywhere. The one said, 'Shall I undo the tent?' 'Lord, no!' said the other, 'on a night like this.' The third said, as he counted up their money, 'These pigs do not appreciate music, and their women dance like bears. Luckily, before the month is up we shall be in Austria, where the folk are pleasanter.'

" 'Perhaps we should do better to go down to Spain; the year is getting on,' says one of the others. 'Let us run away from the rain and get nothing wet but our throats!'

“I remembered everything, as you see. By and by they each drank a glass of brandy and went to sleep, their foreheads turned up to the stars. I wanted so much to ask them to take me away with them and teach me to play on their instruments, but I did not dare; no doubt because it is always very difficult to decide to do anything, whatever it is, and also because I was afraid of being caught before getting outside France.”

His three comrades showed little interest, which gave me to think “This little fellow is already an unintelligible.” I looked at him attentively; in his eye and upon his brow there sate some precocious hint of doom, a thing which generally disarms, so to say, and which, I know not why, excited me to the point that for an instant I had a bizarre idea that I might have a brother unknown to myself.

The sun was set. The solemn night was falling; the children parted, each one going, unknown to himself, the prey of chance and circumstance, to ripen his destiny, to scandalize his neighbours, to gravitate towards glory or towards shame.

XXXII

THE THYRSUS:

DEDICATED TO FRANZ LISZT

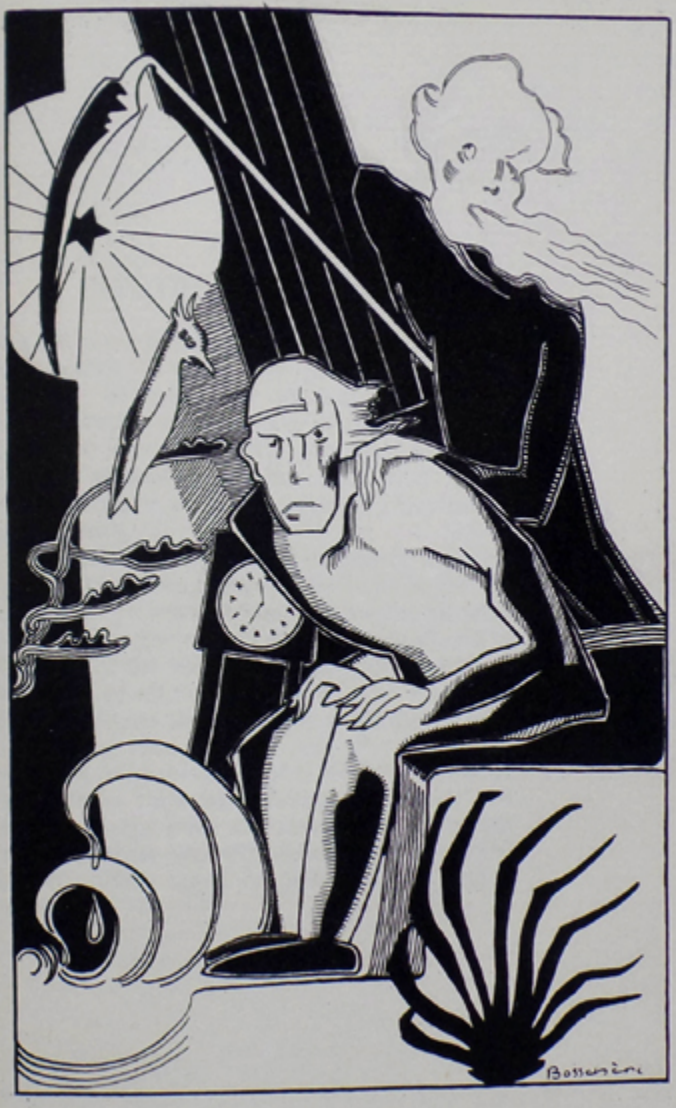
WHAT is the Thyrsus? In the moral and poetic sense it is a sacerdotal emblem borne in the hands of priests or priestesses when they celebrate the Divinity whose interpreters and servants they are. But physically it is nothing but a stick, a mere stick, hop-pole or vine-prop; or, hard, and straight. Around this stick, in capricious meanderings, sport and frolic tendrils and blossoms, those sinuous and evasive, these hanging like bells or inverted cups, and an astounding glory shoots forth from this complexity of line and tender or brilliant colour. Might not one say that the curved line and the spiral are paying court to the straight line. and dance it in dumb worship? Might not one say that all these delicate corollae, all these calyxes, these eruptions of odour and colour, execute a mysterious fandango around the hieratic staff; and nevertheless, who is the imprudent mortal who will dare to decide if the

flowers and the leaves have been made for the stick, or if the stick is but a pretext to display the beauty of the leaves and of the flowers? The thyrsus is a symbol of your astonishing duality, Franz Liszt, powerful and revered master, dear Bacchante of mysterious and passionate beauty. Never did nymph, frenzied by unconquerable Bacchus, shake her thyrsus over the heads of her maddened companions with so much energy and caprice as you when you wield your genius upon the hearts of your brothers!—

The staff is your will; straight, stiff, unshakable. The flowers are the dance of your fancy around your will; it is the female element executing its spell-weaving around the male; straight line and arabesque line; intention and expression; rigidity of the will, sinuosity of the word; unity of end, variety of emotions. Omnipotent and indivisible amalgam of genius, what analyst will find the hateful courage to dissect and separate you?

Dear Liszt, across the fogs, beyond the rivers, above the towns whose musical instruments acclaim your glory, where the printer's press interprets your wisdom, in whatever place you may be, in the splendours of the eternal city or among the folks of the dreamy countries which Gambrinus consoles, improvis-

ing songs of delight or of sorrow ineffable, or confiding to paper your abstruse meditations, bard of eternal pleasure and eternal anguish, philosopher, poet and artist, I hail thee, Immortal!



XXXIII

INTOXICATE YOURSELF!

ONE must always be drunk. Everything lies in that; it is the only question worth considering. In order not to feel the horrible burden of time which breaks your shoulders and bows you down to earth, you must intoxicate yourself without truce, but with what? With wine, poetry, or art?—As you will; but intoxicate yourself.

And if sometimes upon the steps of a palace, or upon the green grass of a moat, or in the sad solitude of your own room, you awake, intoxication already diminished or disappeared, ask of the wind, of the wave, of the star, of the bird, of the clock, of all that flies, of all that groans, of all that rolls, of all that sings, of all that speaks,—ask what time is it? And the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, will answer you, “It is time to intoxicate yourself.” In order to escape from the slavish martyrdom of time, intoxicate yourself, unceasingly intoxicate yourself;—with wine, or poetry, or art, which you will.

XXXIV

ALREADY!

A HUNDRED times already the sun had sprung radiant or saddened from that vast basin of the sea whose shores scarce let themselves be seen; a hundred times already it had plunged again sparkling or morose into its immense evening bath; for many days we were able to contemplate the other side of the firmament and decipher the celestial Alphabet of the Antipodes, and each of the passengers grumbled and scolded. One would have said that getting near to land increased their suffering; “When then,” they cried, “shall we cease to sleep a sleep that is shaken by the wave, disturbed by a wind that snores louder than we do? When shall we be able to digest our dinners in a motionless armchair?”

Some of them thought of their fire-side, regretted their faithless and sullen wives, their squalling offspring. They were all so obsessed by the image of the absent land that I think they would have eaten grass more enthusiastically than do cattle. At last we sighted the

shore, and as we approached, behold it was a land magnificent and dazzling; it seemed that all the harmonious sounds of life came from it in a vague murmur, and that from this coast, wealthy in every sort of greenery, there exhaled to a distance of many leagues a delicious odour of flowers and fruits.

Immediately everyone was joyful, and ill-humour departed; all quarrels were forgotten, all wrongs pardoned. The duels which had been arranged were erased from memory, and ill-will fled away like clouds of smoke.

I alone was sad, inconceivably sad. Like a priest from whom one should ravish his Divinity, I could not without heart-breaking bitterness tear myself from this sea, so monstrously seductive, from this sea so infinitely varied in its terrifying simplicity; this sea which seems to contain in itself and to represent by its play, its enticements, its rages and its smiles, the dispositions, the agonies and the ecstasies of every soul that hath ever lived, that lives, that ever shall live.

As I bade farewell to this incomparable beauty I felt myself smitten down even to death, and therefore whenever one of my companions cried “At last!” I was only able to cry “Already!”

And yet it was land; land with its noises, its passions, its conveniences, its festivals; a rich and magnificent country full of fair promise, which sent to us a mysterious perfume of rose and musk, and whence in an amorous murmur came to us all the music of life.

XXXV

WINDOWS

WHOSO looks from without into an open window never sees so much as he who looks at a closed window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more darksome, more dazzling, than a window lighted by a candle. What one may see in sunlight is always less interesting than what passes behind the glass. In this black or shining cavity life lives, life dreams, life suffers.

Beyond the waves of roof I see a woman, middle-aged, already wrinkled, poor, always bending over something, who never goes out. With her face, her clothing, her gesture, almost nothing, I have re-constructed the story of this woman;—or rather, her legend. And sometimes I tell it to myself, and weep.

If it had been a poor old man, I could have reconstructed his history just as easily.

And I lie down to sleep, proud of having lived and suffered in others than myself.

Perhaps you will say to me, “Are you sure that your fairy tale is true?”

What does outside reality matter to me, if my imagination has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?

XXXVI

THE DESIRE OF PAINTING

UNHAPPY perhaps is the man, but happy is the artist whom desire tears in pieces.

I am on fire to paint her who appeared to me so rarely and who fled so quickly, like a beautiful, regrettable thing which the traveller, borne away into the night, leaves behind him. How long it is since she disappeared.

She is beautiful, and more than beautiful. She is surprising. In her black abounds, and every thought that she inspires is of night and the abyss. Her eyes are two caverns where mystery sparkles vaguely, and her glance kindles like lightning. It is an explosion in the depths of shadow.

I would compare her to a black sun; if one could imagine a black star that shed light and happiness; but she makes one think more readily of the moon, which doubtless has marked her with its fearful influence. Not the white idyllic moon, which resembles a cold bride, but the sinister, intoxicating moon, hung from the height of a stormy night and jostled

by the hurtling clouds. Not the peaceful and discreet moon that visits the slumber of chaste men, but the moon, torn from heaven, conquered, yet in revolt, that Thessalian witches force by their strong spell to dance on the affrighted grass.

Beneath her narrow brow dwell tenacious will and lust of prey; and yet on this disquieting countenance, where the mobile nostrils sniff up the unknown and the impossible, there breaks forth with ineffable grace the laughter of a great mouth red and white and delicious; as who should dream of the miracle of a superb flower blossoming on volcanic soil.

There are women who fill one with desire to conquer them and to enjoy them, but she makes me wish to die by inches underneath her eyes.

XXXVII

THE MOON'S GIFTS

THE Moon, who is caprice itself looked in at the window while thou dost sleep in they cradle, and said to herself, "This child pleases me."

Softly she descended her ladder of clouds and passed noiselessly through the window-panes. Then she stretched herself upon thee with the supple tenderness of a mother, and laid her colours on thy face. From that thine eyes are turned green, and thy cheeks are marvellous pale. It is through looking at this celestial visitant that thine eyes are grown so strangely large, and she has so tenderly fastened on thy throat that thou hast therefore kept for ever the desire to weep.

And yet in the overflowing of her joy the moon filled all the room like a phosphorescent atmosphere, like a luminous poison, and all this living light was thinking and saying: "Thou shalt know eternally the influence of my kiss; thou shalt be beautifully in my fashion. Thou shalt love that which I love and which loves

me;—the Water, the Clouds, Silence, Night; the vast green Sea, the shapeless water that hath many shapes; the place where thou art not, the lover that thou knowest not, monstrous flowers and delirious perfumes, cats that swoon at music and groan as women do with harsh, soft voice.

“And thou shalt be loved of my lovers, courted by my courtiers. Thou shalt be the queen of those men whose eyes are green and whose throats I have clutched in my nocturnal caresses: of those who love the sea, the vast, tumultuous sea, the shapeless water that hath many shapes, the place where they are not, the women whom they know not; the sinister flowers that resemble the thuribles of an unknown religion; the perfumes that trouble the will, and the savage and voluptuous beasts that are the symbols of their madness.

And it is for that, spoilt child accursèd and belovèd, that I am crouched this moment at thy feet, seeking in all thy being the reflection of that fearful Divinity, that god-mother prophetic, that poisonous nurse of all the madmen-of-the-moon.

XXXVIII

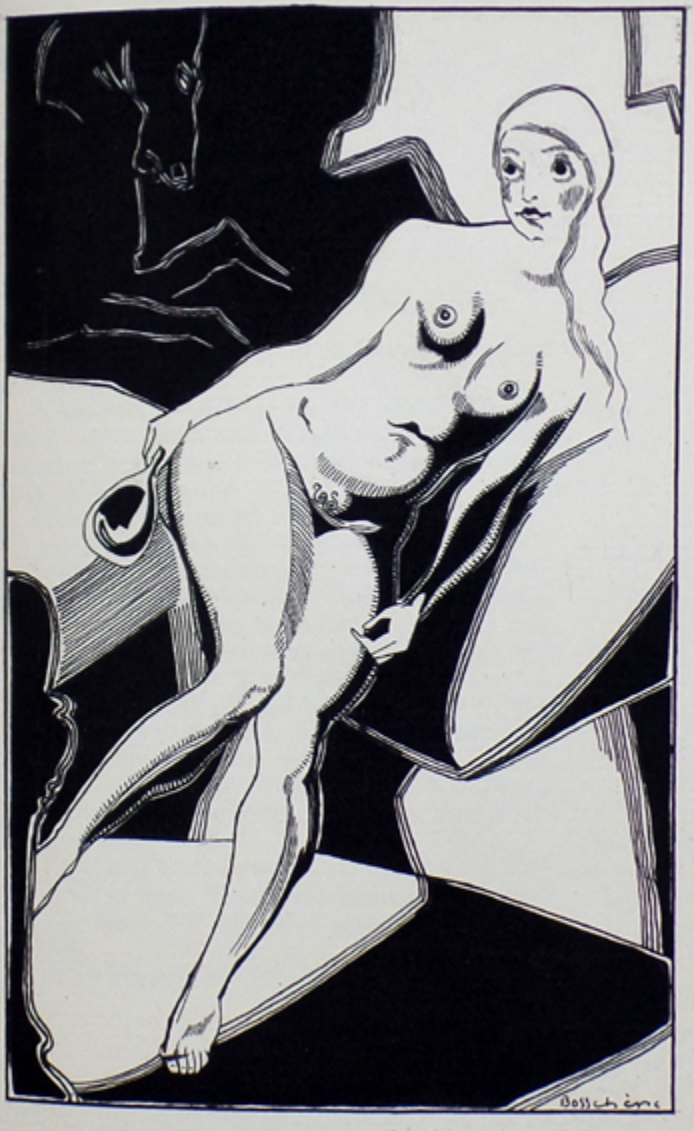
WHICH IS THE TRUE ONE?

I ONCE knew a girl called Benedicta, who filled the atmosphere with the ideal, whose eyes shed forth the desire of greatness, beauty, glory, all that which makes a man believe in immortality.

But this miraculous girl was too lovely to live long, and some days after I had become acquainted with her she died. It was I myself that buried her, one day when the Spring swung its thurible even within cemeteries. It was I that buried her, well shut up into a bier of perfumed wood, incorruptible as are the coffers of India.

And as my eyes remained fastened on the place wherein was buried my treasure, I saw (on a sudden) a little person who resembled the dead woman strangely; who, stamping on the fresh earth with a strange and hysterical violence, shouted with laughter, and said, “I am the real Benedicta, and a rare bitch I am! and for the punishment of your folly and blindness you shall love me all the same.” I, furi-

ous, answered, “No, no, no!” and to emphasize my refusal I struck the ground so firmly with my foot that my leg buried itself to the knee in the fresh-turned earth, and like a wolf taken in a snare I remain attached, perhaps for ever, to the grave of the ideal.



XXXIX

THOROUGHBRED

SHE is ugly enough, in all conscience, and yet how delicious she is!

Time and Love have set the mark of their claws upon her, and taught her cruelly how much of youth and freshness each minute and each kiss carry away.

Verily, she is ugly! She is an ant, a spider, if you will; even a skeleton:—but also she is a love-draught, a magistry, a sorcery! Take her all in all, she is exquisite. Time has not been able to destroy the sparkling rhythm of her walk, or the indestructible elegance of her apparel. Love has not altered the suavity of her child's breath; Time has torn no hair from her wild flowing mane, whence is exhaled in tawny perfume all the devil of South French vitality—Nîmes, Aix, Arles, Avignon, Narbonne, Toulouse, towns amorous, charming, blessed of our father the Sun.

Time and Love have attacked her tooth and nail, but in vain. They have diminished nothing

of the vague but eternal charm of her boyish breast.

Worn out perhaps, but not weary, and always heroic, she makes one think of those splendid thoroughbreds which the eye of the true lover of horses can recognize even in the shafts of a cab or a dray.

And then she is so sweet and fervent; she loves as one loves in autumn; one would say that the approach of winter kindles a new fire in her heart, and the servility of her tenderness has no element that might weary one therein.

XL

THE MIRROR

A SHOCKINGLY ugly man comes in and looks at himself in the glass.

“Why do you look at yourself in the mirror, since you cannot see yourself there but with displeasure?” Sir Ugly answers me, “Sir, according to the immortal principles of the year ‘89, all men have equal rights; ergo, I possess the right of looking at myself,—whether with pleasure or chagrin is no one’s business but my own.”

In the name of good sense, I was doubtless right; but from a legal standpoint he was certainly not wrong.

XLI

THE HARBOUR

A HARBOUR is a charming resting-place for a soul weary of the struggles of life. The amplitude of the sky, the mobile architecture of the clouds, the changing hues of the sea, the sparkling of the lighthouses, are a prism, marvellously fitted to amuse the eyes without ever tiring them. The slender shapes of the ships with their complicated rigging on which the swell imprints its harmonious oscillations, serve to banquet the pleasure of rhythm and beauty in the soul. And above all, there is a sort of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure for him who has no longer either curiosity or ambition to lie upon the terrace or to lean upon the quay and watch in contemplative mood the movements of those who come and go, of those who have still the force to will, the desire to travel or to acquire riches.

XLII

PORTRAITS OF MISTRESSES

IN a man's boudoir, that is to say, in the smoking-room of a fashionable gambling hell, four men were smoking and drinking. They were not precisely old or young, they bore that unmistakable distinction which belongs to the veterans of Marshal Joy, that indescribable—I know not what to call it—that cold and bantering sadness which clearly says, "We have lived strongly, and we seek something to admire and to respect."

One of them turned the conversation to the subject of women. It would have been more philosophical not to speak of it at all, but many witty persons after drinking do not despise commonplace talk. At such times one listens to whoever is speaking as one listens to dance music.

"Every man," one of them was saying, "has passed through the age of Chérubin; I mean the time when, in default of dryads, one kisses trunks of trees without disgust; that is the first grade of love; in the second grade one begins

to select; to be able to deliberate is already a decadence. It is then that one definitely hunts for beauty; as for me, gentlemen, I flatter myself that I have arrived long since at the climacteric epoch of the third grade, when beauty itself no longer suffices unless it is seasoned by perfume, *adornment,* and the rest. I will even admit that I sometimes aspire as if to an unknown happiness, to a certain fourth degree, whose stigma should be perfect calm; but, during my life, except at the age of Chérubin, I have been more sensitive than anyone else in the world to the enervating foolishness, the irritating mediocrity of women. What I love above all in animals is their frankness; judge them, what I must have suffered with my last mistress.

"She was a prince's bastard. Beautiful, it goes without saying; without that, why should I have taken her? But she spoilt that great quality by an unbecoming and deformed ambition. She was a woman who always wished to play a man's part:—'You are not a man; Oh, if only I were a man!—of us two it is I who am the man.' Such were the insupportable refrains that came ever from that mouth from which surely only songs should have flown. Talking of a book, or a poem, or an opera, for which I happened to express my admiration, 'You think

perhaps that that is very strong,' she would say immediately; 'I suppose that you are an authority on strength'; and she would argue the point.

"One fine day she took to chemistry, so that henceforth I found a mask of glass between my mouth and hers. With all that, she was very prudish; if at any time I shocked her by a too amorous gesture she writhed like a victim of rape."

"How did that finish?" said one of the three others; "I did not know you were so patient."

"For every evil," he replied, "God has appointed a remedy. One day I found this Minerva (an-hungered for ideal strength) engaged in a private interview with my servant, in a situation which compelled me to return discretely lest I should cause them to blush. That evening I discharged them both, and paid them the arrears of their wages."

"As for me," replied the man who had interrupted, "I have no one to complain of but myself. Happiness came to live with me, and I did not realize it. Destiny had lately granted me the enjoyment of a woman who was indeed the sweetest, the most submissive and the most devoted creature possible, always ready, and without enthusiasm!—'I should like it very much, if it is agreeable to you,' was her ordi-

nary answer. If you were to thrash the wall or the curtain you would draw more sighs from them than the ecstasies of the most frenzied love would draw from the breast of my mistress. After a year of life together she admitted to me that she had never known what pleasure was. I became disgusted with the unequal contest, and this incomparable girl got married. Later, the fancy took me to see her again, and she said, presenting to me six fine children, 'Ah well, my dear, the wife is still as virgin as your mistress was.' In her nothing had changed. Sometime I regret her; I ought to have married her."

The others began to laugh, and the third said in his turn:

"Gentlemen, I have known enjoyments which you have possibly neglected—I mean the comic side of love; a side which does not exclude admiration. I admired my last mistress more than I think you hated or loved yours. And everyone admired her as much as I did. When we went into a restaurant, at the end of some minutes everyone forgot to eat in order to look at her. The waiters themselves, and the lady at the cash-desk, felt the contagious ecstasy so strangely that they would forget their duties. In short, I lived for some time alone with a living phenomenon. She ate, chewed,

munched, devoured, swallowed, but with the lightest and most careless air in the world. She retained me long enough in ecstasy; she had a soft, dreamy, English, romantic way of saying, 'I am hungry.' And she repeated these words day and night, showing the prettiest teeth in the world, which would have softened and enlivened you at the same time. I might have made my fortune by showing her at fairs as the 'Polyphagous Wonder.' I fed her well, and yet she left me."

"For a provision merchant, no doubt?"

"Something of the sort—an officer of commissariat, who, by some wizardry, was probably able to supply the poor child with the rations of several soldiers,—or so at least I suppose."

"I," said the fourth, "have endured atrocious suffering from the contrary quality to that with which the female egoist is generally reproached. I find you ungracious, Oh too fortunate mortals, in complaining of the imperfections of your mistresses."

This was said in a very serious voice by a man of easy and composed aspect, of an almost clerical physiognomy, unhappily lighted by eyes of clear gray: eyes of that kind whose glance says, "I will," or "You must," or, "I never forgive."

“If, nervous as I know you to be, you, G——, easy-going and light-hearted as you are, K—— and J——, if you had been harnessed with a certain woman that I knew, you would have either fled or died. I have survived, as you see. Imagine to yourself a person incapable of committing an error of sentiment or of calculation. Imagine to yourselves a devastating serenity of character, a devotion without comedy and without emphasis, a sweetness without weakness, an energy without violence. The history of my love resembles an interminable voyage upon a pure and polished surface like a mirror, monotonous enough to make one giddy, which would have reflected all my sentiments and my gestures with the ironical exactitude of my own consciousness, so that I could never permit myself a gesture or an unreasonable sentiment without immediately perceiving the mute reproach of my inseparable spectre. Love appeared to me as a tutelage.—How many silly actions she prevented me from doing which I regret not having committed! How many debts paid despite myself! She deprived me of all the benefits which I might have drawn from my personal folly; with a cold and untransgressible rule she set up a bar against all my caprices; to crown the horror, she did not exact thanks when the danger was

past. How many times did I not hold myself back from leaping at her throat and crying, ‘Be imperfect then for once, wretched woman, that I may love you without discomfort and anger.’ For several years I admired her, my heart full of hatred. In the end it was not I who died of it.”

“Ah,” said the others, “she died, then?”

“Yes, it could not go on like that. Love had become for me a crushing nightmare; to conquer or die, as the political phrase goes, was the alternative which Fate laid upon me. One evening in a wood by the shore of a mere, after a melancholy walk where her eyes, hers, reflected the softness of heaven, and my heart, mine, shuddered like hell——”

{ “What!”
“How”
“What do you mean?”

“It was inevitable. My sense of justice is too strong to allow me to beat, insult or dismiss an irreproachable servant; but I had to reconcile this sentiment with the horror with which this being inspired me: to disencumber myself without lacking in respect. What would you that I should do with her, since she was perfect?”

The three other men looked at their companion with a vague and slightly stupefied

glance, as if pretending not to understand, as if admitting implicitly that they did not feel themselves capable of so stern an action, explicable enough as it was.

Then they sent the waiter for fresh bottles to kill time, whose life is so hard; and quicken life, which flows so slowly.

XLIII

THE POLITE GUNNER

AS the carriage rolled through the wood, he stopped it in the neighbourhood of a shooting gallery, saying that it would be agreeable to him to fire a few shots to kill time. To kill that monster is surely the most ordinary and legitimate occupation of all of us, is it not?

And he offered politely his hand to his beloved, delicious, execrable wife, to the mysterious woman to whom he owes so many pleasures, so many sorrows, and perhaps also a great part of his genius.

Several balls struck far from the bull's-eye; one of them even buried itself in the ceiling. And as the charming creature laughed wildly, in mockery of her husband's bad shooting, he turned sharply towards her and said, "You see that doll down there on the right with its nose in the air and so haughty an expression?—Well, my dear angel, I imagine to myself that it is you," and he shut his eyes and pulled the trigger. The doll was cleanly beheaded.

Then, bending towards his beloved, his delicious, his execrable wife, his inevitable and pitiless muse, he kissed her hand respectfully, and added, “Ah, dear angel, how I thank you for my skill!”

XLIV

THE SOUP AND THE CLOUDS

MY small beloved mad girl had invited me to dinner, and through the open window of the dining-room I contemplated the moving architecture that God has made of vapour, the marvellous buildings of the impalpable, and I said to myself in my contemplation, “All these phantasmagoria are almost as beautiful as the eyes of my beautiful, wild girl with the green eyes.”

And then, suddenly, I received a violent blow in the back, and I heard a raucous, charming voice, an hysterical voice, a voice made hoarse by brandy, the voice of my dear, small, well-beloved girl, that said, “When are you going to eat your soup, you dirty old cloud-monger?”

XLV

THE CEMETERY AND THE SHOOTING-GALLERY

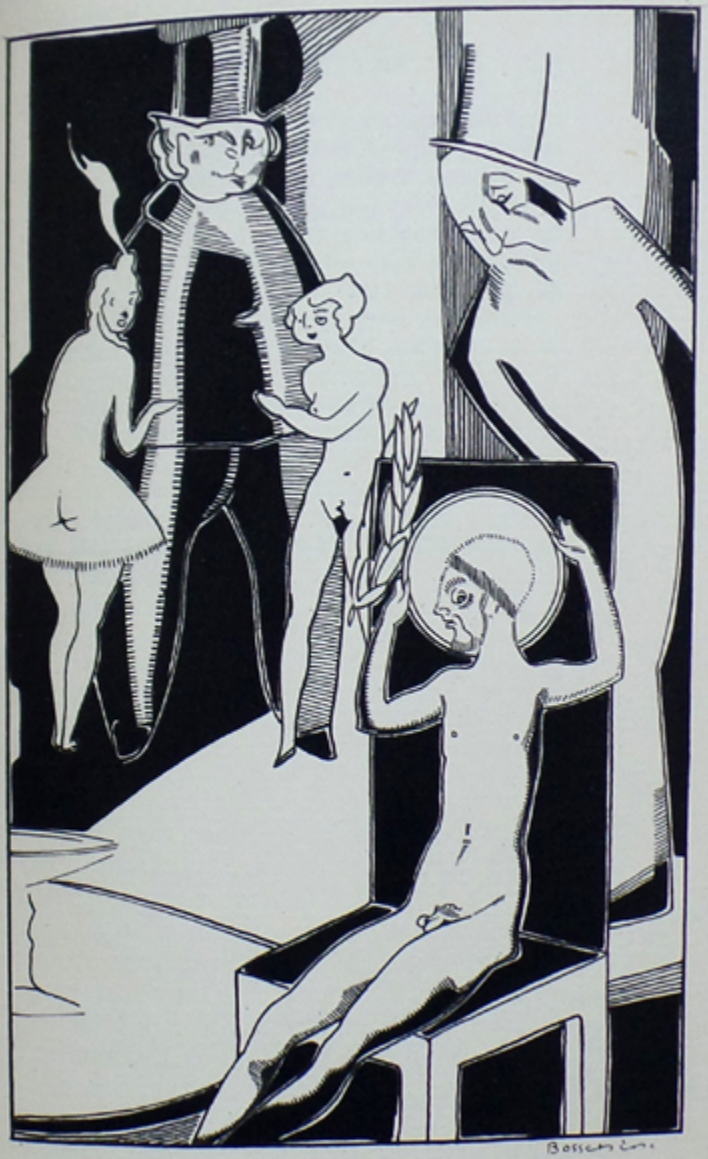
GRAVEYARD View Hotel! “Singular announcement,” said the stroller to himself, “but well calculated to produce thirst. Sure enough, the master of this inn must appreciate Horace and the poets of the school of Epicurus; perhaps even he knows the refinement of the old Egyptians, who held no festival without a skeleton or some other emblem of the shortness of life.”

In he went, drank a glass of beer opposite the tombstones, and slowly smoked a cigar. Then the fancy took him to go into the cemetery whose grass was so tall and so inviting, and where so rich a sun held sway.

In effect, the light and the heat were revelling there, and one would have said that the drunken sun was wallowing at all its length upon a carpet of magnificent flowers nourished upon destruction. An immense rustle of life filled the air; the life of things infinitely small, which was interrupted at regular intervals by

the rattle of the shots of a neighboring gallery, which burst like the explosion of champagne corks amid the murmur of a muffled symphony.

Then, under the sun which warmed his brain and in the atmosphere of the burning perfumes of death, he heard a voice whisper beneath the tomb where he was seated, and this voice said, “Accursed be your targets and your guns, ye noisy folk that are alive, who care so little for the dead and their divine rest! Accursed be your ambitions, accursed be your calculations, impatient mortals, who come to study the art of slaying so close to the sanctuary of death! If you knew how easy the prize was to gain, how easy the mark was to hit, and how all is nothing except death, you would not take so much trouble, O toilsome folk that are alive, and you would trouble less often the slumber of those who long since have hit the mark, the sole true mark of detestable life.”



XLVI

A LOST HALO

“HULLO! are *you* here, my dear fellow?—*You*, in a house of ill repute; you who disdained all drink but the Quintessance, all is matter for surprise in this.”

“My dear boy, you know how horses and carriages frighten me; just now, as I was crossing the street in a great hurry, tip-toeing in the mud, across the moving chaos where Death arrives at a gallop from every side at once, my halo, in the course of a sharp movement, slipped from my hand into the mire of the street. I had not the courage to pick it up. I thought it less unpleasant to lose my decorations than to break my bones. And then I said to myself—’Every cloud has a silver lining; I shall now be able to walk about incognito; to do degrading things, give myself up to vice like mere mortals.’—And here I am, just like yourself, as you see.”

“You might at least have offered a reward for your halo, or reported its loss at the Police-station!”

“Not much!—I am perfectly at ease here; you are the only person that has recognized me; moreover, dignity bores me, and besides that, I am gladdened by the thought that some bad poet will pick it up and impudently crown himself therewith. To make anyone happy—there is a pleasure for you! And above all, a person at whom I can laugh. Think of Yeats, or Noyes, or Masefield—Jove! that would be funny!”

XLVII

MISS BISTOURI

AS I came to the end of the suburb under the gaslight I felt an arm slipped gently under mine, and heard a voice which said in my ear, “Are you a doctor, Sir?”

I looked; it was a tall girl, strongly built, with wide-open eyes, slightly rouged, her hair floating in the wind with her bonnet strings.

“No, I am not a doctor, I am sure of it. Come home with me, you will be very pleased with me, I know.”

“Doubtless I will come and see you, later on.”

“Ah, ah,” said she, still clinging to my arm and shaking with laughter, “you are a doctor who is fond of his joke; I have known several like that; come along.”

I passionately love the mysterious, because I always hope to unravel it; so I let myself be carried off by this companion, or rather by this unhoped-for problem.

I omit the description of her garret. You may find it in plenty of classical French poets;

only—a detail which Régnier failed to observe—two or three portraits of famous doctors hung from the walls.

How I was petted! There was a big fire, hot wine, cigars; and while offering me these good things, and herself lighting a cigar, the little buffoon said to me, “Make yourself quite at home, dear boy; this will remind you of the hospital and the happy days of youth. Ah, where did you get this white hair? You were not like that when you were house-surgeon under L——, not so long ago, either. I remember that it was you who helped him in major operations.—There, if you like, was a man who loved cutting, trimming and lopping! It was you who looked after his instruments, his thread and his sponges, and the operation completed, how proudly he would say, looking at his watch, ‘Five minutes, gentlemen.’ Oh yes, I go everywhere. I know these gentlemen very well.”

A moment later she addressed me more familiarly, resuming her previous manner, and said, “You are a doctor, aren’t you, my dear?”

This unintelligible refrain made me leap to my feet. “No!” I cried furiously.

“A surgeon, then?”

“No, no, I tell you,—unless it were to cut off your head. Dirty damned a——— of dirty s———!

“Wait,” said she, “you shall see.” And she pulled a bundle of papers from a wardrobe. It was nothing less than a collection of portraits of all the illustrious doctors of the period, lithographed by Maurin, just as you may have seen them exposed for sale upon the Quai Voltaire.

“Hullo, do you recognize this one?”

“Yes, it is X——; the name is on the bottom of the photograph anyhow, but I know him personally.”

“I was sure of it. See, there is Z——, the man who said to his students in speaking of X——, ‘This monster who bears the blackness of his soul upon his face’ just because he did not agree with him. How one laughed at that in the Medical School long ago!—You will remember? Ah, there is K——, who denounced to the Government the rebels who were in his care at the hospital. It was when the riots were on. How is it possible that so handsome a man should have had so mean a soul? And here now is W——, a famous English doctor. I picked him up while he was in Paris. He looks just like a young lady, doesn’t he?” And as I touched a packet tied up with string that lay on the little round table,—

“Wait a moment,” said she; “those are the house-surgeons, and in this packet are students. And she spread out like a fan a whole lot of photographs representing much younger faces.

“When we see each other next you will give me your portrait, won’t you darling?”

“But,” said I to her, pursuing in my turn my own fixed idea, “why do you think I am a doctor?”

“Because you are so nice, and so kind to women.”

“Singular logic,” said I to myself.

“Oh, I am hardly ever deceived, I have known ever so many of them. I love doctors so much, that although I am not ill I sometimes go and see them just for the pleasure of seeing them. Some of them say coldly to me, ‘There is nothing the matter with you,’ but there are others who understand me because I make eyes at them.”

“And when they fail to understand you?”

“Why, as I bother them uselessly, I leave ten francs upon the mantelpiece. They are so kind and so gentle, these men. I discovered at La Pitié a little house-surgeon who is as pretty as an angel, and oh, so polite, and works—the poor boy—how he works! His comrades told me that he had no money because his parents

are poor people who are able to send him nothing. That gave me confidence; after all, I am a beautiful woman, though not too young. I said to him, 'Come and see me; come and see me often, and do not worry yourself on my account, I have no need of money.' But you must understand that I made clear to him in a hundred different ways. I did not say it to him crudely; I was so afraid of shaming him; I should like him to come and see me with his case of instruments and his apron; even with a little blood on them."

She said that frankly and sensibly, as a man might say to an actress that he loved, "I want to see you in the costume that you wear in that famous *rôle* which you created."

I persisted; "Can you remember the time and the occasion when this unusual passion was born in you?"

With what difficulty did I make her understand me; at last I succeeded; but then she answered me very sadly, and even, if my memory serves me, turned away her eyes; "I do not know, I do not remember."

What bizarre things does not one find in a great city when one knows how to walk about and how to look! Life swarms with innocent monsters. Oh Lord my God, Thou Creator, Thou Master, Thou who hast made law and lib-

erty, Thou the Sovereign who dost allow, Thou the Judge who dost pardon, Thou who art full of Motives and of Causes, Thou who hast (it may be) placed within my soul the love of horror in order to turn my heart to Thee, like the cure which follows the knife; Oh Lord, have pity, have pity upon the mad men and women that we are! Oh Creator, is it possible that monsters should exist in the eyes of Him alone who knoweth why they exist, how they have made themselves, and how they would have made themselves, and could not?

XLVIII

ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE OUT OF THE WORLD

THIS life is a hospital where every sick man is possessed with the desire to bear his sufferings in front of the stove, and another thinks that he will get better beside the window.

It seems to me that I should always be well wherever I am not; and this question of removal is one which I ceaselessly discuss with my soul.

Say, my soul,—poor deluded soul, what do you think of going and living in Lisbon? It must be warm there, and you would become as lively as a lizard. It is on the waterside; they say that it is built of marble, and that the people have such a hatred of vegetation that they pluck up all the trees.—Ah! there is a landscape to your liking; a landscape made with light and mineral, and a liquid mirror to reflect them!

My soul replies nothing.

Since you love rest so much while contemplating movement, would you like to come and live in Holland, the land that brings happiness?

Perhaps you would find amusement in that country, whose picture you have so often admired in museums. What do you say to Rotterdam, you who love forests of masts, and the ships moored alongside the houses?

My soul remains dumb.

Would Batavia smile on you perhaps more sweetly? There we should find the spirit of Europe wedded to the beauty of the tropics.

Not a word. Can my soul be dead?

Are you then come to such a point of enervation that you take pleasure only in your unhappiness? If so, let us away to those countries that are the emblem of death. I have it, poor soul, we will pack for Tornéo. Let us go farther still, to the far end of the Baltic, still farther from life, if it is possible. Let us set up our camp at the Pole! There the sun strikes the earth obliquely, and the slow alternation of light and night suppresses variety and increases monotony—that better half of nothing. There we may take prolonged baths of shadow, while, to amuse us, the Aurora Borealis will send us from time to time its rosy sheaves, like the reflection of the fire-works of Hell.

Then at last my soul broke forth, and wisely did she cry, “No matter where, no matter where, so long as it is out of the world!”

XLIX

DEATH TO THE POOR!

FOR a fortnight I had shut myself up in my room, and had surrounded myself with the books that were fashionable at that time—I speak of sixteen or seventeen years ago; I mean the books in which is discussed the art of making everyone happy, wise, and rich, in twenty-four hours. I had then digested—swallowed, I suppose I should say—all the lucubrations of all these happiness-furnishers, both those who advise the poor to make themselves slaves, and those who persuade them that they are all dethroned monarchs. You will then not find it surprising that I was in a state of mind approximating to giddiness or stupor.

It seemed to me, only, that I felt, cooped up at the bottom of my intellect, the obscure germ of an idea superior to all the motherly formulas whose dictionary I had been skimming. But it was only the idea of an idea; a thing infinitely vague.

So, feeling very thirsty I went out, for the passion for reading bad books begets a propor-

tional need of the open air and of refreshment. As I was about to enter a cabaret, a beggar held out his hat to me with one of those unforgettable looks which would overturn thrones if spirit could move matter, and if the eye of a mesmerist could ripen grapes.

At the same time I heard a voice whispering in my ear; a voice I knew well. It was that of a good angel, or of a good *daimon*, who accompanies me everywhere. Since Socrates had his *daimon*, why should I not have my good angel, and why should I not have the honour, like Socrates, of obtaining my certificate of insanity signed by the subtle Lélut and the well-advised Baillarger?

There exists this difference between the *daimon* of Socrates and my own; that his only manifested itself to him to forbid, warn, prevent, and that mine condescends to counsel, suggest, persuade. The unfortunate Socrates had only the demon of the everlasting NO; mine serves the everlasting YES. Mine is a demon of action and of combat.

Now his voice whispered this to me: “He alone is the equal of another, who proves it; and he alone is worthy of liberty, who can win it.”

Instantly I leapt upon the beggar-man: with a single blow of my fist I bunged up one of his

eyes, which became in a second as big as an orange; I broke one of my nails in breaking two of his teeth, and as I did not feel myself strong enough (for I was of a delicate constitution, and had done very little boxing) to kill this old man quickly, I seized him by his coat-collar with one hand, and with other I caught his throat and began to knock his head violently against a wall. I must confess that I had previously thrown a rapid glance around and made sure that in this deserted suburb I was for a sufficiently long time out of the range of any policemen.

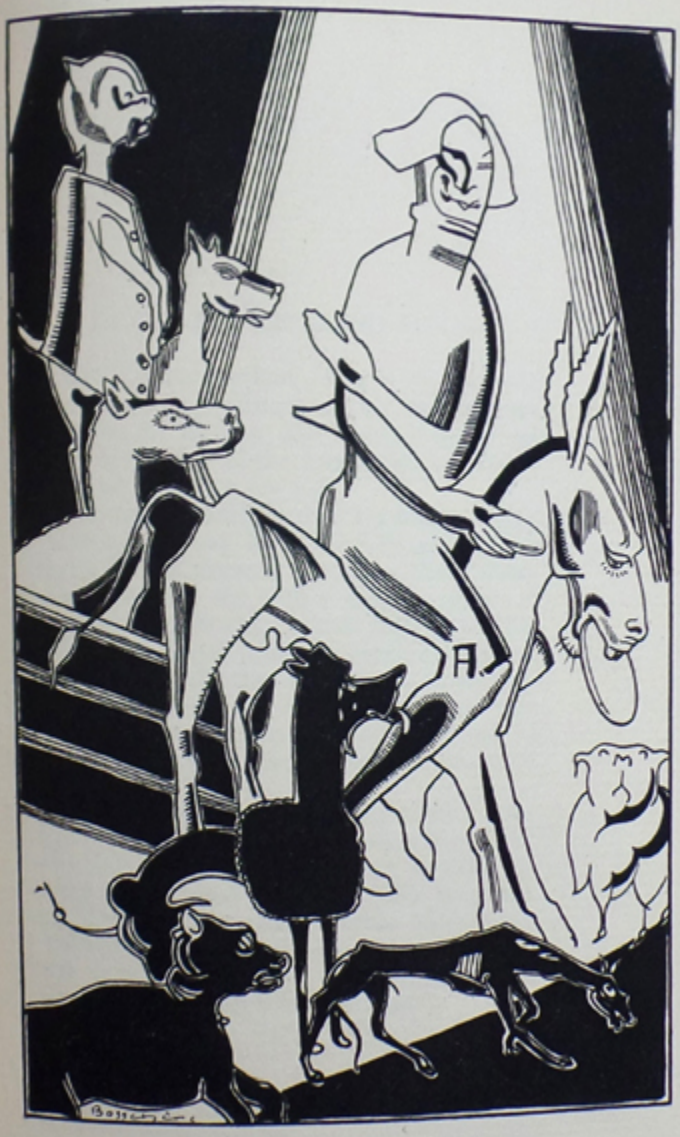
Having finally, by a kick in the back hard enough to break his shoulders, knocked down this feeble sexagenarian, I took a big tree branch which was lying on the ground and beat him with all the persistent energy shown by cooks who are trying to make a steak tender.

Suddenly—Oh miracle!—Oh joy of the philosopher who verifies the excellence of his theory!—I saw this antique carcass turn over, spring up with such an energy which I should never have suspected from so seriously damaged a machine, and with a look of hatred which appeared to me of the best augury, the decrepit brigand threw himself upon me, gave me two black eyes, broke four of my teeth, and with the same branch beat me to the con-

sistency of wet plaster. By me energetic treatment I had given him back pride and life.

Then I made a number of signs to make him understand that I considered the discussion at an end; and rising with the satisfaction of a sophist of the Portico I said to him, “Sir, you are my equal. Do me the honour to share my purse with me, and remember, if you are really a philanthropist, that you must apply to all your brothers when they ask alms of you the theory which I have had the pain of trying upon your back!”

He swore emphatically that he had understood my theory, and would take my advice.



L

IN PRAISE OF GOOD DOGS

I HAVE never blushed, even in the presence of the young writers of my age, for my admiration for Buffon. But to-day it is not the soul of this painter of the stately side of Nature that I wish to call to my aid.

Much more readily would I address myself to Sterne, and say to him, “Descend from Heaven or rise towards me from the Elysian Fields to inspire me with a song in favour of good dogs, of poor dogs, which shall be worthy of thee, sentimental jester, incomparable jester. Come back astride that famous ass which ever accompanies thee in the memory of posterity, and above all, let this ass not forget to carry delicately between his lips his immortal macaroon.

Back, O academic Muse! I have no use for you, old prude. I invoke the familiar Muse, the hackneyed Muse, the living Muse, to help me to sing of the good dogs, the poor dogs, the sorry dogs, the dogs that everyone kicks away as pestiferous and lousy, except the poor man

whose associates they are, and the poet who looks upon them with a fraternal eye.

Fie upon the insipid beauty-dog, this absurd quadruped, Pomeranian, King Charles, pug or lap dog, so pleased with himself that he runs indiscreetly between the legs or on the knees of a visitor as if he were sure of pleasing, as boisterous as a child, as silly as a beldame, sometimes as snappish and insolent as a servant. Shame above all upon those four-footed serpents, shivering and idle, that they call Italian greyhounds, and who do not keep in their pointed muzzles enough scent to follow the trail of a friend, or in their flattened heads enough intelligence to play at dominoes.

Away to the kennel with all these wearisome parasites. Let them return to their silken and padded kennels. I sing the sorry dog, the poor dog, the homeless dog, the wandering dog, the mountebank dog, the dog whose instinct, like that of the poor man, the Bohemian and the actor, is marvellously sharpened by Necessity, that best of mothers, true patron saint of intelligence!

I sing the dogs of calamity, whether it be those who wander solitary in the winding ravines of great cities or those who say to the hopeless man with blinking, soulful eyes, “Take

me with you, and from our two miseries we may perhaps make a kind of happiness."

"What becomes of dogs?" once said Nestor Roqueplan in an immortal pamphlet which he has doubtless forgotten and which I, and possibly Sainte-Beuve still remember to-day.

"Where do dogs go?" do you say, O men of little observation? They go about their business.

A business appointment; a love appointment. Across the fog, across the snow, across the mud, beneath the burning dog-star, beneath the rustling rain, they go, they come, they trot, they pass under carriages; excited by fleas, passion, necessity or duty. Like ourselves they rise early, and seek their livelihood or pursue their pleasures.

There are some that sleep in a ruin of the suburb, and who come every day at a fixed hour to ask for their portion at the door of a kitchen of the Palais-Royal; there are others who run in troops fifteen miles and more to partake of the repast which the charity of certain sexagenarian old maids has got ready for them; women whose empty hearts are given to animals because senseless men will have no more to do with them. There are others who, like runaway negroes, maddened by love, leave, on certain days, their departments to

come to the city in order to gambol for an hour around a beautiful bitch, a little careless about her toilet, but proud and grateful.

And they are all very exact, without pocket-books, notes, or portfolios.

Do you know lazy Belgium, and have you admired—as I have—all those vigorous dogs that attach themselves to the butcher's, baker's, or dairyman's cart, and show by their triumphant barks the proud pleasure which they experience in rivalling horses?

Here are two who belong to a yet more civilized order; let me introduce you to the acrobat's room in his absence. A bed of painted wood without curtains; bed-clothes dragging on the floor and full of bugs; two straw chairs, a cast-iron stove, one or two damaged instruments of music. Oh, what depressing furniture! But look, I beg you, at these two intelligent personages, clothed in robes at once sumptuous and frayed, their hair dressed like troubadours or soldiers, who inspect with a wizard-keen attention the *nameless dish* which simmers on the lighted stove, in the centre of which a long spoon stands up planted like one of those aerial masts which announce that the masonry of a building is complete!

Is it not that such zealous comedians should not start on their journey without having glad-

dened their stomachs with a tasty and solid soup? And will you not forgive a little sensuality in these poor devils who must all day confront the intelligence of the public and the injustice of a manager who keeps the fat part for himself, and who eats more soup than four comedians?

How many times have I contemplated with a smile on my lips and tenderness in my heart all these four-legged philosophers, complaisant, submissive or devoted slaves which the republican dictionary might equally well call “worthies,” if only the republic who, too much occupied with the happiness of men, had time to think of the honour of dogs.

And how many times have I thought that there was perhaps somewhere—who knows after all?—to recompense so much courage, so much patience, so much toil, a special Paradise for the good dogs, the poor dogs, the sorry and unfriendly dogs. Does not Swedenborg say that there is one for Turks and another for Dutchmen?

The shepherds of Virgil and Theocritus expected as the prize of their successive songs a good cheese, a flute by the best maker, or a she-goat with swollen dugs. The poet who sang of the poor dogs received as his reward a fine waistcoat, of a colour at once rich and faded,

which makes one think of autumn suns, the beauty of well-ripened women, and Saint Martin's Summers.

None of those who were present in the tavern of the Rue de la Villa-Hermosa will forget with what petulance the painter gave up his waistcoat to the poet, so well did he understand what a fine thing it was to sing of the poor dogs.

Just so did a magnificent Italian tyrant in the Good Age offer to the divine Aretino either a dagger crusted with precious stones or a mantle fit to wear at Court in exchange for a well-wrought sonnet or a curious satiric poem.

And every time that the poet puts on the painter's waistcoat, it makes him think of the good dogs, the philosophic dogs, the Summers of Saint Martin and the beauty of well-ripened women.

EPILOGUE

MINE heart at ease, I climbed the promon-
tory
Whence one may contemplate the town
outspread—
Hospital, brothel, jail, hell, purgatory,

Where each thing monstrous rears its pros-
pered head!
Well know'st thou Satan (ease this woe
of mine!)
I went not thither useless tears to shed,

But an old lecher with's old concubine,
To madden sense on the enormous bitch
Whose hellish charm pours youth for me
like wine

Whether thou sleep in morning's sheets
(dear witch!)
Heavy, obscure, and chill; or preen thee,
vain,
In evening's veils, with gold embroidery
rich.

Infamous capital, I love thee! Drain
Whose thieves and whores give me to ease life's itch
Pleasures inscrutable to the profane!

NOTES

IV. Written at the height of the power of Napoleon III.

IX. "Box-office Clerks." The allusion is untranslatable. In French theatres there are three officials to check the theatre tickets, sold or complimentary, and to assign seats to ticket holders.

XXIII. Santerre's drums.

XLVI. Yeats, etc. Baudelaire here alludes to some long since forgotten poetasters of his day.

L. The incident of the Villa Hermosa seems to refer to some incidents in Baudelaire's life.

ADDED VERSIONS
OF THE
EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

In happiness of heart I mount these heights
Where I can watch my city hour by hour;
Her hells and hospitals and bawdy light,

Where every evil opens like a flower.
You know, o Satan, lord of my grief unsung,
I go not down to weep against your power,

But like an old tramp in rotting dung
Rather would I get drunk with this great whore
Whose rank infernal charm preserves me young.

And if in sheets obscure she still must snore,
A bleary bitch, or like a young girl go
Tripping in veils of evening, gold once more,

I love you, o my city, in your woe,
Sad capital, whose whores and bandits pluck
Joys that your blind philistines never know.

RALPH CHEEVER DUNNING.

EPILOGUE

With heart at peace I climbed the mountain trail
Whence I could contemplate with quiet eyes
The city: hospital, limbo, brothel, gaol,

Where all iniquity opens flowerwise.
O Satan, patron of my soul dismayed,
You know I sought no refuge for vain sighs,

But like an old pauper with his cinder-jade
I coveted drunkenness from the mammoth trull
Whose hell-born charms bring back my youth [that's strayed.

While you still sleep obscure and leaden dull,
Clouted with morning, rheumy-eyed, or preen
Yourself in gold-laced evening, veiled in full,

I love you, infamous Capital! To quean
And highwayman, you tender ravishment
Which lurks unknown to those of common men.

PIERRE LOVING.

EPILOGUE

Serene of heart I reached the mountain top and well
From there could watch the city in her magnitude,
Her brothels, pest-house, prison, purgatory, hell,

Where like a flower flourishes all vicious brood.
You well know, Satan, fount of soul-devouring harms,
I went not there to shed vain tears in dolorous mood,

But, like a shrewd old lecher in his woman's arms,
To drink deep of the lures of this lewd behemoth,
Who keeps my youth aflame with necromantic charms.

Whether past noon you're still in bed, asthmatic, wroth
And torpid, or quitting the dim haunt you inhabit,
You prance in trailing veils of evening's gold-spun cloth,

I love you, shameless city! Rogue and drab, it
Is you who still reveal and offer ravishments
That must forever be beyond the ken of. . . .
Babbit.

E. W. T.