

There is beauty in every incident of life; the true and the false, the wise and the foolish, are all one in the eye that beholds all without passion or prejudice; and the secret appears to lie not in the retirement from the world, but in keeping a part of oneself Vestal, sacred, aloof from that self which makes contact with the external universe; in other words, in a separation of that which is and perceives from that which acts and suffers. And the art of doing this is really the art of being an artist. As a rule, it is a birthright; it may perhaps be attained by prayer and fasting; most surely, it can never be bought.

But if you have it not, this will be the best way to get it — or something like it. Give up your life completely to the task; sit daily for six hours in the Old Absinthe House, and sip the icy opal; endure till all things change insensibly before your eyes, you changing with them; till you become as gods, know-

ing good and evil, and this also — that they are not two but one.

It may be a long time before the veil lifts; but a moment's experience of the point of view of the artist is worth a myriad martyrdoms. It solves every problem of life and of death — which two also are one.

It translates this universe into intelligible terms, relating truly the ego with the non-ego, and recasting the prose of reason in the poetry of soul. Even as the eye of the sculptor beholds his masterpiece already existing in the shapeless mass of marble, needing only the loving-kindness of the chisel to cut away the veils of Isis, so you may (perhaps) learn to behold the sum and summit of all grace and glory from this great observatory, the Old Absinthe House of New Orleans.

V'la, p'tite chatte; c'est fini, le travail. Foutons le camp!

AT THE FEET OF OUR LADY OF DARKNESS

Translated by Aleister Crowley from the French of Izeh Kranil

Sullen and peevish, the weather steals their form from my desires! I turn over the leaves of my *Verlaine*; for "in my heart are tears as, in the city, rain." Devoutly I read him once more, and I burn incense to appease the mystic longing of my soul. And now, after a little, my spirit takes wing.

Deserted, my eyes follow the coral verses; my fingers unconsciously turn the pages, while poems, other than these, engrave themselves upon my brain. Poems sacred or poems accursed? Does it matter so long as they are beautiful, so long as they make me quiver?

It rains!

The raindrops strum their melody upon the casements. Upon my heart, upon my skull they seem rhythmically to drive furrows whence my sensibility, and my thought, may germinate. "For weary heart, o the song of the rain."

I have closed my *Verlaine*.

I will go and wake softly the silent psalter, with its sorrowful and sacred voice. It sings to me the pious poems of long since. They are yet more poignant when heard in a place unconsecrated. For this Temple of mine is the Temple of my own Goddess, Our Lady of Darkness, kind to initiates. This Temple of mine is concentrated. It is robbed in old silks of China; rich rugs from the East; skins torn from the tawny terrors of the jungle; cushions soft as the marrow of a baby's bones. Sage is the smile of my gilded idols, and the ever-burning lamp which is cooking the essence destined to evoke my dreams, starred all over with strange butterflies, which lattice its lucidity, makes itself the tireless accomplice of my vice.

The web of rushes, so hard, and yet so kind, lures me beyond resistance. My blood runs slow and cold within my veins. My eyes are overcast. My temples drone.

"Quick, Nam, a pipe! Opium is so kindly when the heart is dying." And with his spindle fingers of amber, the boy cooks the drug. Eagerly I fill my lungs.

"Now sing to me."

Softly, with the very voice of prayer, her psalms the ancient airs of over-yonder. It seems as if a breeze laden with the enervating fragrance of the plains of Annam entered with it.

He sings. I smoke.

Little by little reality slips away.

Now it is blue of twilight amid the rustle of leaves. The birds, weary of flying, send their complaints leaping to heaven, before they put their heads beneath their wings, and the sea, the great savage, with long groans, crushes against the rocks her lofty-prancing waves.

The sun has hidden himself, staining the horizon with bloody weft. It is the hour of the mirage!

Melancholy and slow, wrapped in a thousand sombre veils, I pass to and fro upon the bank, and listen to the eternal moan of the waters, and the light song of the breeze. The full fledged grass of the little wood near by, washed by the dew (and o so softly green!), asks me to trample it with my bare feet.

Briskly I take off my sandals, and so, upright in the wet greenward, wrapped closely in my veils, I think myself a great black lily, born from a magic wand.

And now I sway like the flowers on their stalks. I sway because the breeze is soft; because the sea and the leaves make music together. I sway because the dance is in myself, and because the rhythm of the waters cries to me, "Dance!"

Slowly, in cadence, I open my arms, because the branches do the same; my eyes half closed; my head keeps time with the Universe; my legs shudder; my feet irresistibly tear themselves from the ground to dance. I am going to dance until I lose breath; to dance for myself; to dance for the stars. Drunk with the fragrance of damp earth, and pine, I twist and wheel till my veils fall; until the dew covers my naked body with its dissolving kiss, until my hair falls free, and lends a lovelier veil to my dance.

I dance like one hypnotized. I clasp my hair in my hands. I bound and writhe in one immense desire for pleasure.

Now the breeze, light and warm, flits by as if the captive of my madness. The stars glint like the eyes of perverts. The sea herself has ceased its moan. It seems as if nature herself was dumb in order to admire me, and now, tiptoe, with all my body soaring, I feel myself deliciously seduced by pride.

Shining like emerald, and as green, a beautiful serpent stands