

FELO DE SE.

By ALEISTER CROWLEY.

It lacked a little of midnight. In the east the moon, rising high above the trees that fringed the river, made a lane of light. Her beams fell full upon the face, delicately pensive, with the lips thinly tightened from their drooping corners, of a young exquisite, in whose slender and nervous fingers trembled a gold-headed cane. He was standing at the very edge of the calm water, upon the narrow grass that lay between it and the towing-path. On his right, across the river, rose a hill, cloaked in giant woods, a menace and a mystery. On his left, a clump of beeches sheltered a knoll of velvet grass, one would have said a lover's bower. Behind him lay many miles of pleasant fields and villas. There was no sound in the night but the rare hooting of an owl in the great wood, and the secret undercurrent of sound caused by the commotion of a distant weir.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. A fine night!" said a strange voice in the young man's ear. He failed to catch the first part of the greeting, so absorbed was he in his thoughts; to the second he answered mechanically "a fine night, sir!" As he did so he turned to look at the stranger. He saw a man between thirty and forty years of age, both full and broad, yet slender, and giving the impression of great strength and activity. It was, however, the face, barbered in Vandyke fashion, which startled him. No one could ever forget it. Deep melancholy lay upon it, yet only as a veil to roguishness. The mouth was small, scarlet and voluptuous, although firm. But in the eyes lay something beyond any of this. The pupils were extremely small, even in that dim light, and the expression was of such intensity that the young man, startled, no doubt, by the suddenness of the apparition, thrilled with fear. By instinct he moved backwards to the towing-path, for in that place the river runs exceeding deep—and who could decipher the portent of such eyes?

"I am afraid that I have broken in upon your meditations," continued the new-comer. "Pray excuse me, I will resume my walk." But the young man gave a little laugh, harsh and bitter. "Not at all," he said with a little sneer. "I am only going to kill myself."

"Good," returned the other, whom we may identify as a Master of the Law of Thelema—and this story will explain what that is—"I applaud your decision."

The youth, although not a disciple, failed entirely to understand that the Master meant what he said. He sought instantly to excuse himself. "If you only knew all my reasons," he began gloomily.

"I do not ask them," replied the elder man. "You have announced your intention. I do you the common courtesy to assume that your intention is in accordance with your Will. That is reason enough and to spare. There is no Law beyond: Do what thou wilt. Besides, you'll make a bonny corpse."

The young man stared rather wildly. "No, I'm not a lunatic," smiled the Master; "would it perhaps bore you if I explained my reasons for not excluding *felo de se* from that infinite list of acts which are now lawful? It may relieve you of some

silly scruple, and enable you to take the plunge with that calm ecstasy which should accompany our every act."

"You interest me greatly," acquiesced the youth. The other nodded.

"Let us then sit here, where we can enjoy the beauty of the moonlight. Perhaps you will join me in a cigar?"

"I only smoke cigarettes."

"Every man to his taste. Well," and he lit up, "in order to set ourselves right with the Academies we had better begin with Plato. What say you?"

The youth removed his cigarette and bowed with deference.

"The *Phaedo*," continued the adept, "is certainly the feeblest of all the Dialogues. It is a mass of very silly sophistry, and the classic of *petitio principii*. But the argument against suicide is put with all the cogency of a nursemaid. 'The Gods will punish it, probably,' is the Alpha and Omega of that monolith of stupidity. Socrates himself saw it, no doubt, for he changed the subject abruptly. His only attempt to save his face is to shelter himself behind Pythagoras. Now he saw, just as you do, that death was desirable to the philosopher . . . and young though you are, my friend, if I may dare call you so, that brow bespeaks the love of wisdom . . . yet he would not 'take death the nearest way. Gathering it up beneath the feet of love, or off the knees of murder reaching it,' because of the gods. He has given the most excellent reasons for wishing to die, but he will not admit their validity. Yet he had himself, as he admits later, committed suicide by not escaping 'to Megara or Boeotia.' True, he gives an excellent reason for so acting, but to admit one reason is to admit the edge of the wedge. If an act is permissible for love of law and order, even unjust law—and this is, as you know, the reason advanced by Socrates—then why not for—let us say—the safety of the republic? What of the messenger, fallen into the hands of the enemy, who kills himself lest torture wring the army's secret from him; the man who throws himself from the raft, that his comrade may be saved—or his enemy—

I alit

On a great ship lightning-split,

And speeded hither on the sigh

Of one who gave an enemy

His plank, then plunged aside to die.'

One can think of a thousand cases from Curtius to Jesus Christ, this last surely the most deliberate suicide possible, since he had planned it from all eternity, even taking the trouble to create a universe of infinite agony in order to redeem it by this suicide. You are, I hope, a Christian?"

The young man declared that he was an humble, and erring, but sincere, follower of the Man of Sorrows.

"Then observe how suicide is the hallmark of your religion. 'If thine hand offend thee, cut it off.' Scourge thy body, starve it, lick the sores of lepers, risk everything, but save the soul. This is all suicide, some partial, some complete. It does not even