A TRANSLATION OF VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM'S
TRIBULAT BONHOMET

THESIS

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MASTER OF ARTS

By

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The four works in this collection are related by their central character, Tribulat Bonhomet. In "The Swan-Killer," the first, Bonhomet the music lover carries out his carefully planned excursion to kill swans to hear their last songs. "The Eventualists' Banquet," the second work, reports an after-dinner speech in which Bonhomet proposes a method for ridding France of revolutionaries. And the "Motion of Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet" sets forth a plan whereby earthquakes are harnessed to rid the world of poets and artists. The last and longest piece, "Claire Lenoir," a novella, recounts Dr. Bonhomet's visit to the Lenoir home. A highly philosophical work, "Claire Lenoir" explores questions of reality, revenge, and survival beyond death, ending with a bizarre murder and a grotesque climax.
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Critics and historians are unable to agree on either the extent or the manner of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's influence on French writers of the late nineteenth century (4, p. 13).

Villiers was legendary in his day not so much for his writing as for his unusual life: his unexplained disappearances, financial difficulties, his family's spiriting him off to religious retreats, rumors of his becoming heir to the Greek throne, his deathbed marriage. But most celebrated was Villiers's extraordinary mode of conversation, more monologue than interchange, which held everyone spellbound when he appeared at Mallarmé's Tuesday evenings (4, pp. 14-26). It is probable that his output would have been greater had he written, instead of dissipating his creativity by recounting plots that he was "going to write." The question of whether his work or his life made the greater impression on the young writers of his circle causes some diversity of critical opinion.

Not so in the case of Villiers's direct effect on one British poet. If any English speaker hears of a writer named Mathias Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, it is as the writer of Axël (1886), a symbolist play which W. B. Yeats was to see in Paris in 1894, and which then became one of the

Because of Villiers's importance to Yeats's work, it is profitable to examine some of his other works, such as "Le Tueur des Cygnes," a compendium of the favorite symbols of this literary movement. "Claire Lenoir," too, contains such references as well as some philosophical discourse which illuminates Villiers's thoughts on Hegelian philosophy. Moreover, the entire collection which contains these two stories has for its main character what must surely be one of the most bizarre of literary creatures.

Tribulat Bonhomet is a collection of short stories and a short novel about a character of the same name with whom Villiers was apparently fascinated, since his first work about Bonhomet was unpublished in 1867, and the last did not appear until twenty years later. This doctor of dubious credentials is a "faux savant" (5, p. 8) who delights in his own affected eccentricity and worships no
goddess but Science. He seeks truth and practicality like any good bourgeois, he says, at the expense of all humanity, charity, ethics, self-knowledge, or other related sentimental defects.

Since all of the tales are told from Bonhomet's point of view (two of them entirely in his voice), the reader builds a picture of the doctor's personality only through Bonhomet's self-image. His anxiety attacks, compulsions, obsessions, phobias, delusions of power, and inability to discern right from wrong mark him as patently psychotic.

Some critics see Bonhomet as a collection of all that is worst in middle-class mentality. Michaud describes him thus:

... il est bien ... "l'archétype de son siècle," non pas, ainsi qu'il le croît, parce qu'il a l'esprit sain et positif, et que rien ne saurait traverser "l'épaisse cuirasse de son sens commun," mais parce que, de ce siècle, il représente la suffisance, la sottise, et la banalité (2, p. 85).

Others find Bonhomet a personification of evil. Conroy speaks of his "diabolical cruelty," contending that "he is actively satanic" (1, p. 118).

Each of these views is supported by the works. In "Le Tueur de Cygnes" Bonhomet is a bizarre patron of the arts. The next two stories reveal Bonhomet the sensible bourgeois politician. Finally, in "Claire Lenoir," the doctor "s'affirme comme un symbole éternel de l'esprit satanique et négateur" (1, p. 120).
Tribulat Bonhomet challenges the translator in the usual ways, to be sure: he must walk the thin line between traduction and trahison. One of the main indicators in English of educated diction, or of pomposity in Dr. Bonhomet's case, is a preponderance of vocabulary of Latin derivation. Retention of that affectedly erudite flavor with the use of a more Germanic lexicon, so as not to make the translation a pastiche of cognates, was a major concern, as was the standardization of Villiers's idiosyncratic punctuation. Also, in many instances, his syntactic complexity prevented the ingestion of his ideas in any readily understandable way, so several extremely long sentences were divided into more digestible portions. Some of the conversation, particularly that which occurs at the dinner table (Chapter VII), is slow and heavy, advancing the plot little, if at all, and contributing nothing to the further delineation of the three characters. For that reason, I have omitted that chapter from this translation.

There were a few problems with obsolete vocabulary and slang. "Les horizontales," for example, is not the expression a reader expects to translate as "prostitutes."

Finally, the ideas Dr. Bonhomet espouses are often from obscure classical, biblical, philosophical, or occult sources such as chiromancy, cartomancy, physiognomy, astrology, or alchemy. Not a few of his comments
are inside jokes, or they address contemporary news or political events, then common knowledge, now almost forgotten.

Nonetheless, despite these obscurities and long philosophical harangues, Tribulat Bonhommet is liberally sprinkled with arresting imagery, exotica, broad irony, and some of the best examples of black humor of any age. Any understanding of the French symbolist movement or of its influence on other literatures will be enhanced by the study of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam.

REFERENCES


NOTICE TO THE READER

First, we present here today, by way of introducing the public to the CHARACTER of Dr. Bonhomet, three short stories which will reveal, in broad strokes, his innermost self.

Next, the doctor himself will take the floor and tell us the more than strange story of CLAIRE LENOIR, the heavy responsibility for which we leave to him.

Then, an EPILOGUE.

If, as we have reason to fear, this Personality (one, if there ever was one) achieves some popularity, we will soon publish, though not without regret, the ANECDOTES of which he is the hero and the APHORISMS of which he is the author.

--Villiers de L'Isle-Adam
"The swans understand the signs."

--Victor Hugo

Les Miserables

We think it pointless to add that in this authentic quotation, it is not the author of The Mouth of Shadows who is speaking but merely one of his characters. Indeed, it would be hardly just to attribute to an author the platitudes, the blasphemous monstrosities, or cheap puns that for private and even high-minded reasons he has resigned himself, in sadness, to put into the mouths of certain Helots of his imagination.
THE SWAN-KILLER

for Monsieur Jean MARRAS

As a result of poring over many a tome of natural history, our renowned friend, Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet, learned in time that "the swan sings beautifully just before it dies." Indeed (he admitted it again recently), ever since he first heard it, that music alone has made it possible for him to endure life's disappointments. Any other has seemed nothing but racket, or "Wagner."

How did he manage to indulge himself in this kind of dabbler's delight? Thus:

In the vicinity of the ancient walled town where he lives, the pragmatic old man discovered one fine day in a neglected, century-old park, under the shade of its tall trees, an old, sacred pond over the dark mirror of which glided twelve or fifteen of those tranquil birds. He studied carefully the accesses to it, calculated distances, and especially noted a black swan, their sentinel, fast asleep in a ray of sunshine.

That one kept his eyes wide open all night, a polished stone in his long pink beak. When the slightest sound alerted him to danger for those he guarded, with a quick turn of his neck, he would cast the pebble of alarm into
the waters, into the midst of the white circle of his sleeping charges. At this signal, the flock, guided by him still, would fly off into the darkness, through the tall and leafy tunnels of the paths, toward some faraway meadow, or some fountain mirroring grey statues, or another such well remembered refuge. Bonhomet observed them for a long time in silence, smiling at them even. Wasn't it with their last song, as a thoroughgoing dilettante, that he dreamed of regaling his ear by and by?

So, now and then, at the stroke of twelve on a moonless autumn night, Bonhomet, tormented by insomnia, got up all of a sudden, and for the concert he must hear again, dressed in a curious manner. The bony, gigantic doctor, having buried his legs in huge rubber boots reinforced with steel, which were attached without seams to an oversized raincoat comfortably lined with fur, slipped his hands into a pair of blazoned steel gauntlets that had belonged to some medieval suit of armor (which gauntlets he was pleased to have acquired for thirty-eight good sous . . . madness! from a travelling dealer). That done, he put on his huge modern hat, blew out the lamp, went downstairs, and, house-key in pocket, set out in bourgeois style for the edge of the deserted park.

Next he picked his way down the dark footpaths toward the haunt of his favorite singers; toward the pond whose waters, shallow and carefully sounded at every point, did
not rise above his waist. Once below the vaults of foliage that stood near the shallows, he muffled his footsteps as he made contact with the dead and fallen branches.

Having reached the edge of the pond, slowly, so slowly, without the least noise, he ventured one boot, then the other, with the most incredible caution, so extraordinary that he scarcely dared to breathe, like a melomaniac about to hear a long awaited cavatina. Consequently, to cover the twenty paces which separated him from his dear virtuosi, he generally took from two to two and one-half hours, so great was his dread of alarming the keen vigilance of the black sentinel.

A breath from the starless heavens swayed the topmost branches dolefully in the gloom around the pond, but Bonhomet, not to be distracted by these mysterious murmurs, advanced imperceptibly, with the result that by three o'clock, he found himself, invisible, half a step from the black swan, without its having taken the slightest notice of his presence.

Then the good doctor, smiling in the dark, stroked gently, ever so gently, scarcely brushed, with the tip of his medieval forefinger, the obscured surface of the water in front of the guardian! So gently did he stroke that the latter, although surprised, was unable to judge whether this vague alarm was important enough to warrant throwing the stone. It listened. At length, its instinct
having become dimly aware of the idea of danger, its heart, oh! its poor simple heart set to beating frightfully—which filled Bonhomet with jubilation.

Now the beautiful swans, troubled by that sound in the depths of their sleep, withdrew their heads sinuously one by one, from beneath their pale, silvery wings and, under the weight of Bonhomet's shadow, began little by little to feel distressed, having some vague and confused awareness of the mortal danger which threatened them. Yet, out of their infinite refinement, they suffered in silence like their sentinel, unable to flee: for the pebble had not been thrown! The hearts of all those white exiles began to pound in agony, mute yet intelligible and distinct to the ravished ear of the good doctor, who, knowing full well what effect morally his mere proximity was having upon them, reveled with an incomparable, prurient itching in the terrifying sensation to which his immobility subjected them.

"How sweet it is to encourage artists!" he murmured to himself.

About three quarters of an hour it lasted, this ecstasy which he would not trade for a kingdom. Suddenly a ray from the Morning Star, stealing through the branches, unexpectedly lit up Bonhomet, the black waters, and the dreamy-eyed swans! Maddened by fear at the sight, their sentinel cast the stone . . . too late!
Bonhomet, with a loud, horrible cry, by which he seemed to let fall the mask of his syrupy smile, hurled himself, claws raised, arms outstretched, into the ranks of the sacred birds! Swift were the embraces of this modern knight's steel fingers, and the pure, snowy necks of two or three singers were pierced or broken before the rest of the bird-poets could take their dazzling flight.

Then the souls of the dying swans, oblivious to the good doctor, exhaled toward the unknown Heavens in a song of immortal hope, deliverance, and love.

The rational doctor smiled at such sentimentality, in which he, as a serious connoisseur, deigned to savor but one thing: THE TONE. Musically speaking, the only thing he valued was the unique tonal sweetness of those symbolic voices that vocalize death like a melody.

Eyes closed, Bonhomet breathed in, into his heart, those harmonious vibrations; then, staggering, as if in a spasm, he went, collapsed on the bank, and stretched out on his back in the grass, still in his warm, waterproof outfit.

There the Maecenas of our age, lost in a voluptuous torpor, savored again in his heart of hearts the memory of that delectable song (however flawed by a sublimity that to his mind was out of date) of his dear artists. Resorbing his comatose ecstasy, he lay there ruminating, à la bourgeoise, his exquisite impression until sunrise.
"A little coffee after dinner makes one think better of one's self."

--Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues
THE EVENTUALISTS' BANQUET

to Madame Mery LAURENT

The annual Eventualists' banquet, under the distinguished chairmanship of Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet, was coming to an end with a round of quiet toasts.

It was that delightful moment during which, smiling at one another, men drink to "ideas" of which they consider themselves, here on earth, to be the principal, if not the sole, trustees. Urgent socio-biological questions had just been debated. Obviously the names of Stuart Mill, Bain, Smith, and Herbert Spenser, giving luster to the pleasant banalities attributed to them by their heedless citers, had streaked many a period like flashes in the night.

The present wits, then, were abandoning themselves to the current polite controversies, by which men of taste know how to stimulate their enlightened digestions.

All at once, the galk (general, though informal), at some inexplicable turn became ALARMIST. For when the coffee appeared, the most resounding of all words, despite the softness of its syllables, the word "dynamite" was uttered.

"Hard times in Paris are getting worse: no remedy in sight, production exceeding demand, ominous rumors not
likely to bolster the languishing currency. Nothing seems more . . . obvious. Even the clearest, the most didactic explanations of the present crisis are beginning to seem less than nourishing to those who are most affected.

"What with the agitators of the radical press constantly goading the bull of state, a concert of explosions, new and terrible, may eventually, at any moment, disturb the public peace. Yes. Recent trials during which the accused, backed up by a threatening audience, spoke of blowing up everything, daring even to claim, in the criminal courtroom itself, that the honorable judge and his assistants, were shaking 'ON THEIR TIBIAS' about it, made clear the exasperation of the destitute. Even now in some of the suburban organizations, the men think of nothing but dynamiting, panclastitizing, or even melaniting, just for fun 'to see what will happen,' in the Assembly, the Senate, Police Headquarters, the Elysée palace, etc., etc. Some talk about blowing up only the synagogues; the Israelites seem to be the best off, therefore the most to blame. A joke at first, this notion grew imperceptibly, one must admit, into a plan. Partial hit-lists have been drawn up; those anarchist children are already saying them like evening prayers. In short, after a few cold snaps, perhaps at the end of this month, a revolution far more serious than that of 1871 (since the enemy no longer encircles the capital), could . . . ."
"Actually, gentlemen, I am searching in vain for a euphemism which will convey to you that here and now you are reasoning like absolute cheeses!" cried Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet (attenuating with his most unctuous smile whatever in his tone might strike anyone as undiplomatic).

"You have forgotten that the insight, prudence, and sly labors of the men who govern us have been able to neutralize, in advance, any possibility of insurrection, even partial, thanks to a certain preventive measure, prophylactic, if you will, and truly inspired in its simplicity, the pacificatory results of which are truly magical."

"What measure?" cried the dinner guests, wide-eyed.

"Ah! You haven't taken cognizance of it?" continued the chairman. "Well! I shall be happy to disclose it. Though at the first blush it may seem merely anodyne to superficial minds, therein lies its power. I declare that you will be mummified with admiration if you will only take the trouble to consider the consequences. I am referring, of course, to a decree, already old-fashioned, which authorizes the thousands and thousands of watering-holes, cabarets, cafés, and taverns of the capital not to put up their shutters until two o'clock in the morning."

"So what?" retorted the latter. "Follow, pray, my line of reasoning, the miraculous banality of which is so obvious that, once again, it must seem a paradox. In short, let your minds absorb the following long forgotten truth: a day has only twenty-four hours.

"Let us start from that premise. Now, when a man goes to bed before midnight and gets up at seven in the morning, that man has clear vision, an alert mind, a strong and steady hand; he can be genuinely concerned about the business of his country... (all the while tending profitably to his own).

"If, however, the same man acquires the habit of not going to sleep (and what a sleep!) until three in the morning, it leads, don't you see, to A VERY LATE BREAKFAST! He wakes up with bleary eyes, he yawns, he shrugs his shoulders, and time passes: the day is wasted. Worries, increased by his more than useless expenditures for liquid refreshment, become more pressing. In short, the riot, if it was projected for the evening, if put off for a week, indefinitely.

"In fifteen years, we obtain thereby an exemplary population of dreamers whose moral and physical powers are diluted every evening, and through two-thirds of the night, in a nicotine fog, by foolish discussion, idle professions of faith, chimerical resolutions, and impotent fist-clenching. Remarks are coughed out over glasses of
beer or spirits and evaporate. The result, for a capital city, in fifteen years, will be a most harmless population of approximately 300,000 bleary-eyed types, all more or less ataxic, empty-brained, and flabby-hearted, the majority of whom will surrender, for a drink of absinthe, the guns or explosives which had been passed out to them, as a Chinaman would surrender his wife for a pipeful of opium.

"So you see, gentlemen, this measure is such an effective policy that it will, come what may, guarantee the duration of any government, whatever mistakes it makes, all the more so (as in the present case) when it makes none. This law paralyzes any rebellion in advance without bloodshed and in the best bourgeois manner. See here: if it had been promulgated as an ukase in Saint Petersburg, I am inclined to believe that Nihilism itself could not have survived for more than six months. And I have come to the point of wondering why the idea, so simple, so practical, of this derivative seems, up to now, to have escaped the wisdom, however proverbial, of the powers that be in Moscow.

"Therefore, gentlemen, we, the representatives of an elite, who are, by nature, always prepared, as our name indicates, to greet, always and everywhere, every unexpected turn of events, we who know what it means to take every precaution, let us banish from our festivity
all false alarms! Let us lift our thoughts, our hearts, and especially our glasses in honor of those whose strict vigilance has for so long protected us from all excessive demands . . . from that very Proletariat, about whose afflications we can do nothing, alas, but weep. Come then! a drop of champagne. Let us drink, out of heartfelt gratitude, to the cloudless prosperity of those whose shrewd initiative has guaranteed without fuss and unbeknown to those bemused disturbers of the peace, the safety of our leisure hours."

At this point unanimous agreement acclaimed the orator; glasses in reassured hands vied with one another at clinking.

The Eventualists' annual banquet went on (the probable future of the human race providing the topic of conversation) until the violet hour, a time sweet always to those who are life's chosen, whose bodies feel well ballasted, minds eclectic, hearts forever free, their convictions eventual and consciences vacant.
MOTION BY DR. TRIBULAT BONHOMET TREATING OF
THE UTILIZATION OF EARTHQUAKES

"When Pharamond put on the crown, France was nothing but a vast, marshy expanse, much better suited to the frolicking of wild ducks than to the orderly processes of constitutional government."

--A Modern Sage
MOTION BY DR. TRIBULAT BONHOMET TREATING OF
THE UTILIZATION OF EARTHQUAKES
to Monsieur Gustave GUICHES

"Shall we measure off an imaginary terrain on which
we are the row of toppling dominoes?

"Well! having just celebrated a naïve tradition of
our forefathers (Shrovetide, of which the young are so
fond), it so happened that at the very moment we were about
to give in to sleep, the courtyards of the best hotels in
our capital were invaded, upon the arrival of the night
trains, by hordes of people less then scantily dressed
(some of the ladies having carried terror to the point of
indecency). There stood the major-domos, believing them-
selves the prey of morbid hallucinations (if not the
letting out of a low-class dance-hall), who could do
nothing but gape at the spectacle; while the guardians
of the peace (which is dearer to us than anything but
life itself), having been sent for in all haste and sup-
posing this to be another hoax on the part of the Anar-
chists, stood silent and stroking their moustaches during
the accounts, still in tremolo, of those travellers to
whom they listened with half an ear as they looked them
over suspiciously out of the corners of their eyes.
"Really, when by means of a reading of the dispatches from the South, electricity had constrained everyone to face the facts, we did not know (let us admit it) what to think. It was like going back to the Middle Ages.

"How can such melodramatic phenomena still occur in the midst of our constitutional and well-regulated civilization? Isn't it an insult to common sense? Such cataclysms, that have no reason for being in this age and have had their day, are, to put it plainly, an affront to accepted ideas, and should be responded to by a prompt suppression. What! in this enlightened era, 6,000 people, for the most part respectable, cannot even go for a stroll without being crushed suddenly by an unforeseen tremor of the earth? To my mind, the whole business smacks of obscurantism.

"How can we subdue these shocks with the reins of a wise regulation, muzzle them, to speak, by filing them under some administrative category? There's no beating about the bush; it must be done.

"Otherwise science, which is everything, absolutely everything, will seem nothing but a delusion, and we, the playthings of the Celestial Machine. That is unthinkable.

"That the subsoil in some volcanic regions still presents a number of problems with regard to exploration, for the moment considerable, granted; but are we, and for
a long time still, to remain at the disposition of the eventual good-will of a sulphur-hole, even when our lives depend on it? Wouldn't we do better, as some experts have recommended, simply to drain Vesuvius, and thereby create freer outlets for the planet's suburban flatulence!?

"Question.

"The most revolting aspect of this whole business is that many men, tolerated in our great urban centers (on what grounds I couldn't say; because they are artists?) seem, in order to make a mockery of Progress, to seize upon these calamitous jokes of our planet as a pretext to claim that the blind oscillations of the terraqueous strata in Italy are proof of meddling in our affairs by occult Powers, both mischievous and harmful. Yes! yes! That is the outlandish notion (that and no other) which lies behind all those transparent insinuations, the reticence, even, of some of the press. We see what they are driving at; oh, yes, we see what they are driving at.

"Those vile scribblers are always slow to pick things up. Their secret wish is to return us to the days of the do-nothing kings, to droit du seigneur, and the Inquisition: they are a plague on society. Surely, I don't deny it, we decorate them, cover them with gold, satiate them with admiring and warmly sympathetic demonstrations, but basically, we know that we despise them like the dirt under our feet. Were it not for the spirit of
moderation that is the principle of our being and of our times, we would have broken them on the wheel long ago. But nowadays, that would be excessive.

"We must, therefore, contrive for them a hideous end . . . of which we will be able to wash our hands in public. I think I am acting upon the secret wish of all of us by expressing it.

"Very well! I have hit upon the idea of turning those fellows over to Mother Nature, since they side with her anyhow. Here then is my plan.

"M. Eve del Rio, having been so kind as to communicate his forecasts to us (which the events of the second of this month have, alas!, justified only too well), we will impose once more upon his good nature to request that he be so good as to specify which times of the year are, in his opinion, the most treacherous and likewise which regions are the most suspect, with regard to a future earthquake, as soon as possible.

"Once the particulars have been obtained from that modern Jonah, I propose that, on the most threatened location, enormous buildings with granite roofs be constructed. That done, I further propose that with all of our cajolery and honeyed persuasion (at which we are, thank God, past masters!), we invite the whole inspired lot of so-called Dreamers (whom Plato wanted, out of
kindness, to be crowned with roses as they were thrown out of his Republic) to move into them.

"The unpredictability of the disaster would shield us, in the eyes of the law, from any responsibility for their annihilation.

"In short, we would offer them a comfortable, even splendid, dwelling, with horizons, sunsets, ladies of the evening, stars, cliffs, myrtle, fine wines, novels, flowers, birds: in a word, all of the surroundings from which those gentlemen gather their insipid phantasmagories. And since they persist, despite the evidence, in believing in the Mysterious, let them be delivered into the hands of the Mysterious, so that when they least expect it, Crrraaack!!!

"We'll be rid of them. And at the news we will rub our hands with joy as we wish them bon voyage to Pluto.

"That way, the periodic interventions of the Absurd, those outbursts of the last, blind forces of Nature, will be utilized and rationalized . . . Similia similibus.

"Everything considered, there would be a saving: the materials would remain on the earth's surface, so that (from time to time) we could repeat this kind of social purgation.

"The proof that I am in the right when I propose, after mature consideration, such a relief, is that, given the choice of trading the 6,000 respectable persons crushed
in the last disaster against 6,000 scribblers, who among us would hesitate . . . even for a second?"
CLAIRE LENOIR

Notebook of Dr. Tribulat Bonhomet
Honorary Member of Various Academies
Eminent Professor of Physiology
Concerning
The Mysterious Case of a Modest and Scientific Person
The Honorable Widow Claire Lenoir
To my Illustrious Contemporaries

--T. B.
CLAIRE LENOIR

"Non moechaberis."

CHAPTER I
PRECAUTIONS AND CONFIDENCES

"Touched with pensiveness . . . "
--Thomas de Quincey

Since the chain of sinister events which I have taken it upon myself to relate (despite my white hair and contempt for notoriety), seems to comprise a quantity of horror capable of disturbing even seasoned old men of law, I must confess in primis that if I allow the printing of these pages, it will be a concession to the repeated entreaties of dear and proven friends. I fear that I will be constrained, more than once, by sad necessity to attenuate (by ornaments of my style and the resources of a rich fluency) their strange and stifling hideousness.

I do not think that Terror is a universally profitable sensation. Yet, would it not be typical of an old madman to spread it, broadcast, in the public mind, prompted by a vague hope of benefiting from the scandal? It is never good to hurl a profound discovery straightway into the stream of human thought. It needs first to be digested
and evaluated by mature minds. Such great tidings announced recklessly often alarm, even cause panic in, a goodly number of pious souls, overstimulate the caustic tongues of wastrels, and awaken ancient neuroses about Possessions among the timid.

However, it is surely true that to make people think is a duty which takes precedence over most scruples! Everything considered, I will speak. Each person should carry within himself his ali\textit{quid in\textit{concussum}}! Moreover, I am reassured by my century that for the few weak intellects I will affect, there are numerous strong minds I will edify. I have said "strong" minds, and I do not speak loosely. As to the veracity of my account, no one, I wager, will be much inclined to make light of that. Admitting even that the following facts are altogether false, the very idea of their being simply possible is quite as terrible as their authenticity, demonstrated and acknowledged, would be. Once a thing is thought about, moreover, doesn't it always happen to some extent in the Mysterious Universe?

I have said "mysterious" and not "problematical," and (if I may repeat myself) I do not speak loosely.

Any digression from this subject, untested and jotted down hastily, would be idle.

Now, and may my readers stand convinced, it is not "literary" laurels I seek. Actually, if there is an
objective, a non-ego, which I scorn beyond the expressions allowable to the language of polite society, it is "Belles-Lettres" and their devotees. Bah!

Since I am obliged to introduce myself to the public, is it not urgent that I describe myself just as I am, once and for all, as to character and physique?

I am at a loss to understand why people who see me for the first time pretend to be convulsed with laughter or affect such pitying attitudes. On the contrary, my appearance should, I imagine, with all due modesty, inspire thoughts like this, for example, "It is an honor to belong to a species that includes such a remarkable individual!"

Physically I am what is called in scientific terminology "a Saturnian of the second age." I am tall, bony, and stooped, more from fatigue than excess of thought. The tormented oval of my face gives evidence of learning, projects. Under thick eyebrows two gray eyes, which glitter in their sockets, Saturn and Mercury, suggest insight. My temples are shiny toward their tops, signifying that their dead skin no longer drinks up the convictions of others: they have stored up enough. They are growing hollow at the sides of my head like those of mathematicians. Hollow temples, crucibles! They secrete ideas to my nose, which judges and decides. My nose is large, of a considerable size, a nose that is both invader and
atomizer. It hooks suddenly in the middle, like a kick, which in anyone else would signify a tendency to some dark monomania. This is why: the nose is the expression of the power to reason in Man; it is the organ which goes before, illuminates, announces, smells, and points out. The visible nose corresponds to the imperceptible nose that all men carry within them when they come into the world. Therefore, when some part of a nose is developed at the expense of others, it corresponds to some lapse in judgment, to some thought cherished at the expense of others. The corners of my prim, pale mouth have wrinkles like a shroud. It is close enough to my nose to chatter on and on inconsiderably or, as the saying goes, like a magpie.

Without my chin, which gives me away, I would be a man of action; however, a senile Saturn, skeptical and capricious, shortened it, as though by the stroke of a scythe. The color and quality of my whiskers are harsh like those of my peers in symbolic contemporaneity. My ear, finely rimmed and long as a Chinaman's, is a sign of my meticulousness.

My hand is barren. The Moon and Mercury feud over the hollows. My long, knotty spatulate second finger, full of lines to the second joint, apathetically leaves them to go at it. The outlook of my hand is misty and sad; clouds formed by Venus and Apollo have rarely bedimmed its sky. The will of my thumb rests on a venturesome mound;
it is there that Venus shows her inclinations. The palm alone is matter-of-fact, like that of a laborer. The fingers can be crooked at the top, like those of women, with a certain daintiness which makes one aware of the several steps of their perfect training. I am, moreover, the only son of a doctor, AMOUR BONHOMET, well known for his dismal ventures in the Mines.

Ever since I can remember, I have always worn the same kind of clothes, those appropriate to my character and bearing. To wit: a wide-brimmed, black felt hat, like those of the Quakers and the lake poets; an ample cloak, closed and draped across my chest, just as my high-flown expressions usually cover my thoughts; an old cane with a vermeil head; an enormous solitaire, a family diamond, on my finger of Saturn. I vie with the old men of fiction in the delicate fineness and delightful whiteness of my linen; I have the honor to possess the same feet as King Charlemagne in my Souwaroff boots, in which I scorn the ground. I almost always have my bag in my hand, since I travel more than Ahasuerus. I alone have the physiognomy of my century, of which I believe myself to be the ARCHE-TYPE. In short, I am a doctor, philanthropist, and man of the world. My voice is sometimes high-pitched, sometimes (especially around women) deep and rich, without any transition, which must be pleasing. Nothing binds me to society, neither women nor any kind of family, at least, I
hope not, and my assets are in an annuity; that is to say, the few that remain to me. My calling card looks like this:

Doctor
TRIBULAT BONHOMET
Europe

Here now are the particulars of my ethical makeup: the mysteries of positive science have had, since the sacred hour when I came into the world, the privilege of overwhelming the powers of attention at my command, often even to the exclusion of every human preoccupation. Also, the infinitely small, the Infusoria, as they have been named by Spallanzani, my beloved master, were from my tenderest youth the goal and subject of my impassioned research.

I devoured, in order to obtain what was necessary for my deep studies and machinations, the enormous patrimony left me by my ancestors. Yes, I devoted the ripe fruits of their mundane toil to the purchase of lenses and equipment which bare the mysteries of a temporarily invisible world.

I have compiled the lists of all my forerunners. Non est hic locus to dwell on the clarifications that I dare believe I have brought to them; posterity will deliver its verdict on this matter; that is, if ever I share it with posterity. What is important to establish is that the spirit of analysis, of magnification, or minute investigation, is such a part of my nature that all the joy of living
is contained for me in the precise classification of the lowly mealworms, in the sight of the bizarre tangles, like ancient writings, presented by the nerves of insects, in the phenomenon of foreshortening of edges that stay immense according to the proportions of the retina which reflects them. Reality thus becomes visionary, and I feel that, microscope in hand, I enter straight into the realm of Dreams.

But I am jealous of my discoveries, and I make a deep secret of all that. I hate laymen, squalid laymen, like death. When I am questioned on that subject, I PLAY STUPID. I pretend to have gout in my hands! And I restrain my joy by imagining how their faces would cloud over if I told them about the astonishing and unexplored things of which my instruments have allowed me to catch a glimpse. Enough of that. Perhaps I have already said too much.

My religious ideas are limited to the absurd conviction that God created man, and vice versa.

We came from we don't know what. Reason is uncertain. I will add frankly that Death astonishes me even more than her sad Sister; there's no making head or tail of it! In it, everything must follow, necessarily, from a mode of logic that is contrary to that with which we comfort ourselves, grumbling the while, in the discursus vitae and which is evidently only temporary and topical.
As for ghosts, I am not very superstitious; I do not put any stock in that meaningless twaddle about omens, the way so many scatterbrains do, and I do not believe in the frivolous antics of the dead. Just between us, however, I do not like cemeteries or very dark places, nor people who exaggerate! I am only a poor old man, but if Pluto had caused me to be born on the steps of a throne, and if a word from me were enough, right now, to bring about the total carnage of all the fanatics, I would pronounce it, I believe, "while peeling an orange," as the poet says.

Nevertheless, I am forced to admit, I am subject to an hereditary illness which has for a long time defied the best efforts of my reason and of my will! It consists of an Apprehension, an Uneasiness without any precise cause, a DREAD, in a word, that seizes me like an attack, makes me taste all the bitterness of a sudden and hellish anxiety--most often about absurd nothings!

Isn't it enough to set one's teeth on edge to feel one's soul poisoned as mortally as that? I am all confused when I think about it.

Being an educated man, I can understand everything easily and most clearly, yet, it's odd, I am at a loss to explain, for example, acoustically or even physically, by means of two sudden extremes of cold and heat, the sound of the wind. Well, then! When I hear the wind I
am afraid. At the thousand quiverings of Silence, produced by the simplest causes, I turn pale.

Each and every time the shadow of a bird passes by at my feet, I stop, and putting my bag on the ground, wipe my brow, a haggard traveller! So I remain oppressed under the weight of nervous anxiety (pitiful!) about the sky and the earth, about the living and the dead. In spite of myself, I catch myself crying out: Oh! oh! what can be the meaning of that caravan of ghosts, looking so solemn only to disappear straightway. Is the universe meaningless? The devouring universe, endless chain in which the feet of one creature are crushed between the jaws of another. Is it, itself, doomed to the voracity of some Eon? What worm will go at it? Answer me, whispering wind, passing bird . . . and thou who knowest, O Silence!

Such are the inconceivable vagaries, ejaculatory, poetic, and consequently grotesque, which haunt me and disturb the lucidity of my thought. A simple illness: I am an anxiety case. I treated myself with showers, quinine, purgatives, bitters, and hydrotherapy. I'm better, much better! I am beginning to feel reassured and to relize that Progress is not a dream but pervades the world, illuminates it, and finally, puts us in touch with those spheres of choice that alone are worthy of the better disciplined impulses of our intelligence. Nowadays, anyone with any discernment has no doubts about it.
I still have occasional attacks!

In public I conceal my agitation for the sake of good form. If I should happen, at some reception, to chat overlong with a lady, at any given moment, she doesn't know, no, happily, I can see by her eyes! She doesn't know that at the same moment I, smiling, am passing a candy from my right cheek to my left, with a delicate and syrupy sound, while calling someone a "fanatic." She is ignorant, I say, that at the same moment, within me a midnight is tolling, a deep, rusty, lugubrious knell! or that the same Midnight strikes more than twelve times!

Now, I have a hobby, adopted over the years as a means to conceal my favorite occupation.

It allows me to move in society, to chat with men, women, and children and to be well received by them. I scarcely dare name it, having such a dread of uncalled-for banter. I speak of my hobby of Matchmaking. My laurels come from no other source. My reasons for adopting this hobby are extremely simple.

But first, I should mention my weakness for Voltaire: the creator of "Micromegas" (immortal pages) in which a good many of my innumerable discoveries were, so to speak, foreshadowed. Yet, my adoration for that writer is not servile. Everyone, in effect, should try to develop by himself, in complete defiance of his teachers and of all those who, having raised him, have sought to instill in
him their own ideas. What I esteem in Voltaire is that skill, so highly prized by both Pozzo de Borgo and Machiavelli, my favorite teachers, which consists of trampling underfoot all respect for one's fellow man under the guise of a humble devotion bordering on obsequiousness. A perfect show, the logical end of which would be to render a real service! I recommend, in passing, this manner of extending charity. It is the only one worth calling serious; it serves to hide one's real motives. Now, I am not eager to have people know that I am devoted, body and soul, to Infusoria. Visits, questions, conferences, and compliments would prevent me from bringing the concentration so necessary to my staggering labors. On the other hand, since I really must talk, when I happen to be in some gathering, I hasten to speak to each person about what must preoccupy him most, so as to avoid any questions about the nature of my scientific investigations. And isn't it, almost always, one's own marriage or that of loved ones that most engrosses the ridiculous children of Women? It stands to reason! That is how, without much wear and tear on the Imagination, I slide into the private lives of many people, and how I effected, aided miraculously by Chance, several marriages.

The unions which were accomplished under my auspices have been favored by heaven, even though many times in my haste, I caused some to marry others, as they say,
offhandedly. Still, it all turned out well . . . always . . . except for one single time. It is to this astonishing couple, whom I riveted into a union, that I wish to call everyone's attention.

Must I aver even that, taken altogether, it was not a happy marriage, the final crisis of which--an unspeakable crisis!--gave rise to my most important discovery? I would be an ingrate to Destiny if I were impudent enough to think it was for a second! Science, true Science, is impervious to pity: where would we be otherwise? Moreover, even though this business has been an ample source of damnation for me, of an unspeakable terror that upsets my wits to the point that I scarcely know what I write, to a point that I, Dr. Bonhomet, professor of diagnostics, doubt my own existence . . . and even things that are much more evident to my eyes, I retain my opinion of Voltaire! I do not repent! I wash my hands indifferently for having brought about this appalling catastrophe! And I pride myself still on being one of the most beautiful souls ever to slip from the hands of the Most High. All truly modern men, all intellects who feel themselves to be "in touch with the times" will understand me.

I will limit myself to a rapid disclosure of the facts, such as they presented and sorted themselves out. Explain the story however you choose, I will not burden it with scientific theories; thus, the general impression it
makes will depend upon the intellectual capacities brought to it by the Reader.
CHAPTER II

SIR HENRY CLIFTON

"The city, blurred by the haze and the soft lights of the night, symbolized for me the earth, with its sorrows and tombs--placed far back, but not totally forgotten."

--Thomas de Quincey

(Confessions)

Towards the end of July, 1886, at the close of a gala dinner given by the captain of an English commercial bark, the Wonderful, sailing towards the coast of Brittany, I began a conversation over coffee with my dinner partner, Lieutenant Henry Clifton, a man about thirty, his face tanned like a man of the sea. I liked both the expression on his regular features and his habitual reserve.

As I said, that evening we started up a conversation; for, since we had begun the crossing, our few chats, those of a naval officer and an ordinary passenger, had been terse. We had come from the coast of Ireland, and, immersed in the study of my dear Infusoria, I had stayed most of the time in the bottom of the hold, examining the old bilges.

We exchanged a few words about our arrival in Saint-Malo, set for the next day; then, the fumes of the wine
and the lights having unsettled our wits sufficiently, we went up on deck for a breath of fresh air and lit our cigars.

During dinner I had refrained from involving myself in the political discussion (always so lively on such occasions), which had, as usual, erupted during dessert. This type of discussion seems interesting to me only with women. Why, who can resist their charming smiles, their untimely and gracious exclamations, their knowing airs, the praiseworthy efforts of their eyes to seem incisive, uneasy, surprised, etc.! . . . I repeat, a political discussion with ladies is an enthralling pursuit, enough to set one dreaming.

So as to earn their respect and confidence, my expression becomes more benevolent, more paternal, more sensitive than usual! I declaim gravely to them with lowered eyes the most outrageous absurdities, which my white hair causes them to venerate, so that my slightest remarks carry weight with the fair sex.

Moreover, political conversation with the stronger sex could be just as amusing if it could only bring the same grace and sprightliness to bear; for I have never heard anyone make a valid prediction as far as events are concerned.

Sir Henry Clifton, also, had not opened his mouth, which gave me a high opinion of him: nothing is more
difficult at that age, I think, than silence. In politics he must, I presumed, share my opinions, which are as follows:

In every country, every citizen worthy of the name, after work and between meals, can spend about three hours a day on leisure. Ordinarily he fills up his moments of respite with digestive and innocent chatting about the affairs of his country. Now, if nothing of import and of a "serious" nature happens, on what can he base his discussions? He will be bored for lack of a topic of conversation, and boredom in the citizenry is almost always fatal to heads of state. The arm is ready to act when the tongue is idle, and if we do not fill up the aforementioned three hours, yesterday's conversationalist becomes tomorrow's rioter. That is the sad secret of revolutions.

It seems to me thus the duty of all good government to instigate as often as possible wars, epidemics, fears, hopes, occurrences of all kinds: in effect (whether happy or unhappy, no matter) topics capable of nourishing the innocent and digestive small talk of each citizen.

After twenty, thirty, or forty years of being perpetually on guard! the kings have learned how to turn the population's attention away from them; so, they have reigned tranquilly, enjoyed themselves, and everyone is happy. That, to my mind, is one of the principal marks of high diplomacy: to occupy the citizens' minds, no matter the
price, so as to avoid drawing any attention to one's self, when one has had the honor to receive from God's hands the mission of governing men! Machiavelli, my beloved teacher, I weep when I say that name, never found a neater formula than that! You can imagine, then, my indifference to events, political upheavals, and the problems of European cabinets; I leave interest in the controversies which they instigate to minds enfeebled by an inborn hunger for wasting time.

So I praised in petto Sir Henry Clifton for his reserve and his quiet manner of drinking.

Sir Henry Clifton's state was truly more pronounced than the "officer's high." He had turned the typical color, and I saw that he was getting to the stage of sentimental confidings.

I myself had kept a cool head and lay in wait for my victim. The night was strewn with stars. The north wind came up and was pushing us along gently; the red lantern on the quarterdeck lit up the foam and the silver spray of the waves as they hit the wooden ship. From time to time shouts from the officers' party came to us from between decks, mixed with the great noise of the swell.

Seeing him silent, I feared some question about my mode of living and, perhaps, about my work! . . . So I began a discussion, following my irresistible method.
"Look here, my young friend," I said. "By Jove! I know just what you need! Should I tell you? I've been thinking about it ever since I had the great pleasure of shaking your hand. (Here I lowered my voice while looking vaguely ahead of me, like a man who is talking to himself.) It is, I'd bet on it, the right thing for you. A clever person! an adventurous widow, experienced however! A beautiful woman! Disposition, not important! Fortune, oh! a fortune of *A Thousand and One Nights*! . . . That's the word--

"Yes," I added (as I quickly raised my eyebrows while fixing my pale eyes on his epaulette), "yes, that's the very thing for you."

After a moment of expected stupor:

"Aha!" cried Sir Henry Clifton, self-consciously flicking the ash of his cigar with his little finger. "Aha! the excellent, the shrewd Doctor! The devil if I understand!"

With forebearance I placed a hand on his arm, and, eyes absolutely drowning in celestial space, I whispered in his ear:

"An introduction, unless something comes up, can take place on Monday during the day, from one to two o'clock, and your marriage could be perpetrated in six months; at least, I would bet my poor head, to be cut off here on the stern post, that I'm not mistaken!"
Dumbfounded, he seized my hands; the fish was nibbling; I had avoided scientific questions.

"I believe I understand, finally," he faltered, after a silence, "that you are proposing something to me like . . . " He was stopped my modesty, for which I was grateful.

"A legal wife, Lieutenant."

"A wife! . . . " he finished in a hesitant, even shaky voice.

"And why not, Lieutenant?" I replied, sensing a mystery. "Your maritime profession (difficult art! noble profession! distinguished career . . . )" I interrupted mechanically, "isn't incompatible with a distant hearth. There are knots sweeter than those . . . which you have the habit of tying," I added with an agreeable smile. "However, if you aren't so inclined, let's leave it at that; not another word."

There was a moment's pause; then suddenly, as if after sufficient reflection:

"Sir!" he said to me, drawing back a little. Probably thinking, "he's a character," then picking up the train of his thought, "I thank you for your good will," he continued. "In fact, Doctor, it deserves my confidentiality."

There we were. The wine was having its effect on this impressionable child. I inclined my ear solemnly.
"It is doubtful," he continued, "that we will ever meet again. So. I decline your excellent offer because there is a woman whose face I will never forget as long as I live."

"Oh! . . . "I said sanctimoniously; "very well! I can understand that: actually the contrary would surprise me!" I added quickly, "but allow me to tell you this:"

(Here I stood up and made a dramatic gesture of regret)

"Oh! it's a pity! Truly a shame!"

The diabolical part of all this was that I did not know of any woman that I could offer him, and my chief aim was simply to avoid all questions relative to Infusoria.

"And she is married!" murmured Sir Henry Clifton, as if to himself.

I felt my eyes fill with tears. "Can I be of service?" I asked, just in case, with deep tenderness.

I added flippantly in a low voice: "That is to say, I am handy when it comes to complicated situations."

There was a moment of the oddest silence, during which I felt I was being scrutinized by the young man. He wavered, perhaps, between boxing my ears and hugging me. I knew already that the decisive interpretation of my words in his mind would be favorable.

"Thank you, my friend, my old friend," he finally articulated in a tone of violent emotion, which was music to my soul, "but the poor woman is never to see me again."
Never to see me again," he repeated bitterly; "her afflicted eyes would no longer recognize me. She is, doubtless, blind even as we speak! Yes! yes, it is all over for her poor eyes! . . . " Still drunk, doubtless, he put his face in his hands.

At these words, I slowly took my cigar from my mouth, and in the shadows I gave Sir Henry Clifton a horrible glance: because I truly do not know why! the young man had just made me think of my beautiful, strange friend, of the poor eyes of my worthy friend, Madame Claire Lenoir.

I drew out my watch and got up.

"I hope to see you again, my young lieutenant!" I cried. "You have your secrets: there are times when a man wants to be alone, and I can respect that."

He shook my hand without lifting his head. I buttoned my greatcoat carefully against the wind, and I went down to my cabin, leaving Sir Henry Clifton to his musings, under the special protection and inspiration of the night, the wine of Constance, and the sea.
CHAPTER III
SUPEROGATORY EXPLANATIONS

"That which sees, in our eyes, and is hidden on this side of the base of our orbs of clay."

--Lysiane d'Aubelleyne

I went to bed hurriedly, my bunk, rocked by the pitching of the ship, lulled my reflections in the darkness; I was leaning on one elbow.

It was precisely at the Lenoirs' that I had thought about staying a fortnight. A letter sent from Jersey had notified them; they should have been expecting me.

Had I seen them since their wedding? Since more than three years ago? No, not at all. I intimated earlier, it seems to me, that I had had a hand in their marriage: as a matter of fact, during a very long stay which I made formerly in the Pyrenees, at Luchon, for my health, I had met Claire's family. An upright and outgoing family of merchants if there ever was one! Their only daughter, when circumstances first threw us together, was quite a lovely girl of around twenty, I think, one whose type of beauty was captivating. She had chestnut hair, a beautiful face, and a complexion like white jade and of an almost luminous transparency.
The frontal bone was, unfortunately, quite large, and betrayed a cerebral capacity that is useless and even detrimental in a woman.

Her eyes were a pale green. Walks in the mountains had exposed her pupils, her large pupils, to the hot sandy wind which comes from the Midi. Her vision, already congenitally feeble, was profoundly altered and soon the doctors' unanimous verdict doomed her to early blindness.

But in pondering one day on the similarity of the name occurring among the Lenoirs, in Luchon, and my old chum Césaire Lenoir, of Saint-Malo, the idea came to me that Claire, rather than being called Miss, could be called Mrs. Lenoir with no great difficulty.

Why not?

I wrote immediately to that excellent Césaire, who rushed up to Luchon. Cleverly I exploited this coincidence of names as a pretext for a formal introduction. Césaire was scarcely forty-two years old; the marriage was soon consummated. I rubbed my hands together proudly, having made two people happy.

Lenoir took his wife to Saint-Malo, to his suburban estate, 18 Rue des Mauvaises-Paleurs, his permanent address; his letters indicated to me from time to time that the happiness of his household, except for the threat of Claire's blindness, was completely untroubled.
How could Sir Henry Clifton, the likeable, noble child of the sea, have known the young woman? Dare I suppose, assuming that it was really Claire of whom he was speaking, dare I suppose, I say, that she had failed in her duty? No! Such a thought was hideous; I was imagining things.

Moreover, if my memory serves me, Claire, the beautiful Claire, was an introverted and studious woman; how shall I put it, a metaphysician? A scholar! An impossible creature! A mystic! A phrasemonger! A dreamer.

—Come now! It could not be she whom the lieutenant wished to sully with the accusation of adultery.

On that I smiled to myself, as I pulled my sheet over my head; I shrugged my shoulders with regard to the young Englishman and fell asleep.
CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS PARAGRAPH

"Moreover, in these lethargic times,
When there is neither gaiety nor remorse
Still the only logical laugh
Is that of the death's-head."

--Paul Verlaine

The docking bell woke me. We were in the port of Saint-Malo. It was just about eleven o'clock, a beautiful sunny day. I took my cane and bag, hopped onto the gangway, and with the stream of travellers, rushed onto the pier, my boots spotted with the foam of the sea.

My first act, after stepping onto the soil of my glorious country, was to go into a cafe, the view from which took in the whole road, and in the distance, the tomb of an old minister of Charles X, the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, whose several ethnographic works about the Savages had, it seemed, attracted some attention. I ordered my usual huge dose of absinthe; then, dropping into a seat, I grasped, distracted with nostalgia, the first newspaper which came to hand.

It was a local sheet, a soiled, forgotten, torn, gazette, already long outdated. It lay there near me on the red seat. And, now that I think of it, I remember distinctly that the waiter wanted to snatch it from my
hands and give me a more recent one and that I resisted him with the automatic reaction of any man from whom someone wishes to take something.

In perusing the newspaper, my glance stopped on a paragraph set between a new case of infringement by the clergy judiciously brought to attention by the editor and an infallible recipe for the most acute earaches, a prescription recommended by some travelling medicine man.

Here is the paragraph:

The Academy of Sciences of Paris has just verified the authenticity of a most surprising discovery. It has been established for all time that animals destined to be our food, such as sheep, cows, lambs, horses, and cats, retain in their eyes, after the blow of the sledgehammer or of the butcher's knife, an imprint of the objects which they last see. It is a veritable photograph of pavement, stalls, gutters, vague figures among which can almost always be distinguished that of the man who struck the blow. This phenomenon lasts until decomposition. As we see, Ignorance is diminished daily; this discovery will figure nobly among its fellows in the already considerable knowledge of this enlightened century.

That I already knew of this discovery, insofar as its principle had been recently tested by the North American police, and, from a self-serving article from the same country, is what I hope will remove any shadow of a doubt in the mind of the reader. But what struck me was the personal effect that was produced in me by that reading; that is to say, the uncanny timeliness with which the fact
appeared to me at that moment, as though arranged by some miserable provincial prankster.

This sensory depravity might have been caused by the nervous exhaustion, both physical and mental, brought on by my trip: then began an examination of myself. Then automatically I raised my eyes again . . . and my glance fell upon a man standing 300 yards from me, against a foresail mast, his arms crossed. I recognized the noble lieutenant.

Our eyes met at the same time, and we turned our glances away from one another spontaneously as if ill at ease. Why? Neither he nor I will ever know.

To cut short the dull thoughts which were rising in my mind, I jumped up, downed the absinthe in one gulp, then, turning my back on the inn, began to stride energetically along the suburban seaside road on which the Lenoirs lived, a road that seemed out of the way and deserted at this hour of the day.

The sun burned me; I stopped now and then to wipe my brow and to look uneasily around me.
CHAPTER V

THE BLUE-TINTED SPECTACLES

"Beautiful eyes of my child, adored mysteries, 
You so resemble the magical grottoes 
Where, beyond the mass of lethargic shadows 
Glitter dimly the treasures unknown."

--Charles Baudelaire

_Spleen et Idéal_

Half an hour later I was standing before an isolated country house, the home of the good doctor Césaire, my best friend. I say "doctor" as a manner of speaking: for Lenoir was, to tell the truth, a perfect ass, the worst ninny under the sun! I rang the bell: an extremely old servant answered it, escorted by an enormous basset hound with a red coat, which must have combined in that house the office of guard dog with that of strangler of gentleman rats.

The servant showed me into the dining room, asked me to wait, and went out.

It was the usual ground floor room. Through the window, open to the garden, a fresh woody smell came in. The portrait of an ancestress on the wall; a lamp with its shade on the big table covered with a cloth. On the mantel, a deep, clear mirror in its carved oaken frame reflected the old Dresden china of the clock and the
ancient candelabras. And this room was pervaded by a country quiet, by the calm of isolation. I remained standing, hat and cane in one hand, bag in the other. I savored the whole effect of this quiet coolness, full of echoes.

Then, half turning around:

"They're happy here," I thought.

This movement put me before the mirror; in it I saw the door open noiselessly behind me, and let in a creature whose appearance caused me some shock.

It was a woman in a green velvet wrapper with garnet tassels; two long chestnut curls fell, a la Sévigné, over her bosom; she had on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, whose enormous blue lenses, round as huge six-livres coins, almost hid her eyebrows and the tops of her pale cheeks. She came in showing her teeth with a deliberate smile, looking like an apparition. I said it before, and I say it again: the sight of her gave me a sudden chill.

"So it's you, Mr. Traveller!" Claire Lenoir said to me in a biting voice that vibrated like the sound of silver. "We went to wait for you last night on the pier! Put that down and have a glass of old Madeira. Césaire will be down in a minute."

After I had deposited my implements in a corner, I hastily took her hands.
"You!" I murmured. "Is it possible?"

The young woman looked up and down as if very surprised.

"Of course," she said to me, "no doubt about it! And whence comes all this astonishment, my dear sir? I didn't know I'd changed that much!--Oh!" she cried suddenly between bursts of laughter, "I have it! It's my glasses! . . . It's true! you haven't seen me since the day . . . Alas! my friend, I am resigned to wearing them, at my age, in the hope of prolonging the light! See! see!"

And, lifting with both hands her large spectacles, she let me gaze on her eyes.

They were of a brilliance so glassy, so inward that her look was as cold as stone; it hurt to look at them. They were two aquamarines.

"Put them back on," I told her sharply; "a sudden gust of air could be dangerous."

Her long lashes fell again over her eyes.

"I don't know what it is about my eyes," she said as she obeyed; "but I judge, from the blinking of my lids, that it is more in the interest of others than in my own that I have to wear these thick glasses."

There was a silence.

I knew the moment had come to slip in a compliment, the situation seemed even to demand one imperiously!

But the moment I opened my mouth to make a comparison
with the most enormous stars of the heavenly vault (be-
loved of the nocturnal angels), someone else appeared
behind the glass door: it was Lenoir.

As soon as he recognized me, his high and poorly
matched eyebrows stopped frowning, and he came in like a
cannonball of 1848, threw himself into my arms without
a word and with a hearty effusiveness which threatened to
knock me over.

He was smothering me.

"Here I am!" I told him, "and I see with real joy,
my dear Lenoir, that the years have been kind to you!
Still hale and hearty!" I added, smiling and feeling
myself all over to make sure that no part of my frame was
broken.

Puffing, he called in the servants, while his wife
poured me a glass of Madeira; he had my things taken up
to the room set aside for me, after which we went into
the sitting room and set to talking.

¹Useless to remind the reader that we are not
responsible for the Doctor's way of looking at things,
even physically. He has his own opinions which we have
in no wise allowed ourselves to correct, assuming that
there is anything at all in his opinions which needs
correction.
CHAPTER VI
KILLING TIME BEFORE DINNER

"Thou shalt be silent, oh sinister voice of the living!"

--Leconte de Lisle

The furnishings, the draperies, and the upholstery of that little parlor were dark red: alabaster vases on the mantelpiece. In the shadows a canvas in the style of the school of Rembrandt; some ugly purple dahlias in a bowl on the piano. A scale model of a man of war (leisure work of my friend), with its rigging and cannons, was suspended from the ceiling like a chandelier. The window open to the west and the sea.

Buried in the sofa, between Césaire and his wife, I related rapidly and in general terms, my travels in the four corners of the world, my expeditions to mountain tops and into the bowels to the earth, from the summit of the Illimani to the depths of the mines of Poullaouen; I talked of geysers or of the mud volcanoes of Iceland, of the pointed skulls of the Seminoles, about the rites of the Juggernaut, about Chinese tortures, simply the names of which would require a dictionary the size of our Bottin, about the cult of sorcerers in Africa who dance with flaming sulphur torches under their armpits, about the
passport tattooed on my back, given me as a token of affection by Zouzou Anandzu-Rakartapadouí-Booey-Anazenopati-Abdoulrakam-Penantogomo V, King of the Honolulu Islands and Moo-Loo-Loo, about the Indian trees, on each leaf of which is written some one of Buddha's thoughts, about the serpent cult of the cannibals of Tierra del Fuego (a snake which need bite only the shadow of a man on the sunlit sand to kill him), about the juice of the Cruciferous Hemlock of the South Pole, a decoction of which always produces the same kind of hallucination, filled with visions of the antedeluvian world; about the Canadian religion which consists in believing that the universe was created by a great hare; the Niam-Niams, men who have a tail like a chimpanzee and are classified above the gorilla but lower than the Blacks of Kafir in the visible hierarchy of creatures (just as I stated in my treatise entitled: On the Tadpole), about the great Tibetan lama whose royal face is always veiled from birth to death inclusively, about the tribal chieftain of Zealand Ko-li-ki (King of Kings), who lives only by extracting from his subjects large chunks of flesh, torn from the tender parts (when he passes through their huts), with one bite of the jaw; I spoke of huge trees, waves, rocks, and far-off adventures. I held the dice; I returned the ball; I shook the fool's bells; I coolly recounted all this drivel; I talked of this, of that, of up and down, without any rhyme or reason,
thinking that, after all, it was good enough for them. In a word, I was charming!

They seemed astounded, both of them, and looked at me as if I were a stranger. I pitied those provincials: truly a timid pair!

Anyway, I must say, I was quite put out with Lenoir, because he had seized me so affectionately with his muscular arms; I don't like coarse expansiveness.

Night was coming on; the rays of the setting sun shone with a sinister light upon all three of us in the red room. During a lull in the conversation, the old servant discreetly opened the door halfway and mumbled:

"Dinner is served."

We rose. I made a leg, simpered, held out my arm and offered it to Madame Lenoir, who deigned to lean upon it.

Césaire followed us, thoughtful, pinching between the tips of his forefinger and thumb his nose, into which he had surreptitiously put a pinch of snuff. His pensive gesture did not escape me, even though he was behind me, because, like all gentlemen of tact, I have eyes in the back of my head.

Shining candelabra were brought in, and their radiance was reflected by the glasses, the linen, and the crystal chandelier.

We sat, unfolded our napkins, with a certain quiet solemnity due to the atmosphere my conversation had
produced, but after the first glass of Bordeaux, there were smiles all around.
CHAPTER VIII
SPIRITUALISM

"At men's dinners there is a tendency to talk about the immortality of the soul over dessert."

--E. and J. de Goncourt

However, since Césaire's intellect--and all of his soul's faculties--seemed for the moment to be engrossed in a serving of stuffed meat, his favorite dish, and since his sense of taste, temporarily overriding all the others, must surely have smothered in him (I presumed as I watched him) any thought about human or divine justice, I deemed it wise to let the storm blow over, as they say, and even to follow the example of his stoic conduct as best I could.

Consequently, I felt keenly that it would be fitting to give play to the heroic set of masseter and croaphite muscles with which Nature, a provident mother, had endowed me. A moment later our two pairs of jaws, each convinced that right was on its side, were competing silently, rapidly, dexterously, and vigorously, combining cunning with discernment.

Suddenly, in the midst of the intelligent silence which reigned upon our distracted brows, Claire complained of the candelabras' excessive brightness.
Thus, it was by the subdued light of the lamp that Césaire, feeling full, fell back typically into his armchair, wobbling his head, and smacked his hands where the servant had just set down the coffee and liqueur. He rolled his surprised and satisfied eyes under raised eyebrows and looked directly at Mme. Lenoir and me. Then he savored the aroma of the first sip of the mocha bean, set down his cup, twiddled his thumbs, and, staring at the ceiling, dropped this word from a voice made fat, husky, and guttural by food:

"Perfect!!"

His mouth, split like a policeman's cap, tried to sketch a smile. Then, right then and there, he launched into a philosophical discussion. Our worthy host's chosen topic was none other than this:

"Will we be called to some new series of existences, or is this life final? Does the sum of our actions and our thoughts constitute a new interior being that will dissolve with Death? In other words, is our paltry quotient worthy, after dissolution of the organism, after disintegration of the actual form, of the honor of becoming Unmodifiable?"

I leave the reader to consider the effect this subject, enough to confuse lunatics in an asylum, must have had on me. But imperturbable, Césaire sat there deep in thought, and, terrified, I saw that he was preparing quite calmly
to trot out with the greatest complacency in the world all the superstitions that had infected his mind.

Better say it now! It's time to warn the Reader about him! He was a frequenter of solitary spots, a man of somber disposition with a vindictive temperament. There was something unhinged, something primitive about his basic character. Laughingly, he claimed through his Kanaka nose that there was a bit of the hairy vampire about him. His fatuous jokes usually revolved around anthropophagy. All of this was blended with a simple-minded middle-classness. But when he held forth on his favorite theme:—The form the nervous fluid of the deceased may assume, the physical and temporal power of the dead over the living—his eyes blazed with superstitious flame! That savage spoke with terror of the great-Devil of Hell, and he would have upset and sickened less stable temperaments than mine, thanks to his bizarre and stubborn eloquence.

I have known him to keep me up till dawn with a tale about a captain of a Russian ship, a prisoner of the islanders on the Sundra Archipelago, horrible tale! and his face assumed an expression that would not have been out of place among those savages.

His true inner nature had to be one of a restrained ferocity, allowances being made for his degree of civilization.
As for what he called his "theological ideas," they were for me the source of the most ample and hilarious jibes possible, interior jibes, understand. Since I abide by the evidence of the excellent authors whom I had the honor to quote at the beginning of this Memorandum, it is not my style to criticize people openly. Therefore, Lenoir suspected nothing when I approved quite loudly and with a sweet smile his tedious and mawkish theories against which, in petto, I nourished a deep, disdainful, blind, and almost murderous hatred. That is partly the reason (ha, ha, ha!) that I had married him off so pitilessly before! For I always have a motive for whatever I do! And like Aeschylus' Jupiter, I alone know my thoughts.

Well, it was about the same year, according to those who were close to him, that faith in the doctrines of Magic, Spiritualism, Magnetism, and especially Hypnotism reached its greatest intensity in my poor friend. The suggestions he claimed to be able to inculcate in passers-by were enough to alarm and terrorize anybody. Confidently he advanced such theories as to give one gooseflesh, in all of the monstrousness of that expression.

He reveled in the works of Eliphas Lévi, Raymond-Lulle, Mesmer, and Guillaume Postel, the gentle monk of the Black Arts. He quoted to me from the astrologer-abbot Tritheme, R. C. He swore by Auréole Théophrastus Bombaste, called "the divine Paracelsus." Caffarel and the popular
Swedenborg delighted him to the point of rapture, and he claimed that the Hell of purification, as analyzed by Reynard, was a more than rational concept.

The Moderns, Meriville, Crooked, Kardek sent him into deep musings. He believed in the Risen Dead of Ireland, in Wallachian vampires, in the evil eye; he quoted passages from the fifth volume of the Mystic of Görres to support his contentions.

Even more abracadabrish is the fact that Lenoir is a rabid and quite knowledgeable Hegelian. How did he manage that?

But I defy you to find an atom of common sense in all the contradictions of those who are fools enough "to think"! Even though it has been shown that that cannot lead to anything, since no one can ever convince himself.

As for magnetism, such as Dupotée and Regazzone's very curious experiments, he had unlimited confidence in it. In this case I was not too far from sharing some of his opinions, but in a much more solid and enlightened way, to be sure.

The old scoundrel believed firmly that blows could be struck at someone from a distance, that passions could be roused suddenly at the will of the magnetizer, in artificial riches, in flowers poisoned by a look, finally in the signs of priestly Esotericism that express the divine Reprobation.
He had in his room the Pentagram of virgin gold and the emblems propitious to black conjuring and pacts. He devised the baphometic goat, a symbol borrowed from the ancient Templars, as we know. He gave a running commentary on the clavicles of Solomon and he believed that an astral body is enclosed in each and every one of us. In support of all that twaddle, he cited, with the coolness of a Greenlander, various texts which, an astounding thing, seemed at first most rational, logical, scientific, and irrefutable, but which were obviously nothing more than bad witticisms, the fruit of ignorance and charlatanism.

Such was the good doctor, and he had just posed the question, if it was even a question, which I mentioned.

It gave rise to, as we shall see, the strangest discussion, which it is essential to relate in order to understand the even stranger events that followed.
"Philosophy commands; it does not obey."

--Aristotle

We lit up our cigars and moved into the drawing room. So that we might better enjoy the view of the waves which shone from afar through the open casement, Claire lowered the lampshade.

The sky was a black chaos of horrible clouds; a copper crescent and a few stars made up the face of the night; but the healthy odor of the sea filled our lungs.

"Here we are in the theater: we are presenting this evening The Sea, a grand opera, music by God," murmured Mme. Lenoir.

"The fact is," I replied smiling, "that, if I may say so, the swell will make a divine bass to harmonize with our thoughts."

I sank into the sofa. Mme. Lenoir was leaning on the balcony railing, half turned towards the main. The doctor settled into an armchair facing me and peered deeply with his unusually clear, bright eyes into mine, with an almost embarrassing intensity.
"My friend," said to him, "my only, my old comrade in arms, right now I need your best lights on a point of physiology which puzzles me."

"Speak, Bonhomet, speak!" he murmured, evidently flattered that such a man as I would call on his "best lights."

"In a word: have the health officers who administer the insane asylums been able to determine the degree of Reality contained in the hallucinations of their patients?"

By this incongruous question I hoped to drive home to him the foolishness and bad taste of his own.

"Before I answer you," he told me calmly, "I should like to know what you mean by that word, Reality?"

"That which I see, that which I feel, that which I touch," I answered with a pitying smile.

"No," said Lenoir, "for as you well know, man is condemned forever by the ridiculous inadequacy of his organs to perpetual error. The first microscope was enough to prove that our senses trick us and that we cannot see things as they truly are. Does nature seem grand and 'poetic'? Yet, if we were allowed to consider it in its true aspect, to see things devour one another, it is likely we would shiver more from horror than from enthusiasm."

"Agreed!" I exclaimed, "we know that! But the real, for us, is relative, my friend; let us keep to that which we can see."
"Well," replied Lenoir, "if the real is, decidedly, that which we can see, I cannot see why the hallucinations of a lunatic should not be accepted as realities."

I felt cornered, but I am not a man to be cornered with impunity, for fear makes me put my back to the wall.

"That is my true belief, my dear Lenoir," I said, after a brief silence. I added hypocritically, to cut through all metaphysical speculation: "The best thing to do is to fall on one's knees before the Creator and not try to see into the unfathomable mystery of things."

"It all depends," said Lenoir.

"What do you mean, it depends?"

"I ask nothing better than to go down on my knees before my Creator, but on the condition that I am really kneeling before Him and not my idea of Him. Precisely what I want is to adore God, but I have no intention of unconsciously adoring myself under that name. It is difficult to separate one from the other."

"But your conscience!" I cried.

"If my conscience has already tricked me once (as I have noted with regard to my senses), who can state positively that it won't fool me again on this score? When I think of God, I project my mind before me as far as possible, while bestowing upon it all the virtues of my human conscience, which I strive in vain to make infinite: but it is never anything but my mind, and not God. I cannot
go out of myself. It's the old story of Narcissus. I would like to be sure it's really God I'm thinking of when I pray! That's all."


"You mean . . . ?" replied Lenoir in the same professorial tone which annoyed me so.

"Well, you won't deny, I hope, that a God created us?"

"Listen: God? . . . a Mystery. The Creation? . . . another Mystery. To say that God created us is therefore to affirm simply that we come from a mystery . . . a point on which we are in perfect agreement, since it is precisely this mystery (or more precisely, this problem) which wants clearing up, but which you make even more obscure by personifying it. Now, every problem supposes a solution. I almost believe that today a solution may be possible."

"Possible! Heavens!" I cried, clasping my hands. "With our poor limited minds?"

"Limited by what" asked Claire softly. "Can you conceive of a precise limit when all limits have been established by the hereafter?"

Such a question, coming from the mouth of a woman, would shock a more prudish man than I. I felt myself blush to the whites of my eyes.
"Where do you see the 'limits' of the Mind?" said Lenoir. "I am near to proving that Man's understanding, by analyzing itself, must discover in and by itself alone, the strict necessity of his reason for being, the law which makes all things clear and is the principle of all reality. Of course, I am speaking only from the point of view of this world, without vouching (in case there is another) for what my senses do not reveal to me."

I confess that I sat there gaping at the doctor's stupid fatuity.

"Heavens!" I thought. "You really can't change the spots on a leopard. He's showing off for his wife."

"But, my friend," I said, "a simple Christian would ask you why Humanity should have waited six thousand years for you to know the Truth! . . . your truth! . . . supposing that you have it."

"I would answer the Christian: Humanity had to wait a good four thousand years before knowing yours! Truth is not measured by the year. As for me, mustn't I be, before I can be a Christian? Before I can be a Christian, I must be a man. I am Man, first. I am part of the human series; and when I raise myself by thought as high as the human Mind, I am the point by which the idea of the Polyp-Humanity is expressed in one of its moments. I cease being a particular self; I speak the name of the species which is represented in me. Outside the General Idea, I would be just a
madman having hallucinations of heaven and earth, and babbling at random, as do others, with a view to some base interest in 'practical' life."

I judged that the moment had come to bring Lenoir to the point of repentance, for he had to be humbled. "Just let me cite Cabanis," I stammered, and I showed them the passage in which the illustrious health officer reports on cases of people bitten by mad animals: wolves, dogs, pigs, and cattle. The victims, he affirms, hid under furniture, barked, growled, grunted, or mooed, and imitated in their posture the behavior and instincts of the animals that had bitten them. "You see," I added, "that the most gifted human geniuses must never lose sight of the fact that such a disaster may befall them, and given the possibility of such a humiliation, it is only with the most extreme and circumspect reserve and after close and objective examination that one should expose his personal opinions. For me, Kant, Schopenhauer, Fichte, and the Baron du Schelling are only a few of the fellows who are infested with a sort of natural rabies virus who should be treated accordingly.

"And Hegel, whom you were about to quote, since he is your master (I added to humiliate Lenoir), is second to none in that respect. When, according to theology, the Devil, in response to Michael's Quis ut Deus? cried 'Non serviam!' (a blunder that was castigated by all the
heavenly virtues, I added with a smile), he taught us to mistrust enthusiastic haste. And the werewolf Nebuchadnezzar did not a little to enforce that symbolic lesson given to our pride! Well, Hegel strikes me as being the Nebuchadnezzar of Philosophy, so there?"

To unsettle the good doctor even more, I caused my diamond to flash in his eyes.

As he listened to this farrago, Lenoir's eyes grew huge, and I took a quiet pleasure in the trouble he was experiencing in trying to make sense of my disjointed remarks.

"You do not mean to imply, I suppose," he muttered, "that some sort of illness limits us, for the Species survives in the individual. If Cabanis is bitten, the Human Spirit is not answerable for his madness; it takes note, studies it as a phenomenon, discovers the cure, and moves on. What are you saying?"

"What I'm saying," I cried, "is that if I press my thumb on a lobe of the brain, if I touch any part of the cerebral pulp, I instantly paralyze either the will, the perception, the memory, or some other faculty of what you call the mind. From which I conclude that the mind is no more than a secretion of the brain, a bit of essential phosphorus, and the ideal is a malfunction of the organism, nothing more."

Lenoir began to laugh softly.
"So the problem boils down to knowing what the 'phosphorus' is and from what are secreted the brain, the Sun, the investigative sense, the reflection of the Universe in our thought, and from whence comes the necessity of being, rather than of non-being, for these 'secretions.' I readily admit that, once the question arises, the rest is a matter of indifference to me. Between the physiologists and the metaphysicians, disagreement arises only from a difference in their modes of expression: science has its countries and its languages as does a world. But what do you think you are saying when you assert that you can paralyze the faculties of the mind by touching the lobes of the brain? Say rather that you paralyze the machinery, the organs by means of which the faculties operate, and manifest themselves externally. Do not say that you touch them, much less destroy them. It is as if you were to amputate a man's legs and then tell him 'I dare you to walk.' Nothing more."

"Eloquently put!" I murmured disconcertedly, as if I had not known of these trite and woeful banalities from my infancy. "Well, Lenoir, your conclusions?"

"I conclude that Mind is both the foundation and purpose of the Universe. In the germ of the tree, in the seed of the plant, you cannot say that the tree and the plant are contained in little; therefore they must be contained ideally. The future tree and plant, potential in
their seeds, are vaguely conceived in that form. Through the mediating idea of Exteriority, which is like the web on which the eternal becoming of the Cosmos is embroidered, the IDEA repudiates itself in order to prove its being, in the guise of Nature, and I can reconstruct the fact by using the Hegelian dialectic. The Idea can grow only by rediscovering itself in its own negation. Isn't the movement which is contained in the growth of trees and blades of grass the same as that which makes the suns swing and bounce off one another, thereby casting their rings across the skies, and thus producing other suns? Just as the windfalls of fruit trees or the blooms of grass produce other vegetable pollen, so centrifugal speed disperses astral pollen to the abyss: it is the germination of the world that Hegel, you know, saw as a 'growing plant.'
CHAPTER X

PHILOSOPHICAL MEDLEY

"Satan is a good logician."

--Dante

The maid brought us tea.

With a gentle smile that her glasses made a bit sinister, Claire offered me a cup of the hot Chinese infusion, sweetened and made fragrant with Kirsch through her kindly foresight.

"Lenoir," I said, savoring a sip of the digestive liquid, "you stand, I warn you, in opposition, to theologians and physiologists in affirming that Idea and Matter are one and the same thing."

"No."

"What do you mean, no!"

"Don't theologians say that God is pure Mind, and that He created the world? Matter may, therefore, EMANATE from Mind just as the theologians say. Thus there only seems to be a difference between the two. As for the physiologists, haven't they been forced to state that the form of the body is more essential than its matter? You see?"

I was far from following in Lenoir's wake; his sophisms glanced off the heavy armor of my common sense.
"Look, my friend," I told him, "will you abuse your rights as host so far as to insinuate that this LOG, for example, is not composed of matter?"

"Where do you see 'Matter' in this log?" he answered. I covered my face with both hands: the shipwreck of his intelligence made me sick. He was trying to make fun of me . . . Me!

"You claim that you do not see Matter!" I asked in amazement, "and that this LOG . . . ."

"But really it's elementary!" cried Lenoir, looking at me with exasperation over my ignorance. "I see the attributes of form, color, polarity, and weight combined: I call wood a certain aggregate of these qualities, but that which binds these qualities, the SUBSTANCE, in a word, which these attributes veil, where is it to be found? Between your eyebrows! And nowhere! You can see that 'Matter' in itself is not perceptible! Cannot be probed! Does not reveal itself! And that 'Substance' is a purely intellectual entity of which the sensory World is but a negative form, a reverse."

"But, my friend, what is an intellectual entity, what is the reality of an idea, of a poor little idea, compared with the obvious reality of the fact of this simple LOG, which you deny?"

"I have only to throw this log on the fire, to obliterate it: there is your vanished LOG, become something
other than itself. What kind of reality is that which can be obliterated, which is and is not at the same time, which depends upon exterior chance? Can one really call that 'reality'? Come now! It belongs to the order of Becoming, of Possibility, not of the Real; for it is capable of being as well as of not being. Reality, therefore, must be something other than this contingency, and so we have come full circle, logically, to our first question: 'What is REALITY?''

"And I," I muttered, pained by the doctor's paradoxical dialectic, "I maintain, to the contrary, that that which is solid and has weight is not a simple idea, dammit!"

"Fit the idea of weight (since it dazzles you so) back into the idea of length, for example, and you will understand it all better."

"In words, possibly, but material facts don't lend themselves to such fusions and confusions with so good a grace as do ideas."

"You're joking, aren't you?" said Lenoir after a moment. "How can a fact, do you suppose, contradict a logical idea, since a logical idea is the very essence of a fact?"

"Prove it, then! Try, try to apply your theory in a concrete example!"
"Why, I have only to slide a weight along the length of a steel bar for the length of that bar to lift up a weight a thousand times greater than that which slid along it. Now you see how length and weight fit into one another, in fact as well as in idea."

"Nothing but talk," I muttered ill-temperedly: "it's specious; basically it's nothing but words."

"And with what would you have me answer?" riposted Lenoir, smiling. "With what are you questioning me? You deny the value of the word 'word' with the WORD itself. Is it by gestures that you wish to chat with me? Wind blows, instinct howls, idea is expressed."

"My dear Lenoir," I cried, "let's get back to the question. I will conclude by affirming that, since I can neither touch nor see ideas, I still prefer to call real that which is perceptible. And all Humanity will share my opinion."

"No!" said Lenoir.

"What do you mean, no!" I replied for the third time, looking sadly at the poor Hegelian.

"If things are, if the Appearance of the Universe comes into being, it can do so only by virtue of an Absolute Necessity. There is a reason for that! Well, whether this reason is Idea or something other than Idea, it is really rather perceptible being that one should doubt, since all that it contains of reality comes
necessarily from the living reason, from the Creative-Law. And that reason, that law, can be grasped and fathomed by Mind alone. -- The IDEA is, therefore, the highest form of Reality: and it is Reality itself, since it participates in the nature of sempiternal laws, and pervades the elements of things. From whence it follows that by simply studying the filiations of the Idea, I will be studying the constituent laws of things, and my reasoning will COINCIDE, if it is rigorous, with the very Essence of things, since it will imply, by its content, that NECESSITY which forms the foundation of all things.

"In a word, I am, insofar as I am 'thought,' the mirror, the Reflection of Universal laws, or, as the theologians say, 'I am made in the image of God!' That is to say, the reflex of Creativity."

I touched my forehead with a significatory finger, while looking at Mme. Lenoir, who, silent, seemed to be listening with rapt attention to the disgusting theories of her lamentable husband. I pitied her, truly, for having chosen such a ranter. Therefore, I poured myself a second cup of tea.

"Ah! but your God is not that of the theologians, my friend," I said to him with a heavy heart.

"That is not the question!" said Lenoir. "Right now I am talking Philosophy; but believing only in the Black Arts, I attribute only a dubious importance and, in a word,
quite a relative one, to the principles I am now defending. That said, let's see what your theologians have to say about God. 'God,' says Malebranche, 'is the place of the spirit, just as space is that of the body.' 'God,' says St. Augustine, 'is complete everywhere, yet contained wholly nowhere.' 'Who will deny that God is body as well as spirit?' says Tertullian. 'God is pure Act,' says St. Thomas. 'God is the all-powerful Father!' says the Nicene Creed. I should never stop if I were to give all the so-called definitions of the Absolute-Being, the notion of which is inseparable from its being! But the Spirit of the World does not define itself that way. These glimmerings and images are merely profound; the words of Jacob Boehme, 'God is eternal Silence,' are even less convincing. I am sure that it is finally in an attempt to avoid mental reservations and in the end to fill up, so to speak, desperately, the obscure side of that kind of thinking that Abbot Clarke could never say the name of God without great physical manifestations of Terror and Respect.

"Well," concluded Lenoir, "I don't know if the God of whom my mind is conscious differs essentially in its conception from that of the theologians: but I do know one thing . . . I fear that absolute judge."

I could not restrain my laughter at this last outburst.
"There's nothing to fear, Lenoir!" I replied, "especially from that quarter! Let's not overdo it, or we will offend Common Sense."

"True enough!" said the doctor. "Let us bow down before divine Common Sense, which is changed by opinions every century, and whose nature is to hate instinctively the very mention of the soul. As enlightened men, let us salute Common Sense, which moves on, all the while offending the Spirit, by following the road which the Spirit lays out for it and suggests that it take. Fortunately, the Spirit pays no more heed to the insults of Common Sense than does the Shepherd to the bleating of the flock that he drives towards the peaceful place of Death or Sleep."

Here, Lenoir closed his eyes, as if lost in a vision.

"O Torches!" he murmured. "After all, what would be your glory, if there were no Shadows? However," he added, smiling at me, "it is the Mephitic shadows which, unable to accept the Light, extinguish the torches."

At these words . . . I swear it . . . at this banal joke . . . yes . . . the idea of the loss of my friend . . . seemed less disturbing to me.

"In short," I said, "what purpose, in the practical and positive sense, do all of these fine speculations serve?"

Lenoir gazed at me several moments with a somber expression but did not reply.
CHAPTER XI

THE DOCTOR, MADAME LENOIR, AND I ARE STRICKEN BY A FIT OF MERRIMENT

"And my heart so rejoiced—that I no longer recognized it as my own."

--Dante

Until then, I had indulged a feigned giddiness with an evasive, roundabout manner and learnedly frivolous queries. Lenoir (though he had managed to show off to good advantage the ingenuousness of his intelligence), on the other hand, had made all the more obvious his incompetence in these transcendental matters. Evidently I had led him onto ground where, despite all his efforts, I could henceforth, at leisure, dig a final grave for his illusions.

He collected himself and leaned, forehead in hand, pondering what was probably some new outrage, unworthy of submission to my attention. His meditative silence made immoderately clear to me the emptiness of his soul; for, if he had had something to say, he would have said it right then, like anybody else, without feeling that futile need for reflection, which is a sure sign of impotence and absent-mindedness.
"I will not hide from you, my friend," I cried out, "--I may say my best friend--that I am quite convinced beforehand of the futility of your arguments insofar as the usefulness of your bizarre theories is concerned. I repeat: what use is it?"

He reopened his eyes, and, after a brief silence: "For you and your kind, no use at all! For others, contemptuous of Death and very much concerned about Eternity, it will help to fight gloriously for Justice, with the certainty of defeat."

At these words, I could not repress a small cry of fright, and my features registered such real dismay, that Lenoir sat there open-mouthed.

I had felt, as a matter of fact, with an almost divine presentiment, that he was going to tell over his endless rosary of ideas that were subversive to the whole social order. Without my instinctive expression of disapproval, he would, no doubt, have gone on and on about the "independence of the world," and been carried away by the sound of his own voice: I saw that my dumb show alone was enough to trample his resolutions, that he would not insist on them in front of me.

What weight, indeed, could such thoughts, supposedly noble, generous, enthusiastic, be given in the estimation of a serious man. Was it not enough that they be simply reflected by my brain and dissected by my lips, for them,
stripped of all their vain embellishments, to take on an
aridity that would provoke among the specters themselves
a yearning for the tomb?

Lenoir stopped, and I was grateful for his silence.

"Yes," I said, "I understand you: it is a question
of Peoples . . . of the People! Do you hope to make
them receptive to these dreams about freedom, dignity,
justice? But one does not have the resource of ampu-
tation when it comes to treating gangrenous souls: there
are incurable sicknesses that are only aggravated by
attempts to cure them. The People--of course, no one
holds them dearer than I; but just as it is my function
to pity them, so it is theirs to suffer. If it had been
established that Science was good for them, who among us
(I first of all!) would not give his soul, his life, and
his love to them! Unfortunately, the victim, once his
bonds are loosed, has no other aim than to wrap them
around the neck of his liberator. Since the place of
miserable folk cannot stay empty in this world, and one
man cannot ransom another except by taking his place,
lucky is he if he does not pay by ruin, slander, and
death for the benefits he has lavished on his fellow.
My friend, gratitude is a heavy burden, very heavy!"
I added, resuming my paternal tone, " . . . and the
Progress of Reason can only arouse in beings but re-
cently unconscious, inoffensive creatures, who are blessed
at least with our pity, the instincts of jealousy, base hatred, envy, and betrayal! Believe me, Lenoir, I know what I am talking about! I say also: Perish the Benefactors, if their action must result in the disappearance of victims! Misfortune fall on the future republics, on the ideal societies, in which sensitive men will no longer have cause to shed, as I do, soft tears over the hard fate of the people! At the very thought that someone might deprive me of this satisfaction, my veins run with bile instead of blood, my poor friend!"

This tirade provoked some merriment: for Lenoir and his wife carried their insanity so far as to imagine that I was joking. Delighted by their error, I believed that I was obliged to improve on their mirth. If they had known me better, I doubt that they would have been so grossly mistaken on that score. I have noticed, as a matter of fact, something odd which, being particular to me, puzzles me now and then: it is that my own pranks always make me turn pale.

So I filled the drawing room with one of those bursts of laughter which, reiterated by nocturnal echoes, used to make, I remember well, the dogs howl when I passed by! Since then, I have had to restrain my use of it, it's true, for my own hilarity terrifies me. Ordinarily I make use of these noisy manifestations only in times of great danger. It is my special weapon, when I am
afraid, although my fear is contagious: it is for me a sure guarantee against thieves and murderers when I am in out-of-the-way places. My Laugh, better than prayers, my laugh would put to flight the ghosts themselves, since I myself have never been able to gaze on the Starry Heavens, and the Spirits whose protection I invoke dwell in the wan stars!

Nevertheless, it didn't take me long to realize that what I had taken for a smile on Mme. Lenoir's face was simply an effect of shadow that the lamp had cast on her face.

I had to acknowledge likewise that the doctor had induced me into error by a certain nervous tic, accompanied by a coughing fit which I had taken for a burst of laughter. He had choked on his cigar smoke as he listened to me.

I realized that I had been the only bon vivant among us three with my fit of mirth.
CHAPTER XII
A SENTIMENTAL QUIBBLER

Satan: "Thought, where have you led me!"
--Milton

We filled our teacups once again, and between two spoonfuls of Kirsch:

"My friend," I interrupted, "what good does it do you to brood over all these idle speculations, or puzzle about metaphysics, instead of just living quietly and unambitiously at home? (Here I winked) We will never know the last word about all that!"

I have said that Lenoir was a crank about philosophy: but,--really!--I could hardly have anticipated the way he returned, as if with a leap, to the insipid and idle discussion of a little while ago.

"Ah!" he cried, "it seems to me that we are part of 'all that,' whether we like it or not! Consequently, we are justified to concern ourselves about it, and everything seems, on the contrary, to indicate that we can perceive 'the last word' on it! Look. The dialectic of Nature is the same as that of our brains: her works are her ideas. 'The tree grows by a syllogism,' as Hegel says. Objects are thoughts clothed in various externals,
and Nature produces just as we think. As soon as we re-
discover the connections of a phenomenon with our logic,
we classify it, we pronounce over it this one word: Science
. . . and from that moment on, we are masters of it.

"Thus we may depend, to some degree, on the worth of
our Reason, even with respect to the Supreme Solution of
the enigma of the Universe. Why not? As for . . . GOD
. . . let us live and act as if . . . Someone . . . under-
stood us . . . and as if we did not have to die. That,
too, is what I call fighting for justice."

Claire, at these words, from the shadowy corner where
she was sitting, murmured: "My dear, the inevitability of
such a destiny is not in accord with the notion we have
about ourselves, and when I said a while ago that 'the
Mind of Man is limitless,' I was implying, you know, 'if
it is enlightened by the humble and divine Christian
Revelation.'"

At these words, I gave a start, I admit it, taking
her almost seriously.

"I see where you're going!" I thought. "There, dawning
on the horizon, are Original Sin and the Vale of Tears.
Results: in politics, the Priesthood and Monarchy; in
social economy, present ownership based on future charity;
in history, the Bollandists; in science, Joshua. Unless,
my dear brother, I incarcerate you, torture you, kill you,
and have engraved upon a stone by your followers: 'Here
lies a martyr. It's a way to wipe the slate clean--designed for women--well known!"

I therefore caught the ball on the bounce so that I could take a smashing revenge against Mme. Lenoir for those two or three bad moments which the rather concise paradoxes of Lenoir had put me through--the humiliation of which my embittered heart would never forgive.

I made then, morally speaking, an about face. I changed my principles without warning: that is, without exactly relinquishing the notion of God, I intended to extract atheistic conclusions from it, in order to achieve my singular goal, which was to confuse the issue to the point that each of us would begin to shout and argue without knowing why.

"If I may . . .," I faltered. "If I may say so! I believe we have here a tautology. We are heading down a road we cannot avoid. Why did this phenomenon occur? That is the question. Well now, to account for it, many people have, empirically, appealed to Intuition (that is induction, with or without the knowledge of the inspired). But in order to be on a mountaintop, one must climb one by one the degrees of which this height is but the sum, and there is no such thing as spontaneous intuition. If *Revelations* has further enriched, arbitrarily, the Problem with a new complexity, (Here I raised and stretched out my arms) there's no way we can agree! That means giving
up! I would like very much to believe that a God created the world, but how can we admit that He watches over it, going so far as 'to reveal' to us His ways through this or that intermediary, especially when there is nothing to prove it in any conclusive way? I am amazed that a mind like yours is still deluded by such illusions: they are outmoded."

I thought it permissible, as I sat back, to savor the effect of my eloquence of my interlocutors, and my glance, straying into the shadows, moved towards Mme. Lenoir. Near the window, she had not altered in the least her inscrutable demeanor, and her silence was beginning to make me uneasy. I felt myself being observed by her penetrating and inquisitorial pupils . . . whose glasses cheated me of their accursed expression.

"Well, Claire!" murmured the doctor, "have you no answer?"

"Oh, sir," the lovely Claire replied smiling, "you know very well that the arguments which have up to now been sufficient to refute the dialectic of our friend are not absolute, and I have no desire to complete his sad defeat."

I observed, on the sly, with ill-concealed amazement, this woman who did not fear to irritate my wound to such a monstrous degree, but I could find no response to her damnable remarks. I hunted for a sally, a scathing
epigram, a round-about approach; I appealed to my bad faith. All the efforts of my brain were ineffectual. And after that humiliating proof of my impotence was fully demonstrated to me, spite, indignation, blind hate began to overwhelm me. My heart throbbed and tolled like a death knell in my breast: fury, thirst for revenge, vague ideas of murder, all the vilest sensations, indeed, rose hideously in my throat, but they were deflected suddenly by a blissful and approving smile on my face. Meanwhile, my attitude and gesture encouraged her to go on. "The fact is," I murmured, to keep up appearances, "that Lenoir's assertions--if they didn't make him blush--would make Monsieur de la Palice jealous."

"But you saddened me," continued Claire, in her grave, mystical voice, "when you claimed a little while ago that Science is enough to clear up the riddle of the world, and that to walk in its borrowed light would be enough for the just man to fulfill his duty to God."

Lenoir lowered his eyes with a rather strange smile; I wanted to come to his rescue as only I know how to.

"You are repeating yourself, my dear Claire!" I stammered: "You recriminate without settling the problem. By what right is a 'simple belief' imposed upon philosophy?"

"I know men who could never be accused of repeating themselves, considering that they have never said anything," the dear creature replied.
Turning to Césaire, she went on: "When I think about light, my very humble spirit is in accord with THAT which causes light to be produced. The mind, indomitable, homogeneous, one, in which is resolved every notion as well as every essence, can penetrate and be penetrated. And when I think on the notion of God, when my mind reflects this idea, I actually penetrate the essence of it, according to my thinking: I participate, in fact, in the very nature of God, according to the degree by which He reveals His idea in me, since God is the very being and ideal of all thought. My mind, depending on the surrender of my thoughts to God, is penetrated by God, by a proportional augmentation of the living-idea of God. The two terms, in accord with my freedom, intermingle in this unity which is myself and they mingle without ceasing to be distinct from one another. Now, the Christian-Revelation being the result and application of that absolute principle, I have no intention of treating it as an 'outworn illusion,' since it shares in the nature of its principle: in other words, it is eternal, absolute, immutable."

"My dear Mme. Lenoir," I replied, "I think your conception of God is too great. He is only infinite, indispensable, unimaginable, only astonishing! Why always bring Him into conversations? Remember that Kant had an old servant named Lamb, who implored his master to reconstruct the proofs of the existence of a God, proofs that
the great philosopher had totally demolished. We have, too, in all of us, some old servant who wants a God. Let's be more sensible than Kant: let's be wary of our first impulse; let us have the sense to answer with a smile . . . melancholic? Let us accept such proofs only with reservations. Our inheritance from our first parents, to speak plainly, seems to me incontestably to deserve such treatment!!!"

This was a dash of cold water.

However, Mme. Lenoir answered placidly: "Why not ask for a God from the Infinite itself? Isn't it obliged to give being to every thought? (For what would a so-called Infinite amount to if it were limited by its impotence from giving being to one of Man's thoughts?) And since God, I tell you, is the most sublime conception of which we can conceive the inmost notion, we are infinitely foolish if we strive to destroy it in ourselves . . . which is impossible to do, anyway."

I kept quiet, not wanting to betray what was going on inside me.

"So be it!" answered Césaire. "But, my dear, no one today could impugn the evidence of Man's development, or not attach the greatest importance to it. After all, Progress does not preclude Revelation: the original curse still holds in any case, although thanks to the sweat of our brows, it is diminishing in intensity. There you
have it. The Revelation doesn't hinder us. I myself see
signs of it everywhere! So you are totally free and very
wise to confine yourself to it.--Only, as far as meta-
physics is concerned, I myself am obliged to count on
Progress alone . . . human progress, through Science."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "how can you, a Man, be satis-
fied to develop yourself only by means of a series of
relative terms, the sum of which constitutes your Science.
In that case, instead of being perfect animals, we are
simply animals that are improving and which an indefinite
Progress forever confines by a relative law! Even if the
thing were absolutely true, it still would be nothing to
be proud of. Following that system for a thousand years,
we would still be digging, like moles: what matters the
greatness, the splendor, the depth of the hole, if we know
that it must swallow up our whole destiny? If we are
consecrated to Death, then, towards which we are walking
at an ever-quickening pace, the heavens, according even
to those assertions of Science at its most positive, are
sure to become, sooner or later, fiery and deadly. We are
barely able to examine a past of six thousand years: our
appearance dates from scarcely a few hours ago, and we
dare to found our highest hopes on a grain of sand, whereas
the most trifling thing will return us, irretrievably, to
dust, to shades, to Nothingness."
"But," I exclaimed, "the catastrophe of which you speak will take place only after a lapse of time so considerable that it is almost absurd to try to think about it! First of all, let us win our independence from Nature, and then we will see later. Besides, after us, the flood, and by Jove, we'll take our chances!"

"But we will always be in a state of dependence," she answered, "by the simple fact that we are forced to think. We must believe in Thought, for to deny this is simply another thought. That is why there is action, no idea, no reasoning, which does not have its source in Faith. We believe in our senses, our doubts, our progress, our nothingness, even though they are doubtful, strictly speaking, since nothing can be proven. The most profound scepticism is born of an act of faith.

"Now, since we must choose, let us make the best possible choice! Since Faith is the only basis of all reality, let us prefer God. In vain does Science explain to me in its own way the laws of such and such a phenomenon; I mean to go on seeing in that phenomenon only that which can AUGMENT my soul and not that which may diminish it. If the mystics delude themselves, what good, then, is a Universe inferior even to their conception? In Death, is it the logic of two abstractions that will give me back my own lost Divine-Infinity?
"No! No. I will therefore close my eyes to a world in which my soul seems a stranger. Little does it matter to me if the laws that govern the movement of the stars have been discovered, since the only lesson they teach me is one of certain destruction! Temptations only, those stars, that will be burnt out! Illusion, the 'scientific' future! The History of modern times is the history of Humanity entering upon its Winter years. The cycle will soon be complete. Since the sages of old have set me a holy example, I will not waver in my choice, Christian and sinner that I am, between our 'century of light,' and the Light of Centuries."
CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGE OBSERVATIONS OF DOCTOR LENOIR

"The Preacher said: 'A live dog is better
Than a dead lion.' Except, of course, eating and drinking,
All is but shadow and smoke, and the world is very old,
And the nothingness of life fills up the black tomb.

--Leconte de Lisle

Because of the furious scorn that kept choking me
during the course of this diatribe, I had to loosen my tie,
and not knowing how to express, in a hearty fashion, my pity
for such doctrines, I settled for pronouncing the word
"Brava" eight times in a row in my most melodious and joy-
fully enthusiastic voice.

One thing pleased me: the silent doctor's face had
clouded over noticeably.

I rubbed my hands; they differed in their opinions,
that was certain. Little did it matter to me on what point;
the convictions of both struck me as equally absurd. The
important thing was to arouse them against one another, to
bring them to grips, so that I could act as a referee and
have the last word, and by that means be free to think my
own thoughts (though seeming to be deeply attentive while
they squabbled).

I even entertained a faint hope that, due to my ef-
forts, this model household might soon come to blows or,
at least, hair-pulling, over the subject of "the immortality of the soul," and I prepared in advance to end it all with a good laugh.

At this juncture, I resolved to take Lenoir's part, whatever it might be! For his wife's theories had the effect of so irritating my brain as to make me lose all self-possession.

So, the Reader, who, doubtless, with his usual tact, is waiting like me, for some sort of clash, always regrettable between spouses, will understand how surprised I was (I would almost say disappointed), when I heard Lenoir murmur this strange remark:

"Claire's intelligence is a mirror, deep and clear, in which are reflected only divine truths, and I am proud to love forever her wonderful person."

At these words, I looked at Claire; it seemed to me that she had turned ghostly pale.

Césaire got up, took a step toward his wife, and bending swiftly, kissed her hand lingeringly, in silence, with a passion the wild fervor of which, concentrated and restrained, coming from a forty-six-year-old man, astonished me.

Then he came back and sat down at my right.

Some seconds passed during which I perceived distinctly only the noise of the swell. I put them to good use by collecting my scattered wits.
"Yes, the Ideal!" added Lenoir (who continued to turn his back on those principles of which, up to then, he had made himself the trite champion), "yes, invincible Hope! Faith! What is more positive, after all? Wasn't it Swedenborg who said: 'Faith is as far above thought as thought is above instinct?' Indeed, to believe is enough. And when I try to assert the autonomy of any philosophy whatsoever (and there are as many as there are individuals), when I rack my brains, in a word, to defend the quibbles of Science, so vain as far as actual results go, so arrogant in its disturbing pretensions, I confess, yes, I confess that I must always suppress a great urge to laugh."

He turned to me:

"If only one knew," he added, "to what point the living power of the Idea can be surprising and terrible in the realm of Faith! The power of the imagination, of a dream, of a vision, sometimes transcends the laws of life. Fear, for instance, the idea alone of superstitious Fear, without an external cause, can blast a man just as an electric battery can. Things seen by a visionary eye, basically, material to him in as positive degree as the Sun itself, that mysterious lamp of this whole phantasmagorical system of creation, of annihilation, of transformation! Have you ever considered those human monsters stippled with bi-colored spots, with fur, or the cephalopods, Siamese twins, horrid mistakes of nature, in short,
the results of a sensation, a caprice, a sight, an IDEA that occurred during the pregnancy of the mother? Have you ever thought about the childish explanations offered by physiology on this subject?

"Whenever I consult the medical records, with regard to the almost ponderable reality of the Idea, you see, I find, at every turn, facts like this: I quote the text: 'A woman whose husband was stabbed to death brought into the world five months later a daughter who, at the age of seven, began having hallucinations. The child would cry out: "Save me! There are the men with knives who are going to kill me!" The little girl died during one of these fits, and darkish marks were found on her body, similar to blood bruises, and they corresponded basically, in spite of sexual differences, to the wounds her father had received seven years before, at which time she was on the other side of mortality.'

"Call this what you will, I ask how the shadow, the idea differs decidedly from what you call tangible reality, if the mere reflection of an alien sensation has the power to instill itself, to infiltrate fatally into the essence of our bodies. So! a shadow, a mere shadow, can kill us? Think about it.

"Let us turn now to the physiologists: Beclard defines life as the organism in action, and Death as the organism in repose. Bichat's key words are these: 'Life
is the totality of functions that resist Death.' Consult the best treatises since Harvey; re-read Broussais' famous work on blood. You will see that though a great physiologist could assert, 'Without phosphorus there is no thought!' most of them, especially the newest comers (and these are the most consistently logical among themselves), will admit neither the idea of Life, nor the idea of Death, nor even that of an Organism. For the time being, leaving behind the absolutely divergent and debatable principles of Physiology, compare that fact which I cited to you from among a thousand others, compare it with the phenomena exhibited, for example, by the ravings of the dying. Then the visions begin to be a bit more real! What am I saying? become the only things that deserve the label of reality. Death is Impersonality; it is the reality of that which is now only vision. It is certain, in my opinion, that in death our actions become a second body and that the Past is reaffirmed in Death as flesh.

"The Past is a shadow, and we feel quite instinctively that Death is the realm of shadows. Death and Life are simply the logical consequences of the eternal dialectic; and by the very fact that they are inevitabilities, constituting the double face of Existence, they find, like everything else, in effect, their essence in Mind. 'Thought being given, Death is given by the same token!' said the Titan of the Human Spirit: 'and it is
that alone which is proof of Immortality.' 'Suppress Thought, and what remain are substances capable at best of being eternal, but not immortal; for Death begins only there where Thought is extinguished and disappears. Death, created by Mind, as is Life, is dependent upon Mind.'

"And what which we call Death is, in effect, only the middle term, or, if you prefer, the necessary negation, expressed by the Idea in order to expand as far as the Mind, through Thought.

"I would almost go so far as to say that we may even have now, from this side of Becoming, some glimmers of the terrors which await us, and which our own past holds in store for us. Remember those thousands of individuals, drowned or hanged, who, in the last instant of suffocation, at the moment they were about to die, were rescued and recalled to life. All claimed to have seen themselves on the point of passing through all their actions, through all their thoughts, even the most forgotten, and that in a manner inexpressible in the tongues of the living. The real question is not then whether 'the soul is immortal,' since it is a fact that cannot be proven any more than any other can. The question is: What is the nature of that immortality, and can we, in this life, exert an influence on it?"
"Well," I cried, completely dumbfounded by this stream of incoherent and absurd remarks, "you believe (I felt myself blushing at my words) you really believe in a certain 'materiality' of the soul?"

"I believe, at least, all vain dialectical sophisms apart," answered Lenoir, "for example, in the power of Suggestion that a vengeful corpse, from the depths of the DARKNESS, can exert against a living being to whom it was close (to whom, consequently, it is bound, mysteriously, by a thousand, thousand invisible ties). Yes, I tell you, I believe that that power of Suggestion can become oppressive, murderous, fearsome to that being,—material, in fact—for an indeterminate time. For there are living dead, in whom Death itself does not immediately destroy feeling and passion."

I saw that it was high time to put an end to this hoax, the gruesomeness of which was beginning to affect even me.

"My friend," I told him, "allow me to quote Voltaire, a witty man like you: 'When the speaker no longer knows what he's talking about, when the listener has dropped out of the conversation, we call that metaphysics.'"

Lenoir looked at me silently.

"That's true," said Claire, moving closer to us, "but the same great man also said, somewhere, in the story of the Phoenix: 'The Resurrection is a completely natural
idea: it is no more astonishing to be born twice than once."

"Oh," I said, "resurrection, that's a joke, you see, that Voltaire, a straightforward thinker, let slip in a moment of extravagance."

"Fine!" Claire answered smiling. "If you question the survival of personality after Death, I can show you that that is a futile exercise of the mind. In the first place, I would really like to know if its place in Life, even, isn't doubtful. Where is the self really itself? When? At what hour of life? Is your self of this evening the same as it will be tomorrow? The same as it was fifty years ago? No.

"We are, I tell you, the playthings of an everlasting illusion! And the Universe is really a dream! . . . a dream! . . . a dream!"

"A bad dream, even!" added Lenoir pensively: "for I can only reiterate it with amusement, all that I have learned from philosophy has not altered the disturbing and savage nature in me, and I am afraid of becoming, once and for all, in some other order of reality, that which I am.

"Ah! if I had, like Claire, the springboard of Faith from which to leap out of these gloomy thoughts, of which I am the haggard prisoner! But the truth is, I belong too
much to this world: I don't know exactly, in a word, where two and two might really not make four. And yet! . . . "
CHAPTER XIV

THE ASTRAL BODY

"Words! words! words!"

--Shakespeare, Hamlet

Lenoir spoke those words in a tone which literally froze the smile on my lips, and it seemed to me that all of a sudden, during our chat, Night herself had come closer and that she, in turn, was about to give her point of view and take part in our conversation. The fact is that mere night outside, where the cold winds were cracking their whips on the backs of the waves, was now unfolding her starless horror under thick clouds. This shift of impressions was so sudden that I thought I must be hallucinating. It seemed to me that we were turning very pale; the curtains at the window were stirring; we lay under the spell of Midnight.

I felt then the hereditary evil which is in me awakened in the depths of my being and, unable to stand the sight of empty space, I got up suddenly and closed the casement with that tremor of foreboding which in me is a precursor of Hell's torments.

Oh! that sickness! How does it come about? Isn't it frightful?
Nonetheless, I concealed as best I could the state of my feelings, and with an air of unconcern, I answered Lenoir:

"Are you implying that you have within you another person than yourself, Doctor? Heavens! that would be quite distressing, I'd say, especially with regard to the state of your sanity."

"But you yourself, Bonhomet," replied Lenoir, after a silence, pinning me with his glittering eyes, "you. Could you tell me if the exterior, the appearance which you present to us, and which is evident to our senses, is really that person whom you know to be within you?"

The unexpected question stirred my conscience. I looked at the doctor without replying.

"And," he continued, "alone accessible and perceptible, doesn't that external being still have within it its own observer, its gainsayer, its judge?"

"Yes," I said, "that's the ancients' theory: Homo Duplex. What are you driving at?"

"This: that inner companion, that occult being, is the only real one! And it is the one which constitutes the personality. The visible substance is simply the imprint of the other personality. It is a veil which obscures or illuminates according to the translucence of the onlooker's sight, and the hidden being does not allow itself to be guessed at or recognized except through the expression of
the features on the mortal mask. The organism is, after all, only a blind for the luminous substance which shines through it. And one would never think about one's body, except perhaps to keep it alive, if one were alone. Observe: if two men are linked by whatever mutual feeling, they finally forget little by little the details of one another's appearance; they no longer see each other. They are in a deeper relationship, and it is their moral being which they see reciprocally; they know who they are under the tangible semblance."

"That's specious," I muttered, just to say something.

"And that gives the key to many a mysterious contradiction," added the doctor. "The visible body is so far from being the real one that, quite often, it is not a man at all who resides in the human form."

"Oh! oh! . . . " I cried with a nervous twitch, for it seemed that a cayman had just leaped within me.

"What! have you never seen a type of animal, several animals sometimes, predominate in a face? Well, observe closely the usual movements, the instincts, the inclinations of an individual in whom the bear type predominates, for example, or the tiger, and you will experience an obscure glimpse into him, of some sort of wild beast that has crept by mistake into an alien skin. Do you believe that there are many men and women who conform to their own notion of themselves among earthly Humanity? Man is
but a divine animal, distinguished from others by the Ideal! And anyone in whom a concern for eternal things is not on constant alert in the depths of his conscience, that person still retains something of the animal, and has not yet totally emerged from the shadows: he is not a Man in reality, and his facial expression betrays him every moment, despite his visible form. Likewise, the woman who is true to what she should be, reflecting on divine hopes, like a clear deep mirror, establishes love and hope beyond Death. Do you think that such beings are numerous among our species? Come now. Be persuaded of it: cities are very much like forests, and it is not hard to encounter ferocious beasts in them."

"You believe, then, that most living beings," I interrupted.

"... are still confined in the wretched bonds of Instinct, are invisible beasts transfigured by their disguises, if you like," said the doctor, in a burst of laughter which revealed to me two rows of teeth which would do honor to the jaws of a West Indian, "--but are REAL BEASTS! And," he added, "the features of their faces (through the expression of which the luminous essence of their true form shines) prove it beyond doubt. Hence their inborn hatred of Thought, their unquenchable, constitutional, fundamental thirst for degrading, stupefying, profaning every noble and pure inclination! Thence comes
their grotesque scorn of sublime art, of all unselfish charity, of anything that is not low and impure, like their concerns, their actions, and their works! Thence comes their mode of demonstrating the rightness of their opinions by means of blows and blood! thence, their inability to understand Genuine Man, descended from On High! Yes, I tell you, believe me, the visible body is not the real one; it changes molecules with each moment, it is entirely renewed at each passage of six or seven months; it is not, strictly speaking. It is merely becoming within Becoming. It is its form, its idea, its intangible unity which is and upon which is superimposed its Appearance. One physical proof of this is that physiognomies turn either bestial or become luminous at the approach of Death, in a way which is striking to anyone who has eyes to see."

"But that is simply the Soul of which you speak, my friend!" I interrupted. "And, well, . . . that would be Homo Triplex, we'd have to say."

Lenoir's only response was a slight shrug.

"And I myself," he cried suddenly, "wait! would you ever believe it? I sense in myself an instinct to devour! I experience fits of darkness, of raging passions, of savage hatred, of ferocious and unquenchable thirst for blood, as if I were haunted by a cannibal! Yes, it's insane, but there you are: and I know a fair number of alienists who would say the same about themselves, if their
livelihood did not constrain them to be calm, dissembling, and silent. When I leave the realm of the Mind, I can distinguish very clearly this fiendish nature in me! It's the true one! All metaphysical speculations seem to me then like a tissue of glittering nonsense, not only incapable of redeeming me from this hideous intellectual form—almost diabolical—but also incapable of giving me a single moment of solid hope. That is why I am afraid of that changing-room called Death. That is why I am not at peace, I tell you! I know myself too well ever to be!"

One o'clock struck. I got up. I had recovered a little from my nervous attack, Lenoir having, this time, gone much too far, having overshot, in a word, the target, by exaggerating it. Decidedly I was finding his superficial whims more and more stupid.

"We will take up this topic again," I smiled.

"Yes," he said, preoccupied and still a little gloomy.

Pulling a small edition of the Bible from his pocket, he ended his peroration by crying:

"We will also concern ourselves with this book!"

(He tapped the cover as if it were a snuffbox.)

He opened it offhandedly, at random, and fell on the chapter of Moses' law devoted to the adulterer and his punishments.

Having read the passage, he blew his great nose with a noise that quite alarmed me. There was a silence
during which he scrutinized me as if to judge the effect produced on me by this passage.

I had noticed only that at the word "adulterer," Mme. Lenoir trembled silently for a long while in her chair. But it was, no doubt, only a nervous reaction aroused either by the memory of some passing flirtation at a ball, or by the coolness of the night and the sea. The green forests of Paphos will always have their mysteries, and the sly little god knows very well what he's doing. At least, that was my opinion.

As for the lieutenant, as for Sir Henry Clifton, the idea never crossed my mind.

Lenoir closed the Bible abruptly and added in a low voice, as if to himself:

"Indeed, how could an adulterer be pardoned? O fury! The idea drives me crazy, I confess! Yes, I feel that I would wreak vengeance and the loss of Paradise would not stop me, even in the regions of Death if . . . "

His gaze, directed towards his wife, broke against her green glasses and pallid face.

Claire got up, took a lighted candle:

"What can you be thinking of?" she added, "Our friend needs rest."

Smiling, she handed me the candle.

A minute later, I fell asleep between the bedclothes, laughing until I cried, at this incredible couple.
CHAPTER XV

CHANCE ALLOWS MY FRIEND TO VERIFY HIS HUMILIATING THEORIES ON THE SPOT

"Death is a woman who is married to the human race, and faithful. Show me the man she has deceived?"

--Honoré de Balzac

I will not dwell on the charming and secluded existence we three led during the next fortnight, after which my poor friend lay lifeless in his room, reposing between two tapers with a pall drawn up over his face.

He had been taken suddenly, alas!, by a lightning-quick attack of apoplexy, caused by a truly immoderate use of snuff. I had several times warned him about the risks of that terrible herb, and the dangers he braved, so to speak, in trifling with it. I had failed.

Scornful of the pleas of his loving wife, who had thrown herself more than once at his feet, begging him in the name of all that is holy to give up his foul passion, he did not reduce one iota the dose of power which he inserted and packed into his nasal fossae, saturating them eventually with nicotine. The poison did not take long to move from there throughout his system, disturbing it to the point of delirium, and sometimes (let it be said quite softly) to the point of madness.
In the first few days, having observed his addiction, I resolved to cure him! To save him!

To divert and distract the demon of habit in him, I had endeavored to substitute, in his gold box, silver nitrate, licorice sugar, mercury chloroborate, mineral coal, calcium phosphide, scrapings from old shoes, caustic soda, gunpowder, and a thousand other harmless nostrums. In short, I fussed over him like a mother. Vain efforts! He put them all into an indifferent nose, its besotted cartilage armor-plated. Yet, I refused to give up. Having decided to cure him by my homeopathic method, the only serious one for any man who has not lost his common sense, I shut myself up in the chemistry laboratory.

Whatever human ingenuity can devise by way of fiery sneezing powders and terrible counter-irritants, I slipped into his snuffbox. He would have either to succumb or to recover. I had resolved to resort even to explosives to put an end to his sickness. There are not, I am pleased to hope, any ingredients produced by all the branches of knowledge with which I did not, quite cleverly, have him stuff his cavities. At the risk of my life, I heated crucibles in which were pulverized, after concoction, saps of the most noxious plants, so useful to medicine when the dosage is carefully measured. I thought I saw the finger of God in all this. I neglected my dear Infusoria for the moment; friendship alone was my guide. And often at
night, when awakened with a start by some nightmare, I would perceive my window-panes glowing red with the reflections from the laboratory where, night and day, boiled the alembics, the long-necked matrasses, and the retorts. I took a pitying delight at the thought that what was happening there, under the watch of the genius of true Science, would be inserted the next day in the olfactory apparatus of my lamentable friend.

At the moment when my care and my treatment were about to be crowned with an unhoped-for reward (for I believe I remember that he had begun to look at his snuff-box with an indefinable expression), one Saturday evening, about ten days after my arrival at the house, after one of our liveliest dinners, he suddenly blanched during dessert! His eyes closed, his lips moved, he was dead.

I had the presence of mind, amidst the general shock of Claire and the servants, to put my ear to his mouth to hear what he seemed to be whispering, and I heard quite distinctly the odd phrase which I quoted above.

"Indeed," murmured poor Lenoir, "how can an adulterer be pardoned? . . . I feel right now, right now that I am undoubtedly going to give a body to the notion I have always had about myself, yes, I feel that at the far end of the outer darkness I will have my revenge if . . . "

Those were his last words. One may imagine with what sorrow, what dismay we were overwhelmed! Where are words
to express it? I will not try. Moreover, is it fitting to intrude our private sorrow on the public?
CHAPTER XVI

WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED A FALSE ALARM

"The cry of the damned conveys this thought alone: 'If only I had known!--and I did know!'"

--Commentaries on Theology

Ha! ha! I, too, know how to play the "poet," when circumstances require it, when, in a word, it suits the seriousness of the occasion. Lyricism, when there is a call for it, is by no means useless: what doesn't it absolve? I could live off it if I had to, as almost everyone does these days, if I would deign to lower myself so far as to trust my ideas to a printer.

Yes, I too, would pass for a "poet," if I lived in the days when that feather in the cap could lead to a fortune. Actually, I know a goodly number of pen-pushers who, if that trade brought in neither money nor women, would immediately cease exploiting the public with their antics, and become again, quite rightly, as Plain-John as I am, which would be the best thing they could do, in any case.

Now, the Lenoir incident was, it must be agreed, of a nature to inspire me, if not to tirades, at least to an extremely "poetic" solemnity of idea and phrase.

The fourth floor bedroom of the deceased was lofty. On the wax-pale and frozen face of the dead man stood a
few drops of holy water, upon which the candlelight fell so that they gleamed like funerary diamonds.

Mme. Lenoir was on her knees beside the bed, her head on the pall, her hands joined above her forehead. I, too, was kneeling, but farther off; in the dark corner at the end of the room, behind a dresser and sitting on my heels, hands joined, head bowed, looking fixedly at a red spot in the carpet. We were alone. The priest and the doctor had left an hour before, chatting in low tones. The door had closed again.

A large ivory crucifix between the drapes seemed to pacify the shadows.

Furiously I denounced the heartlessness of nature that had deprived me of my friend, and I might even have called Science into question, had I not already made clear my despair.

Suddenly, I don't know what happened, but to be precise, I felt something, the analysis or even the definite articulation of which seems to me well beyond the terms of human syntax: to put it simply, a sensation of cold in the eyes, the heart, and the temples.

At that moment, while I was wondering what was wrong with me, the young widow stood up abruptly, her hair standing on end, the candle flames shining in the lenses of her glasses, and her arms upraised! Terrifyingly, she emitted into the deep silence a cry so infused and
saturated with mad horror, that I was overcome from head to toe by fear, a fear without name.

Fright deluged me unawares, to speak. I was frozen. It paralyzed the working of my faculties for a good while. I refrained from doing anything but opening and closing my eyes! Eventually I stole a glance at her.

Her aspect was not such as to hearten a poor old man! She devastated me! The result of this sight was a trembling, and a swooning of my whole moral being, in a second! And, still on my knees in the dark corner, and not making a move, I began to utter loud, slow, and prolonged chromatic howls, the volume of which increased proportionately as they descended towards the deep notes of my basso-profundo register. With the third howl, I felt my fear approaching delirium, so I relieved my soul with a little laugh, barely distinct, which had the immediate effect of so increasing the young woman's terror that she ran towards the door in a panic and flew down the stairs, where I followed her without delay, taking four steps at a time, and, as they say, without wasting time in idle chatter.

We took two seconds to go down the flights and landings, all the way to the garden door. In our mutual haste to open that cursed door, we neutralized one another's efforts. I uttered then, in my dismay, a muffled groan, the noise of which caused me to fall fainting into the
poor woman's arms; her knees gave way and we rolled around half-dead on the floor.

Then there were cries and candlesticks, and heavy, hurried footsteps. The frightened servants came running. Mme. Lenoir responded to the old valet in a whisper. They carried both of us to our rooms. An hour later, feeling that I had regained my self-control, I jumped out of bed, crammed everything I had into my suitcase pell-mell, and made my escape through the garden, escorted in silence as far as the gate by the basset hound. I ran to the stagecoach office in one breath, settled down in the back of the first coach, and experienced a great pleasure at the first rattling of the wheels and the noise of the postilion goading the team with whiplashes. I could feel myself moving away from the Lenoir household . . . in which I promised myself never to set foot again, even if my life depended on it!

Ah! ah! I resumed the course of my great discoveries. I saw the world! I might even say that I caused Science to take giant strides!

But the important thing is to finish this story. What I have to tell is so terrible that I have been verbose on purpose. I have not dared. I kept putting off the fatal moment! But . . . tonight . . . I drank a heady wine which has stirred up my brain . . . and I will speak.
CHAPTER XVII

THE OTTYSOR

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

--Shakespeare, Hamlet

A year later, I happened to be in the south of France. I had explored the Alps; I was stopping in Digne. According to my solitary habits, I took lodgings at an inn on the outskirts. I spent my days in the countryside, armed with my instruments.

One night, worn out by research, I returned quite late. I asked the waiter to bring a piece of fish, some pears, and two liters of coffee to the room for my night.

The waiter had a solemn look about him.

"The gentleman is not aware that this is a public holiday? Except for an old lady, sick and bedridden, there isn't so much as a cat left in the house. There's no one in the kitchen! Everyone has gone to see the fireworks. You will find a few restaurants if you take the street that leads into town. Also, this letter came for you."

Taking the bulky letter carefully, I read it by the light of the candle he held close to my forehead.
The letter was from England. One of my correspondents in London, an eccentric man, as are all the English to some degree, informed me that he had won an important lawsuit for his firm, over which, he said quite amusingly, he hoped I would rejoice with him. The postscript added, "By the way, a young English friend of mine, a naval officer, has just met with a most tragic death while on a mission in the remotest part of Oceana. The exploring steamer which he commanded was taking on water at 14° south latitude and 134° longitude, off the Marquesas, heading for the sinister Pomotou group. The steamer had launched a landing party commanded by this officer to scout out landing places on one of those huge islands that look deserted, a kind of dark block of lava which rises to phenomenal heights, and which supports an enormous, intensely green forest amid the stormy skies above the vast equinoctial sea.

"In these most remote waters, so to speak, of our globe, no possible trade having seemed to civilized nations worth the risking of vessels among the innumerable reefs which bristle around their approaches, these islands, lost in the enormous expanses of ocean, remain virtually unknown. This archipelago comprises more than seven hundred islands, of which only a few are coral.

"The terrible tempests, a certain basaltic quicksand similar to anthracite dust, and the sometimes sudden
setting in of stagnant fog make this area deadly to navigators, who have named these waters the Perilous Sea. So many ships of all flags have been lost there that everyone has tacitly renounced ever straying among them. Only one tribe of Polynesian pirates, the Ottysors, lie in wait on stormy nights for shipwrecks, some squatting in caves, others wandering over the rocks, waiting for prey.

"Now, when the events occurred, a small detachment of scouts on top of the island's cliff were skirting the treacherous sand under cover of night and making their way back to shore. The young officer, walking perhaps fifty paces in front of the party, was so suddenly attacked, as he was coming around a boulder, by a huge black islander (one of the Ottysor pirates, no doubt) that the latter, deluged with blood, had cut off his head and was swinging it at arm's length and making ghastly gestures before any defensive action, before a gunshot could be fired or a cry raised. As the party rushed to slaughter him, they saw him, walking slowly, venture out onto the deadly sand, toward which they directed a continuous volley of fire that lit up the twilight, while the fantastic native, giving himself up to death, sank little by little before the speechless crew, beneath the dunes of those deadly beaches and disappeared, as he smothered, shaking by the hair the bloody head which he held straight out in his fist, and which he seemed to be displaying victoriously
to the stars. That unlucky friend was none other than a ship's lieutenant named Sir Henry Clifton, with whom," said my correspondent, "I had made the crossing to Saint-Malo."

I refrained momentarily from any reflection regarding Sir Henry Clifton upon receipt of this distressing news. I had heard talk of the extremely rare Ottysors, black as jet, who watch for shipwrecks. Norwegian sailors, as well as the Dutch, called these blacks the Demons of the quicksands. These savage cannibals are enshrouded in a mystery not yet explained. At night, sometimes, their loud yells can be heard from far away on the reefs, sinister war cries. They are truly shadows. None has ever been taken prisoner, and despite volleys of bullets, no one has ever seen them fall or flee. Oddly enough, the Danish geographer Bjorn Zachnussen reports that, "No one knows what they do with their dead, if they die."

I decided to wipe this event from my memory, since it seemed the sort to disturb my sleep.

"Didn't you say something about a sick old lady?" I asked the waiter as I put the letter in my pocket. "Has she eaten?"

The waiter, who was trying to read on my face the effects of the letter, took some time to answer.

"No," he said at last. "Her supper is there."
"Good," I answered. "Since she is ill, I will eat her supper. It will do her good."

I began to laugh at this witticism in the echoing stairwell.

Surely I had not gone two thirds of the usual length of my laugh, when my name, spoken in a dying voice, came to me through the nearest door on the landing where I stood.

I felt uneasy, so I stopped short.

"What is that?" I asked the servant.

"What?" he said. "That is the old lady. She must know you."

"What is the lady's name?"

"Madame Lenoir."

"Madame Lenoir!" I said very softly, after a silence. "What! the charming, the incomparable Madame Lenoir, my poor friend's widow? But what can she be doing here?"

I wondered.

The waiter began to hum indifferently.

"I dunno," he said elegantly.

My most charming smile greeted this turn of phrase, and it was accompanied, quite in spite of myself, with a smark kick to the backside of this young Mercury. The candlestick fell, and, while the boy, terror-stricken (why I can't explain), attempted to recreate the race of Hippomenes and Atalanta all by himself on the stairs, I
retrieved it and knocked softly three times with the knuckle of my middle finger on the disquieting door; I held the candlestick and my walking bag in the other hand.

"Do come in!" said a vaguely familiar voice.

I lifted the latch, and a strong odor of paint was my first impression, which painfully assailed me. Recently refurbished, the walls were a silvery white, completely smooth and oily. Instantly they recalled to my mind those metal plaques which are used to increase light reflection on the studios of those worthy followers of Daguerre. In the bed, hung with white curtains, a woman was installed, her face yellow and drawn as parchment, dressed in mourning and leaning on her elbows. A huge pair of bluish glasses covered her eyes. On the mantel glittered two or three bottles bearing pharmacy labels. A candle smoked on the nightstand.

"I recognized your voice, Doctor, in spite of time and grief!" the woman in the bed said without moving. "Sit down by my bed; I have to share something with you. I all but lost track of you since Geneva, but this morning as soon as I arrived I was sure of finding you before I died."

Out of compassion, I drew near to this specter. I was, to tell the truth, reluctant to recognize the lovely Claire Lenoir as I gazed on the devastation in her face,
caused evidently by some mysterious suffering. It was as if she had grown old all at once.

I tactfully imparted as much to her. She began to stare at me from behind her glasses, in deep silence.

"Yes," she murmured in a controlled voice. "You are a hideous old man!"

Then she seemed to lapse into thought.

For the first time in my life, I understood certain kinds of stage business in the comic theatre: I cast my eyes artlessly around me, pretending not to know to whom she spoke. Actually, we were alone.

I took her arm and felt her pulse; it was both irregular and thready. I took pity on her madness and sat down at her bedside.
CHAPTER XVIII

THE ANNIVERSARY

"Which filled the swarm of evil angels with delight,
Hovering among the curtain folds."
--Charles Baudelaire

"Tell me, tell me what Sir Henry Clifton revealed
to you," demanded Claire Lenoir in a horribly low voice.
"You know what happened during a journey that my
husband, M. Lenoir, made. You know!"
I crossed my hands on my chest.
"I don't know a single thing about it," I said.
"Well, so be it!" continued Madame Lenoir, "I will
not relate to you the extraordinary circumstances of my
wretched downfall. In short, I was loved! I am guilty."
"Infamous creature!" I thought. Then aloud: "Well," I said, "what harm is there in that?"
"I know that one cannot redeem a sin by oneself but,
since then, I have remained faithful to M. Lenoir until
his death, faithful even in thought."
"I am not a priest, Madame."
"The priest has just left, and I tell you that I am
going to die," replied Claire, with a preoccupied look.
"Oh, my dear Madame Lenoir! Can it be? You exaggerate! Your color is not so bad, your voice is not at all wheezy, and with the exception of an attack, to which we are all susceptible, you seem to be in fairly good health?"

"Then what is this, Doctor?" she asked, raising her glasses.

I leaned forward.

"That?" I said, after a cursory examination. "The devil . . . there are, in fact, some symptoms of . . ."

"Of? . . . " she said in a voice that gave my nerves a jolt.

"Of a disease which it would be ridiculous not to treat in time!" I added, "It's nothing."

But I thought to myself: "For certain, it's too late."

"Stop it!" she cried. "Do you suppose that I'm afraid?"

She was trembling but rather, I must say, because of neural deterioration than from fear of impending death, of which she was obviously aware.

"Very well," I answered. "Listen carefully. Apoplexy is a little tear in the brain. Right now I see that the veins of your eyelids, your temples, your whole face are congested in a most unusual manner. One might say that they are about to explode."

I got up to read the labels on the bottles.
"I am going out to get what we need," I told her.
To myself I promised not to return, since I felt that my ministrations would be useless.

"It's no use! Stay! Death is something for which I have been prepared for a long time. I know my condition: in a few minutes, at ten o'clock it will be all over. So stay where you are. Rest assured that I am in possession of the last glimmerings of my reason. As I said, I have something unusual to tell you."

What unusual thing could she have to tell me? Clearly nothing. In any event, I didn't want to listen.

"My word, dear Madame Lenoir," I cried aloud, "I must confess that I am overcome with admiration! The fact is that you are extremely ill! From one moment to the next, Nature may force you to slip away from me! But I like brave people! I particularly like brave people! Cowards be hanged! So speak, and be quick, for your voice is getting weak."

"Oh, be quiet, be quiet!" she said brokenly.
I felt shocked and mortified. I took a toothpick to save face and was quiet.

"Lean over, so that I can speak to you," she said. I complied with revulsion.

"Alive," she went on, "he knew nothing, nothing, never anything! But note this well: I believe he knows, now! Tonight is our anniversary! Ten o'clock will strike
soon. Yes, I think he will come and take me ... through the eyes!" she shouted suddenly. "How can I resist him? My flesh is bound to his by a vow spoken at the feet of God the Consecrator!"

Ah! Something truly bizarre! A mystery of the human constitution! Despite the place, the time, and the memory, I did not bat an eye. "It's delirium," I thought, "nothing more." Never had I felt in better health internally. Beneath my melancholy expression, which the occasion required, I felt lively, in good spirits, merry! Quite pleased with myself, I let a praline melt in my right cheek on the sly.

Actually, what had I to fear? One thing could be said for her husband at the moment: he was dead.

"Don't be afraid. I am here!" I said, to calm her. "It isn't every day that I panic so irresponsibly as I did on the first day of your widowhood. I admit that my nervous reaction was, in me, irrational."

"Oh, miserable man! Admit that that was the only and unconscious flash of Reason, of true Reason, that you ever had since the day you were born!" said Claire, still leaning on her elbows. "Admit it and, above all, think it!"

She uttered a kind of diabolical chuckle; blood was obstructing her throat.

"Oh the dismal breath of the damned!" she exclaimed. "Do you remember the bedroom? You were looking down. You
were kneeling! You saw nothing. As for me, I was prostrated in my sorrow against the bed. I could see nothing. But now I will tell you what was going on above our heads! M. Lenoir opened his eyes! He threw back the sheet and sat up without a sound, his fists clenched and raised against me! He had the look of damnation! He ground his teeth noiselessly, to our ears. Ah, baleful! With two hellish fires under his eyebrows, he cursed me as a part of himself, in the name of the Godless nights into which many will enter. Yet, we did not see him because we were obliged to have our heads bowed at that moment!

"Then, he stretched out again, pulled the sheet up over his chest with both hands, closed his eyes, and his face once more assumed the indifferent mask which we all put on, which I myself will, soon. It was then that, not knowing what had happened, I got up and kissed him tenderly, tears in my eyes, for one last time on his cold forehead."

She stopped. I looked at her intently.

"How... how did you know what had happened?" I asked.

"I saw the scene repeated the following night in a dream, in a huge mirror into which I was looking."

"Demons may, in fact, live in the reflections of mirrors," I told her mercifully, "but in real life," I added, looking at her with my lackluster eyes and scratching
the tip of my nose. "In real life, we don't allow for
Demons like that. How could you recognize me in the re-
flection of that mirror? My features must have been quite
vague. It was, I think, by the spiritual beauty, wasn't
it, that emanated, so to speak, from the ensemble of those
features, that you thought you recognized me?" "In a
dream?" I said again, almost to myself. "But, Madame,
why then did you cry out so, in the bedroom, since you
knew nothing, since you had seen nothing?"

"After I got up," Claire Lenoir replied, "and when I
kissed him, and my ear was still against his mouth, I
heard a muffled laugh, a sort of yelping that came from
his raging lips! Then I screamed, because I was overcome
with a boundless terror, a horrible fright! My cry had
originated from so deep within my soul that you under-
stood electrically, the meaning of it."

This account, I must confess, made me blanch. The
fact is that the deserted inn, the guttering candles, her
idea of an anniversary, and, above all, the moribund woman
in mourning and glasses were beginning to undermine the
solidity of my judgment. Little by little, the evil of
which I have spoken permeated me as well. I felt it
roaring in me, like great, far-off waves! Come, come;
let's put it plainly! My teeth began to chatter madly.
Sweat ran down my temples. I turned greenish, and my
bloodshot eyes rolled in their sockets. A frightful
oppression weighed heavily on my chest. I tore off the mask.

"Hallucination and madness," I howled, as I got to my feet.
"As the priest turned back towards the body, saying to it the words of the Office of the Dead: 'Responde mihi! the dead bishop was seen to sit up in his bier and say in a horrible voice: 'Comparui--Judicatus sum! Justo judicio Dei, damnatus!' And he lay back down in the coffin."

--History of St. Bruno

"I saw him again! Again in a dream!" said Claire Lenoir, not quite addressing herself to me, "about three and one-half months after his death. Only, one thing, due probably to the chance nature of dreams," added Mme. Lenoir in the same hoarse, muffled tone of voice, "is the exterior under which he always appeared to me at the time. Ah yes, it was he!"

And the sickly smile of a lunatic hovered about her lips like a will-o-the-wisp over a tomb.

"Because of those dreams, you are about to take pity on my feeble wits," she continued, "but he was exactly identical in build, height, and coloring to those unknown creatures who are mentioned, you know, in the maritime records of Oceana."
I thought of the letter. I gasped, and not believing my ears, I tried in vain to put two ideas together. A flash of insight beyond all logic blinded my reason. I felt a cry of horror smothering hideously in my throat.

"Yes," the dying woman went on, with unearthly solemnity, "he was like those monsters that haunt the deserted beaches and accursed waves. His body, hairy and ferocious, stood out like a plume of smoke, blackened darker than ebony. Feathers of sea-birds served him as belt and clothing. All around him space stretched out, peopled with Terrors and the infinity of dreams. Fiery serpents were tattooed on the apparition; long and grey, his bristling hair fell about his shoulders. Oh! by what succession of thoughts, of old impressions, had I been able to picture him, to discern him thus, so misshapen, so different! He was standing alone, among isolated rocks, looking out to sea as if expecting someone. I sensed, rather than recognized, the dead man by his inscrutable manner. He was sharpening furtively, behind his back, a crude cutlass made of stone. His nocturnal eyes made my soul quake in a bloody, hellish, agonizing spasm; I woke with a start screaming, chilled, and soaked with sweat. Never have I been able to forget that dream."

She was silent.
May I say it? Are there words to express the appalling thoughts, daughters of fatal possibilities, which paralyzed me from head to toe during this diabolical recitation? I was distraught. The feelings that tossed about within me were unspeakable.

However, even though the sound of my own voice made me shake considerably, I spoke without quite realizing what I was saying:

"No one, no one, fortunately, do you hear? can determine at precisely what point the objective reality of visions begins."

I added, with a forced laugh that made my head ache: "The asylums haven't thought of that! Remember the discussion we had when that quibbler Lenoir was still alive!"

"Of course! Give it some thought," said the invalid with a mournful smile, "and pray. Prayers that have been launched by the will beyond the confines of Nature escape Destruction. As for me, I was not ashamed to pray; whereas my awful husband carried his outrageous skepticism, the cancer of this dismal age we live in, so far as to pretend respect for my faith out of love for my wretched body. As for myself, I have tried to repent for having done something forbidden, since reason could never absolve me, and I hope and I feel sure that after an instant's agony, God will not exclude me altogether from His pardon."
Then, grabbing her spectacles with both hands, she tore them off her face. The lenses broke in her bloodied hands, and with a convulsive gesture, she twisted the frame.

"I have no need of glasses to see things now," she said.

She spoke in a tremulous voice, but with a kind of hopeful smile, truly infinite, by which her courage seemed to be fortifying itself for some terrible ordeal, imminent and supreme, after which her soul would be "saved."

Ten o'clock struck.

There was a moment's silence during which Mme. Lenoir, having thrown back both sides of her long black cloak, her widow's weeds, stretched out deplorably on her back, head held up by the pillow and eyes staring straight ahead, wide open. She seemed to be scrutinizing more and more closely, in spite of herself, the blinding whiteness of the wall from which the candlelight was reflected.

At that moment the first reports of the distant fireworks reached us; the national holiday was at its height. We heard the far-off hurrahs of the solemn village folk, pleased at the sight of beautiful rockets rising and exploding enjoyably in the air.

"Ah!" she cried with a start, "Now! What did I tell you! THERE HE IS! Look! There! there! the monster in my bad dreams! Just as he used to dream about himself,
he too, M. Lenoir! Was he a son of Ham, that he could thus materialize himself after death? For whom is he sharpening so long, so coldbloodedly beside the terrible sea, that knife? Ah! vampire, demon, assassin!" gasped the wretched woman with her dying breath. "Go away from the wall. Get out of my poor sight!" Suddenly, her hands stiffened in a hideous spasm, and her mysterious eyes whitened. What she was looking at had become so appalling that she could no longer find within her breast the strength to cry out. She struggled, then fell back, rigid, with a stifled sob, her gaze still glued to the wall.

She had, no doubt, given up the ghost. But I couldn't be sure.

I rushed to my bag to pull out a case of lancets. I rummaged desperately, but there was nothing but lenses, instruments, colonies of Infusoria, and magnifying glasses. I leaped across the room, out of my senses, and came back to the bed holding unawares in my hand a strong magnifying glass I had found.

Then I took the candle, held it close to the dead woman's face, and with a shiver looked at her through the lens. At last! It was over! I thought with a sigh of relief. She was quite dead.

Suddenly, I cannot say why, her stagnant eyes drew my attention.
An idea, a very strange one, suddenly crossed my mind.

Curiosity entered my heart and made a clean sweep of all my fears. Shuddering a little, I braced myself: I wanted to examine the leucoma which covered her cloudy pupils and to plunge beneath that mourning veil. At that point, a Demon seized my arm, bent down my old head, and, almost by force, pushed my eye toward the powerful lens, and pointing in my soul to the dead woman's eyes, shouted into my ear, deafening my conscience:

"Look!"

In that instant, I grew calm; I could feel that Old Science had me in its grip again.

I moved my magnifying glass over the eyes. They presented no marked anomaly, unless it was their extraordinarily glassy appearance. I was just about to forego my attempt when it appeared to me that the pupils contained little points that looked like flecks of shadow.

I went immediately and turned the key in the lock, then returned to the bed, crossed my arms, and mulled over various methods of experimentation.

I had an induction coil in one of my huge pockets. What if I stimulated the ciliary nerve, I thought.

But I quickly discarded that useless, even idle notion.

I took a small bottle from my bag: a drop of alkaloid, I thought, would dilate the pupil. Yet, I
rejected this idea too; the solution in question would not work on a corpse.

Suddenly I noticed my ophthalmoscope.

"Ah! ha!" I cried, "just the thing."

Gritting my teeth a bit, I seized the cadaver, whose long night-dress made a shroud, and propped her upright against the wall, beneath a big nail.

I intended to suspend her by a rope passed under her armpits and hung from the nail by the two ends knotted together.

But a further consideration thwarted my plan.

Whatever might have remained in those eyes would appear upside down, top to bottom, the hollow situated behind the iris acting as a camera obscura.

There was one way to avoid the problem, yet I hesitated to resort to it.

My colleagues will perhaps find childish certain scruples which I felt about setting the cadaver of Mme. Lenoir against the wall, head down and feet up.

They would say to me, I know, that at the moment of an important experiment, such thinking is a proof of unseemly sentimentality, since, as everyone knows, that particular scientific procedure, as well as many others, even more usual, is practiced every day at every hour throughout Europe on an average of at least fifty or sixty thousand
female cadavers (belonging to the destitute classes, it is true), in amphitheaters, morgues, hospitals, etc.

I would answer that it was precisely because I had always known Mme. Lenoir as well-to-do that the deed, in this case, seemed a sacrilege to me.

Ah! if the dear woman had never been, to my knowledge, anything but needy, a pauper, my God, even a working woman! it goes without saying that the idea of hesitating would never have come to me--or if such ridiculous qualms had even crossed my mind for a moment, I would have suppressed them quickly, with a blush, so as not to deserve becoming the laughingstock of all my friends.

But, as I said, I had always known Mme. Lenoir to be a respectable coupon-clipper, and that, I swear, imposed on me a sense of respect, even for her mortal remains. So, I seized the cadaver again around the waist and set to wandering about the room, not knowing what to do, when a happy compromise occurred to me, one so simple I was astounded that it had not leapt immediately to mind.

Here it is: I put, not without precautions, Mme. Lenoir's body right back on her death-bed. But I placed her lengthwise in such a way that the neck and the head, fallen backwards, now hung over the end of the bed, as if suspended above the floor.

At the foot of the bed now trailed the mass of chestnut hair, of which a third was silver. The face thus
presented itself upside down, and, wide open, the eyes at the level of my knees still seemed, in spite of myself, rather disquietingly solemn. There could be no doubt that now, if there was something in her pupils, it would appear to me in its normal position.

I fitted an enormous lens into a holder in front of the reflector and got ready to send the pencil of light into the very depths of Mme. Lenoir's eyes.

However, at the first glimpse I ventured into those eyes through the hole in the ophthalmoscope, I drew back, not knowing, not wishing to know, what I had glimpsed!

I remained for an instant motionless. As to the ideas that arose in my brain, I do not think Hell itself could reflect a more hair-raising horror.

Making me shudder as it crimsoned the windowpanes, the firework bouquet of the national celebration in the distance burst over the gleeful town, to the cheers of the mixed crowd.

However, the candlestick was guttering; I would soon be in total darkness.

"No!" I cried, sinking to my knees, "I must see! I must see!"

I fixed my eyes on the shining opening.

It seemed to me that, alone among the living, I was the first to look into the Infinite through a keyhole.
CHAPTER XX
THE KING OF HORRORS

"The deep uttered his voice,
and lifted up his hands on high."
--Habakkuk 3:10

Then . . . oh! the fright of my life! Oh! A vision that turned the world into a sepulcher and enthroned madness in my soul! When I examined the dead woman's eyes, I saw at once, distinctly, and standing out like a frame, the border of violet paper at the top of the wall. Within that frame, reflected in the same fashion, I caught sight of a picture that no language, living or dead (I do not hesitate an instant to say it), under the sun and moon can express.

Oh! how to describe it! What imagination could fill up the absurd void in the words I am about to set down!

The attack of feverish anxiety that shook me caused the ophthalmoscope to quiver between my fingers, and the beam of light danced around in the corpse's eyes, in those great bulging, glassy, staring, exposed eyes turned upside down! This is more or less what I saw:

Yes! . . . the sky . . . distant waves, a great rock, dusk, and the stars. And, upright on the rock, larger than life, a man, similar to the islanders in the
archipelagoes of the Perilous Sea, was standing. Was it a man, that phantom? Against the abyss of space, he was holding up in one hand, by the hair, a bloody head! With a howl I could not hear, but the horror of which I could guess from the fire-belching stretch of his wide-open mouth, he seemed to dedicate it to the winds of shadow and of space! He held a stone cutlass, disgusting and red, hanging from his other hand. Surrounding him, the horizon seemed limitless to me, the solitude forever cursed. Beneath the expression of supernatural fury, beneath the features distorted by vengeance, by solemn hatred and anger, I recognized at once in the face of the Ottysor-vampire, an ineffable resemblance to poor M. Lenoir before his death, and in the severed head, the frightfully gloomy features of that young man of old, of Sir Henry Clifton, the lost lieutenant.

Staggering, arms outstretched, tottering like a child, I drew back.

My sanity was leaving me: hideous, jumbled conjectures were turning my stupefaction into madness. I was reduced to a living chaos of agonies, a human rag, a brain dried out like chalk, pulverized by an enormous threat! And Science, the smiling, clear-eyed old lady, whose logic was a bit too disinterested, she of the fraternal embrace, snickered into my ear that she, she
too, was nothing but a bait thrown out by the Unknown, which lies in wait for us.

Suddenly, I rushed towards the wall, and with my hands flat against it, a nameless terror having spread the fingers wide, I slammed into the masonry.

But, but, I grumbled, looking over at the corpse, it had to be in defiance of the old lies of Extension and Duration, lies by the evidence of which all has been made plain today, it had to be that the APPARITION was really external, to whatever imponderable degree, in a living fluid perhaps, so as to be refracted in such a way on her seeing pupils!

I stopped, and I concluded, in a low voice, my hair standing on end, my fists clenched:

But . . . then . . . where are we?

As I leaned over the deceased, in a frenzied rage, both daimonic and sacrilegious, to examine once more the loathsome spectacle that fascinated me so, the ophthalmoscope slipped from my hands at the sight of the dead woman's features; having lifted up her head hastily, I felt a great shiver freeze my blood. I saw two tears well up and run slowly, heavily over her ashen cheeks.

Then Death began, veiling the Impenetrable, to roll its deep shadows over those eyes.