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The Sword of Mihai
& the Knight Errant
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NESTING IN THE OAK OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE

Macphie's Black Dog

Rev John Gregorson Campbell

From Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland

[This tale was taken down in Gaelic from the dictation of Donald Cameron, Ruaig, Tiree, in 1863, and is here given in his words as closely as a translation will allow. It is a very good specimen of a class of tales found in the Highlands, and illustrates many remarkable traits of the belief regarding the Fairy women, their enmity to the hunter, their beauty and powers of enchanting men at first, their changing their shape to that of deer, and the aversion dogs have to them; also the size and character of the Fairy hound.]

Mac-vic-Allan of Arasaig, lord of Moidart, went out hunting in his own forest when young and unmarried. He saw a royal stag before him, as beautiful an animal as he had ever seen. He levelled his gun at it, and it became a woman as beautiful as he had ever seen at all. He lowered his gun, and it became a royal stag as before. Every time he raised the gun to his eye, the figure was that of a woman, and every time he let it down to the ground, it was a royal stag. Upon this he raised the gun to his eye and walked up till he was close to the woman's breast. He then sprang and caught her in his arms. "You will not be separated from me at all," he said, "I will never marry any but you." "Do not do that, Mac-vic-Allan," she said, "you have no business with me, I will not suit you. There will never be a day, while you have me with you, but you will need to kill a cow for me." "You will get that," said the lord of Moidart, "though you should ask two a day."

But Mac-vic-Allan's herd began to grow thin. He tried to send her away, but he could not. He then went to an old man, who lived in the townland, and was his counsellor. He said he would be a broken man, and he did not know what plan to take to get rid of her. The honest old man told him, that unless Macphie of Colonsay could send her away, there was not another living who could. A letter was instantly sent off to Macphie. He answered the letter, and came to Arasaig.

"What business is this you have with me," said Macphie, "Mac-vic-Allan?"

Mac-vic-Allan told him how the woman had come upon him, and how he could not send her away.

"Go you," said Macphie, "and kill a cow for her to-day as usual; send her dinner to the room as usual; and give me my dinner on the other side of the room."

Mac-vic-Allan did as he was asked. She commenced her dinner, and Macphie commenced his. When Macphie got his dinner past, he looked over at her.

"What is your news, Elle-maid?" said he.

"What is that to you, Brian Brugh," said she.

"I saw you, Elle-maid," said he, "When you consorted with the Fingalians, When you went with Dermid o Duvne And accompanied him from covert to covert"

"I saw you, Brian Brugh," she said, "When you rode on an old black horse, The lover of the slim Fairy woman, Ever chasing her from brugh to brugh."

"Dogs and men after the wretch," cried Macphie, "long have I known her."

Every dog and man in Arasaig was called and sent after her. She fled away out to the point of Arasaig, and they did not get a second sight of her.

Upon this Macphie went home to his own Colonsay. One day he was out hunting, and night came on before he got home. He saw a light and made straight for it. He saw a number of men sitting in there, and an old grey-headed man in the midst. The old man spoke and said, "Macphie, come forward." Macphie went forward, and what should come in his way but a bitch, as beautiful an animal as he had ever seen, and a litter of pups with it. He saw one pup in particular, black in colour, and he had never seen a pup so black or so beautiful as it.

"This dog will be my own," said Macphie.

"No," said the man, "you will get your choice of the pups, but you will not get that one."

"I will not take one," said Macphie, "but this one."

"Since you are resolved to have it," said the old man, "it will not do you but one day's service, and it will do that well. Come back on such a night and you will get it."

Macphie reached the place on the night he promised to come. They gave him the dog, "and take care of it well," said the old man, "for it will never do service for you but the one day."

The Black Dog began to turn out so handsome a whelp that no one ever saw a dog so large or so beautiful as it. When Macphie went out hunting he called the Black Dog, and the Black Dog came to the door and then turned back and lay where it was before. The gentlemen who visited at Macphie's house used to tell him to kill the Black Dog, it was not worth its food. Macphie would tell them to let the dog alone, that the Black Dog's day would come yet.

At one time a number of gentlemen came across from Islay to visit Macphie and ask him to go with them to Jura to hunt. At that time Jura was a desert, without anyone staying on it, and without its equal anywhere as hunting ground for deer and roe. There¹³ was a place there where those who went for sport used to stay, called the Big Cave. A boat was made ready to cross the sound that same day. Macphie rose to go, and the sixteen young gentlemen along with him. Each of them called the Black Dog, and it reached the door, then turned and lay down where it was before. "Shoot it," cried the young gentlemen. "No," said he, "the Black Dog's day is not come yet" They reached the shore, but the wind rose and they did not get across that day.

Next day they made ready to go; the Black Dog was called and reached the door, but returned where it was before. "Kill it," said the gentlemen, "and don't be feeding it any longer." "I will not kill it," said Macphie, "the Black Dog's day will come yet." They failed to get across this day also from the violence of the weather and returned. "The dog has foreknowledge," said the gentlemen. "It has foreknowledge," said Macphie, "that its own day will come yet."

On the third day the weather was beautiful. They took their way to the harbour, and did not say a syllable this day to the Black Dog. They launched the boat to go away. One of the gentlemen looked and said the Black Dog was coming, and he never saw a creature like it, because of its fierce look. It sprang, and was the first creature in the boat. "The Black Dog's day is drawing near us," said Macphie.

They took with them meat, and provisions, and bedclothes, and went ashore in Jura. They passed that night in the Big Cave, and next day went to hunt the deer. Late in the evening they came home. They prepared supper. They had a fine fire in the cave and light. There was a big hole in the very roof of the cave through which a man could pass. When they had taken their supper the young gentlemen lay down, Macphie rose, and stood warming the back of his legs to the fire. Each of the young men said he wished his own sweetheart was there that night. "Well," said Macphie, "I prefer that my wife should be in her own house; it is enough for me to be here myself to-night."

Macphie gave a look from him and saw sixteen women entering the door of the cave. The light went out and there was no light except what the fire gave. The women went over to where the gentlemen were. Macphie could see nothing from the darkness that came over the cave. He was not hearing a sound from the men. The women stood up and one of them looked at Macphie. She stood opposite to him as though she were going to attack him. The Black Dog rose and put on a fierce bristling look and made a spring at her. The women took to the door, and the Black Dog followed them to the mouth of the cave. When they went away the Black Dog returned and lay at Macphie's feet.

In a little while Macphie heard a horrid noise¹⁵ overhead in the top of the cave, so that he thought the cave would fall in about his head. He looked up and saw a man's hand coming down through the hole, and making as if to catch himself and take him out through the hole in the roof of the cave. The Black Dog gave one spring, and between the shoulder and the elbow caught the Hand, and lay upon it with all its might. Now began the play between the Hand and the Black Dog. Before the Black Dog let go its hold, it chewed the arm through till it fell on the floor. The Thing that was on the top of the cave went away, and Macphie thought the cave would fall in about his head. The Black Dog rushed out after the Thing that was outside. This was not the time when Macphie felt himself most at ease, when the Black Dog left him. When the day dawned, behold the Black Dog had returned. It lay down at Macphie's feet, and in a few minutes was dead.

When the light of day appeared Macphie looked, and he had not a single man alive of those who were with him in the cave. He took with him the Hand, and went to the shore to the boat. He went on board and went home to Colonsay, unaccompanied by dog or man. He took the Hand up with him that men might see the horror he had met with, the night he was in the cave. No man in Islay or Colonsay ever at all saw such a hand, nor did they imagine that such existed.

There only remained to send a boat to Jura and take home the bodies that were in the cave. That was the end of the Black Dog's day.

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Cover: Two Knights Fighting in a Landscape
Eugene Delacroix



The Corncrake magazine promotes the best works in English literature, from the beginning of civilisation to the present and beyond.

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Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
JRR Tolkien

The Sword of Mihai & the Knight Errant A Carpathian Tale

By Philip Wortmann
(Newcastle, South Africa, May 2026)

The mountain lungs began to sigh as evening bled its latter warmth into the shimmering night. Radu was not easy to understand amid the whistling of the firs and the flapping of their hoods. His voice was hoarse and difficult to hear even when there was no gale, and his shouting, a muffled sound, did little to help the words he had chosen to fire from the cannon of his mouth.

"I cannot hear you, Radu!" Mihai shouted to his companion. The other stopped in the gathering shadow of the stone tumbled woodland. Warily the elder man turned to regard his companion.

"What say you?" bade Radu in response.

Mihai laughed. "I said, I cannot hear you. Your speech gets caught up in your throat too much!" said he, drawing nearer to Radu, planting his staff firmly in the doughty grasses that whipped wild against the hammering winds. Radu grunted in submissive irritation.

The gleaming white of sundown that now bled into a bow of fading red made all the world about them lose its edge and hue. Against the jagged ridges of the Carpathians did it cast its final warmth; yet none of it spilled into the vale. In such a rugged bowl of mountain roots the distances one might see were great. On the far end of the vale, where the clouds of mist were slithering in among the narrow trees, a town looked down from a tall hill with burning eyes. It was still two leagues or more hence.

"The wind is cold, Mihai," said Radu, closing his eyes as he let the blasting breath of evening keep his tired form upright. "I think I must make camp here. Youth is not even to be found in the middle of my dried out bones."

"Yes, I think a rest would do me well also," admitted Mihai, and guided the elder down the rocky decline to a sheltered nook. In it they found a shallow cave, receding into the foot of a large outcrop. It had been hidden by a tall copse of beech that stood before it, and they were very glad for the surprise of good shelter.

They let down their goods, and Mihai helped Radu sit on a fallen trunk. Then he went to gather tinder and wood for the making of a brand. When he returned to their camp with laden arms, he found the old man asleep, wrapped tightly in his fur-lined cloak, hooded head against the hard grey of the cliff. Smiling to himself, Mihai laid down the wood, cleared a space on the dark earth, and built his fire, before lighting it with his flint. The brand burned, casting yellow heat into their little cove. Radu opened his eyes silently again.

"I hope we meet no bears this night," said he.

"No, I do not think we will," said Mihai, ever light of heart. He looked into the old man's creasing visage; his own was lined with a smile. "Perhaps we shall find worse, however."

The old man chuckled gutturally. "You are very intent on testing that Damascan steel you've found, aren't you. Mihai, wielder of the Saracen sword! Slayer of the lurking monster!"

"But it is not Saracen, Radu, look at it!" Mihai exclaimed. "There is no curve in the blade. It is an ancient thing, though the curling sign of Damascus it bears, as though it were ink cast in water. But it must be of our ancient forebears, the Romans! Were not their works beyond any that we now possess?"

"Yes, you've shown me it with every chance you've gotten!" said Radu, bending forward to draw more on the warmth of the fire. His ancient hands were gnarled at the knuckles, and hard as had been his recent pillow of stone. Mihai had drawn the blade from its leather housing. He let the flickering fire play upon its smooth surface as he bent it this way then that, poring over the sacred language of its primal forging.

Their meal that evening was cold and scant. Some dried meat and the water in their skins. Softly they sang some psalms from memory, for they had heard and sung them often. Radu fell asleep again as they were singing and Mihai did not continue long without him. When the old man was breathing rhythmically—as do those that sleep—Mihai took up the sword again, and carefully let his fingers stroke over the weave of the metals welded into its life-lusty tongue.

The clouds that had curled down from the jagged peaks over a part of the vale drew back from the orb of Luna, letting her pale caress trace lines across the world over which she watched. Mihai breathed deeply the fresh scent of the trees and the dark soil. When the winds died down a little, he thought that he heard the prattle of a river not far off. An owl hooted. His head nodded and then swung back up, and he blinked. A rush of frigid wakefulness spilled over him then,

and he looked out, feeling his vision burn like ice on skin, as everything became sharp as glass again. The white lines of the moon's brush gave the tawny wood a skeletal character, even unto the hollows that were resigned to dark shadow, which were the pits in a skull.

Mihai suddenly felt as though he were being watched. He strained his eyes, and then his heart seized his throat, and his bowels were drawn tight, and cold ran the blood in his veins. Again the owl sounded. Far off another answered. He thought he had seen a figure move through the trees.

Tall and lean it had been. He stood up, no longer able to sit, and held his blade at the ready, staring out into the gloom.

Movement and screeching above him caused him to swing about, only to see the shadows of bats, dancing through the air now that their hour had come. He turned to see the forest again, and there he at once saw the movement. Something tall was making its way toward them, and it moved in an almost familiar manner, though not as might a man. And then he discerned its tread, and knew with what he was faced. It was a lone rider, making his way toward the firelight he had glimpsed, no doubt.

Without a further moment's delay, Mihai hied himself to one of the nearby trees, hiding himself behind its trunk. The sound grew steadily louder, and when he thought that the rider was near enough, he called out: "Halt! Who goes there at this late hour, and with what purpose?" the horse was reined in. Though he had thought to hear the sound of chain mail before, the links now rang with shrill clarity, as the rider moved in his saddle, likely seeking out the source of the voice. "If you had sight, not mere sound, you would know me," said the voice of a Saxon, thought Mihai.

"How so?" returned he.

"I bear openly the livery of my order," said the rider.

Mihai now dared turn out of his hiding place, and saw there, seated on the back of a dark charger, the colours of the Teutons, who had long ago been chased out of the land of Seven Burgs by Hungary—which had called them there to begin with. The colours were a black cross on white cloth.

"How do I know that you hold to your oath, if you are not gone with the rest of your kind?" asked

Mihai suspiciously.

The rider dismounted, binding his horse's reins to a nearby sapling. He raised his hands in a gesture of good will, revealing the hilt of his sword at his side. He had a large, grey beard, and he seemed not young; but there was such strength in his movement and such life in his eyes, that Mihai felt small. He was only a half-head shorter than the grizzly apparition.

"I am one of the Seven," said the Teuton simply. "I am Kronstadt."

"Braşov?" said Mihai bemusedly. "But that is the name of a city, not a man. And again, your order was cast out!"

The Teuton smiled. "May I join you at your fire?" said he. Involuntarily, Mihai's eyes darted back to the hilt of Kronstadt's sword. The knight, taking note of this, grasped the pommel and lifted the sword from his belt, only to expose the bonds of peace that there held the sword in place so that it did not leave its sheath. "I will entrust it to honourable

Anastasios, if it quietsens your mind," suggested the Teuton, motioning toward the horse, which presently pawed at the earth with its hoof and shook its mane.

"It would," replied Mihai, though his tone gave an otherwise impression.

None the less, the knight did as was asked, and Mihai returned to the campfire with the guest. There Radu greeted them with a steely gaze, and the words: "I see we have indeed met a greater danger than the bear, Mihai. You are a prophet."

"This is true," laughed the knight. "You both are prophets, though not only for singing the words of the Lord. Yes, I heard the chant of the immortal flock from my camp alongside the river, and thought to myself: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! I have been solitary in my observation of the hours for many a decade now, since my brothers were driven hence. Might I join you in your song, when you raise it again before the Immortal Shepherd?"

"At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments," said Radu, his cold expression melting a little and giving way to the deep joy that resembles satisfaction.

They sang some psalms together, and the two Vlachs were

surprised that the Teuton knew the language of their psalms, for they had heard, that the Saxons still prayed in the tongue of the ancient Rome. After a time, Radu had fallen into sleep again, and Mihai also felt the weariness overcome him with a mighty hand.

Kronstadt noticed this, and said: "Do not be afraid. Trust in God, for so he giveth his beloved sleep. I shall watch over you, and make sure that the evil foe does you no harm. For as the angel of the Lord is encamped about his people..." However the sentence carried on, the words must have been trustworthy indeed, for they were the last of what Mihai remembered of that night.

When he awoke, the heavens were grey with dawn, and the earth was cold, though the fire burned yet. The knight must have fed it while they had slept. But as Mihai looked about, he saw no sign of the Teuton, nor of his charger. He saw then also that he had fallen asleep with the sword in his arms, and that it had made a light cut on his hand. Shaking his head, he arose, and sheathed the patterned steel, after which he stretched his weary limbs. Had he dreamed the encounter with the knight?

"You are awake!" said Radu, then. Mihai turned to look at the elder huddled against the stone in his cloak. "Did you see when our defender deserted us?"

"No, Radu, I slept very soundly this night," said Mihai. "But I am glad to know that it was no dream, otherwise I would have berated myself for falling asleep on the watch."

"That is no evil thought, though our Lord is watching over us," said the elder. "Help me up, Mihai, and then we can eat a little and go on. It will be good to have four walls around me again. I am beginning to feel my age more than ever."

Mihai did, and for a time they separated, Mihai going down to the river to fetch some water in the pot he always carried in his pack, so that they might eat something warm before setting out. He also refilled their water skins for the road, and was happy to wash the sleep from his face.

Upon returning, he found that Radu had once more fallen asleep, resting his head on his fist as he sat atop the old trunk. He did not disturb him, as he hoped the sleep would give the old man strength for the rest of the journey, and set the pot over the brand, that the water might boil. Along the way he had gathered some wild onion and leek, and had found some other goodly herbs to cook.

Of the dried bread in his rucksack he laid a piece into the bubbling water, giving the broth a richer texture. When it was ready, he gently shook the elder, and handed him a wooden bowl of the stuff.

Radu thanked him, and blew on the steaming breakfast gratefully. By the time they were done, the heavens had burned away the stars, growing bright and blue beyond the cotton white of the clouds. Steaming streams arose like the dancing lace of ladies at court, climbing up the sheer fells from the wooded heath that clothed these rugged mountain roots.

The mountain birds had long ago begun their song and dance, replacing the gothic glee of the bats. Radu and Mihai took to the road again. Beneath their feet, a thin film of frost still crunched.

The day wore on, and a bear they did see in the distance, where the stream met upon some boulders, and fell a few feet down into a broader pool in the current. There the bear hunted for fish. A deer also crossed their path—they slowing to watch before it frightened and sped away again into the underbrush. Mihai had wished, then, that he had still had his bow; but alas, it had broken the week before. He hoped now to find a new one in the town that was their target: Turnu Roşu.

After a dip into a shallow gulley, the companions rose again to the top of a short ridge. Thence the last stretch of their journey led up toward that ancient settlement. Its foundations were still of the old Roman soldiers that had once made of this land their own. But, atop these foundations, a newer, wooden architecture mounted toward the red tower of the boyar's house. The legend told of how the stone was painted red by the blood of the Dacians that had besieged the place in the yore time, but Radu had told Mihai that there was also a quarry not far from Turnu Roşu, in which the stones were redder than elsewhere. This was Radu's ancestral home, and he had received permission to dwell in the house of the boyar as a servant for his last remaining years, however many those might be.

Meagre farms and huts crossed their way more regularly now, and the folk of the vale crossed their path quite often, grumbling submissive greetings, or nodding with wary eyes. A man in scaled armour and a scaled, conical helm, who smoked a pipe whilst leaning against a signpost spat as they walked past, baring his

teeth. He was a Mongol, Mihai saw to his surprise, and looked away quickly. Horror-ice flooded his veins, and the drumbeat of his heart pounded in his ears... or was it the drumbeat of war?

"Mihai!" hissed Radu, bringing his companion back to his senses. "We are almost there."

It was true. The waters of the river that had followed them at a distance, now nearer its source, rushed narrow and noisy beneath a moss-cloaked bridge. Its foundation was of a pale limestone, but it had been covered in sturdy beams of dark timber, a small guard house on either bank of the foaming water. They crossed this—suddenly they were passed by a hurried horse and wagon of produce that was late for the market. Then they themselves stood before the guards that had allowed the familiar farmer through with a chuckle and a comment about his customary tardiness.

"I hope he sells something, otherwise there will be no entertainment next week," said one of the guards to the other.

"Who are you, then, father?" asked the other, ignoring his brother in arms, directing his attention at Radu.

"I am Radu, sent for by the boyar," said the elder, extracting a sealed letter from somewhere beneath his cloak, and handed it to the guard.

The watchman took the paper, squinting at the signs that stained its weathered surface.

"You can read?" said his fellow in surprise.

The other grunted irritably, and continued to trace the letters individually with his eyes. He looked Mihai over, his eyes lingering on the tall staff that the man bore as though it might have been a spear. The guard indicated that he should show his hip. There Mihai revealed the sword, and also that it was bound into its sheath. Then the guard turned back to the elder, and said: "It is an honour to have you return to us, old Radu. The boyar will be glad to have you watch over him again, I am sure."

"Thank you, master," said Radu, bowing wearily.

They entered the town, then, and the guard that had given back Radu's letter indulged his fellow watchman with some banter about how heavy the wind had been the previous day. The banners of the town were furling on the present breeze, which was more of the refreshing kind to Mihai, though he knew that it strained his elder companion.

"Come with me, Mihai," said Radu. "Let us go first to the church. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. And it will be nice to do it in the familiar nave of one of his houses."

The church, which stood small and stone-wrought with a sheer roof of wood, resounded with a penetrating voice as they approached. It stood along the winding path toward the top of the hill and its tower. The voice sang a sonorous solo: beautiful and singular, and singing in the ancient tongue.

As the song drew them in, they were submerged in the shadowy dimness of candlelight. In a circle all about the old building's interior, on a shelf that had been set for the icons of the holy ones that had come before, candles flickered and dripped their yellow substance in long, soft fingers across the cool surface of the stone. The many eyes of the Saints stared out at them through perfect almonds. Before the altar of that sacred place, they found the source of the song. It was their knighterrant, the Teuton:

Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit:
in loco pascuae, ibi me collocavit.
Super aquam refectionis educavit me.
animam meam convertit.
Deduxit me super semitas justitiae
propter nomen suum.
Nam etsi ambulavero in medio umbrae mortis,
non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.
Virga tua, et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt.
Parasti in conspectu meo mensam
adversus eos qui tribulant me;
impinguasti in oleo caput meum:
et calix meus inebrians, quam praeclarus est!
Et misericordia tua subsequetur me
omnibus diebus vitae meae;
et ut inhabitem in domo Domini
in longitudinem dierum.

The Vlachs halted near one of the stone pillars that held aloft the wooden beams above, where the tall point of the church's conical roof rose to culminate in that terrible sign of holy wisdom: the Cross. There they harkened and held their breath, for it was really unlike even the voice of the Greek monk that served them in the home they had left behind.

At this thought, Mihai looked about, and saw that there was no priest within the small house of God. And, at this moment, Kronstadt's chant came to a close. The knight turned, his mail coat the rustling leaves of a steel tree as he did so. His eyes met theirs, deep, pale, and knowing.

"My brothers!" said he, and strode slowly over to take their arms in greeting. They were very abashed at this, for the knight suddenly seemed very great and noble as he stood there, perfectly illuminated by a beam of dusty light that was cast into the chamber by the tall windows above. He seemed a saint with such a halo, and by the splendid glow of his white cloak and tabard. "I should have known that you were also on your way hither to the Red Tower. We might have journeyed together."

"Yes," laughed Mihai. "I had begun to wonder if our meeting were only a dream."

"Not a dream, no," said the knight. "But the tale is not fully told yet, good Mihai. Be careful not to cut yourself with that knife of yours, there, son."

"I fear that it is too late," said Mihai, with a nervous smile and raised his hand for the knight to see.

Kronstadt's face fell noticeably. It may even have paled, but he was such a white man, that Mihai could not be certain. Then a resigned smile spread over his features again, and the Teuton said: "So be it. We will see each other soon, then, Mihai. But I would have preferred the delay to have been a little longer. My impatience has doomed you to share my fate, I am afraid. But my hand was not made big enough to govern all things, and so I am glad to share in this adventure with you!"

This disturbed the young Mihai terribly. He was still trying not to think of the Mongol beyond the gate, and now such strange and ominous words from so grave and mythical a figure...

The knight had said his goodbyes in what seemed to Mihai a blur, leaving behind a confused Radu, who turned from the now empty doorway back to his companion. A deep frown furrowed the elder's brow. "What was that all about, Mihai?"

"I don't know, Radu," said Mihai. "But... Let us go up to the boyar now, Radu, I think he will be happy to see you, and it will take my mind off of these strange events. Perhaps he will allow me to stay for lunch for my trouble."

The boyar's house was built in the manner of the Vlachs, in wooden staves about the base of the old, Roman tower. Parts of the edifice's lower walls were yet of the remaining ruin, craftily incorporated into the work. They neared the large entrance, for which they had to climb a broad, shallow stair. There the guards asked once more who they were, and what their business was.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed one of the guards then, "Old Radu! It is good to see you again after all these years! I am Bogdan, the blacksmith's son."

"Yes, Bogdan!" said Radu meekly. "How strange to see a face so familiar changed so; but I do recognise you now. Yes, Bogdan!" Radu and Mihai were allowed in, and they felt glad and welcome for a brief moment. But this changed quickly as they strode into the tall and smokey dark of the wooden hall. It was not for the boyar that sat on the other end in his great wooden chair, poring over some letter or docket that they suddenly felt unwelcome; nor was it for the long, silent banners that hung in the narrow shafts of daylight that cut in through the windows. It was not for the noiseless movement of servants that quickly departed the hall at the sight of strangers. The cold pounding, like ice on drums of iron, poured into Mihai's veins once more, because of the armed men that surrounded the boyar's throne.

They were Mongols.

There were four of them, spread across the far end of the room, each bearing a halberd, each carrying a curved blade at his hip, each clothed with the scaly hide of an iron fish. Only one of them had looked up as they had entered. He cleared his throat, and the boyar looked up at him absently.

Then the Mongol indicated that there were guests present with a motion of his behelmed head.

The boyar looked briefly down at the parchment in his lap, then he laid it aside, onto a small table next to his great chair. He looked up, squinting through the dimness at his guests.

"Welcome!" said the boyar. "You may approach."

The two newcomers did so, timidly nearing the throne. Neither had the fortitude to speak, the scene had such a bewitching effect on them. But as they drew nearer the throne, the boyar's face lit up, and he arose from his seat, marching lively down to meet them, his arms widespread.

"Radu!" cried the boyar, "It is so good to see you again, old father!"

"Alexandru," said Radu, then corrected himself sheepishly,

bowed apologetically, and said: "Boyar."

"Oh leave those formalities, old father!" laughed Boyar Alexandru, embracing first the old man, then gripping Mihai's arm in greeting. "Who is this young man, then?" he asked.

"Mihai, boyar," said Mihai.

"Ah, there is no need to be afraid, Mihai," said Alexandru. "You are welcome to dwell in my house for a few days of rest, if you are willing. The road into the mountains from your home is not short."

"You would only have to leave your blade with us," interjected the Mongol that had spotted the guests with his easterling voice. The rest of his kindred had still not paid a great amount of attention to the newcomers. Presently, one said something in their steppe-tongue to another, at which the other smirked.

Mihai's hand grew tight about the hilt of his ancient sword. Only now did he realise that his hand had clasped it, seemingly of its own will. He looked down at the dark metal that protruded from the leather grip. This caused the boyar's gaze to fall on the sword also, and his open smile quickly faded, transforming into a grim scowl.

"Give me that, peasant!" demanded the boyar, at once striding toward Mihai. But Mihai was no peasant, and he stepped back, regaining his composure somewhat. He raised a hand to both signal a warning as well as compliance. The boyar, realising his rashness, halted, and took a step back again.

All the while, Radu's fearful eyes darted from one figure to the other.

Slowly, so as not to inspire any violence, Mihai unbound and drew his sword. In the shadowy hall, its patterned blade seemed to breathe with light and shadow both, interwoven in a forge-fast dance.

He held it up in both hands, so that the boyar might take it from him. Boyar Alexandru carefully complied. He removed the steel from the other's hands, and held it to the light. His eyes grew ever darker with hatred.

"The witch spoke true!" he hissed. Then his eyes darted over to bore with untethered hatred into those of Mihai. "So you have come to supplant me, and think that I would not know, 'son of Ilion'?"

Mihai's eyes widened, and he stepped back a stride, shaking his head ever more frantically, finally finding the words, "No, no!" But of course, they fell on deaf ears. The Mongol mercenaries, as Mihai had supposed them, had drawn near, and the boyar handed the woven-steel blade to one of them.

"Destroy it!" he commanded, then, turning to another of the four, he said: "Take him out into the square, and remind the people why this place is called Turnu Roșu!"

What came next was a blur for Mihai. He saw himself kicked to the ground by one of the Mongol warriors, and tried to crawl away, but terror of some kind had stunned him, and he found not the will to move or run. Then he was grasped under the arms and dragged out into the daylight. The clouds that formed along the tall ridges of the Carpathians had begun covering the sun, draining the town of its life and colour. He was taken down the pathway along which they had climbed to the tower, and when they arrived in the town square, his shaking hands and feet were bound. In the next moment, he was painfully brought to his knees. A crowd had gathered to watch; the tardy farmer stood among them with a disgusted expression. Somewhere in the deep places of his mind, Mihai observed himself wondering what the farmer was disgusted by. Was it him? Some warning was proclaimed about the consequences of opposing the boyar's will, and some crime that Mihai had not committed was ascribed to him. Then it was as though all the many moments of his life unravelled before his eyes, composing one unified history of who he was:

I am Mihai, the son of a boyar who was defeated, and driven away from the fells, toward the Black Sea. The fugitive boyar had dwelt in the woods with Mihai, the only remnant of his house, for a year. During the Mongol invasion, he had been slain, and Mihai had fled to the house of another boyar, where he was taken up as a guard for his swordsmanship. But now he had fallen to the same fate of his father: the hands of a Mongol invasion he had thought past.

And with that, Mihai's head fell to the ground, and his body slid from the chopping block not far behind.

A long, dark eternity spread out before his spirit. A lostness settled in his very middle. And then an ancient voice called to him: Take up your sword! Your work is not yet done!

When Mihai awoke, he felt the cold of the stone beneath him penetrate his entire body, as though he had slept on a cobbled

floor for an entire night. He felt tired, as though that night had been too short, and as though the day before had been filled with unimaginable labour. Moving his arms or legs seemed too great a strain, as though he were so weary that he could barely even think of the movement, never mind perform it.

"Ah," said a familiar Saxon voice coloured by laughter. "He awakens!"

Like two splintering shutters, Mihai managed to open his eyes. He was in a house with a tall, wooden roof. It looked familiar. Slowly he rolled his head to the side and saw Kronstadt seated on the same cold flagstones on which he himself lay sprawled at present. The knight was leaning his back against one of the pillars near the middle of the nave. Mihai recognised this as the small stone church of Turnu Roşu. The vision of his last moments before death burst across his inner eye, and drowned out the dim light of the candles for a moment. He blinked, returning to himself, and noticed that it was night.

"W-what has happened?" he stammered, yet lying flat upon the stone floor, though some of his life could be felt to return to him.

"Yes..." said the knight and grimaced as he sought the words. "You were slain. Not to worry, though; it left barely a mark!"

At this Mihai sat up.

"What has... How can this be?" said he, then he looked at his hand, feeling there a tingling itch.

The kiss with which the ancient sword had graced him had been replaced with a phrase in a tongue he did not know, burned across the skin of his palm. The writing was not of the kind which the monks had taught him as a boy. "What does this mean?" he muttered, gently touching the marks.

The Teuton raised himself from where he sat and strode over to Mihai, crouching down to appreciate the writing himself:

ΟΙ ΛΑΒΟΝΤΕΣ ΜΑΧΑΙΡΑΝ ΕΝ ΜΑΧΑΙΡΗ ΑΠΟΛΟΥΝΤΑΙ

"I cannot say," said the knight.

"You!" said Mihai suddenly, and clambered to his feet, pointing an accusing finger at the knight, who seemed somewhat taken aback. "You've done this to me! You spoke those ominous words when we last met... here! We met here in this church! Now I am back here again!" The sound resonated against the dusky interior.

"Yes," admitted the knight, then laid his fingers over his moustache in pensive reflection, he seemed to be looking for a suitable explanation to the situation.

"Why have you done this to me!?" cried Mihai. "What did you tell the boyar that he had me killed? Killed! Why am I not dead?"

"Calm down, Mihai," said Kronstadt.

"Calm!" said Mihai; but the rush of emotion drained from the young man as quickly as it had come, as he saw the knight was not at all moved by it. He, at least, knew something.

"Yes, Calm is better than chaos," muttered the knight. "I have never spoken to the boyar. In fact, I don't think he even knows I am here. It would likely alarm him. One might think that a knight of the Teutonic Order would make the news, but alas, Alexandru is too concerned with Astrology at this season in his life. He seeks all the signs that point toward an impossible immortality. He seeks it everywhere but in the place where it has been clearly shown. In the Resurrection."

"What are you? A ghost?" asked Mihai.

"No, no. I am a man," said Kronstadt. "Just like you. But I am also bound to this world with a particular purpose, one might say. Even as you are now."

"But why? What has happened to me?" asked Mihai.

"That sword you had at your side, Mihai," said Kronstadt. "It had a darkness about it; a corruption. I saw it in the periphery of my spirit as soon as you entered this vale. That is why we met in the wood, you see. I was out seeking the source of that corruption. It is a cursed blade, I knew. It bears the scar of Ilion's desecrated towers—of the unspeakable blasphemies that ensued therein—where one fell angel was drawn into strife with another over their respective charge, amplifying sin, so that all the kings of the world have been left with a scar from it."

"Ilion? What is that?" asked Mihai, his horror at his own situation was transformed into a dreadful wonder at these mythic titles and at the shadows of a time he had never known. But they reached out of dream and murk like memory when he heard them mentioned.

"Yes, Ilion," murmured the knight once more. "It is the city wherein the mighty warrior Achilles fell by the dart of his counterpart in every way. But these are only tales of which I have heard here and there an account, Mihai. The reason I know this blade to descend from that ancient city to you is because of a

prophecy that was spoken here in Turnu Roşu. A witch, so it was rumoured in the market today, was brought before Boyar Alexandru. She housed some Pythian demon in her. Many in the market spoke of how she had dwelt in the woods, and of how she was known for speaking of things that must come to pass, and ever do."

"What did she say?" asked Mihai.

For a long moment, Kronstadt simply stared at him, no motion on his mien. Then he recited:

When hammers down the mountain-gale,
The sun shall set on troubled souls;
Though soundly sleeps near ancient frail,
A man bears blade that never dulls.
He comes with dawn upon the Tow'r
That named is "Red", the seat of pow'r.
Upon his hand the scar shall be,
The hand that takes the sword shall die;
Yet not ere he the boyar slays,
Who will not yield to right of rule,
Which by the blood of Ilion,
A son has got,
A sword has won.

"Rule? Ilion? Me?" stuttered Mihai, not knowing what to make of the words.

"That is not all, Mihai," said the Teuton. "That blade which you found: Boyar Alexandru has tried to have it destroyed before. He at once recognised it, and knew that you were the enemy he had hoped to do away with by executing the witch. She shared your spectacular marketplace fate but a few days before."

"Then this place truly does have the name of the Red Tower because of bloodshed," said Mihai scowling. "And Radu assured me of a quarry with red stones. How foolish was I to believe such a tale."

"The quarry is there as well," said Kronstadt. "I am sad to say, that the priest that once served in this humble house also shared your fate, however, leaving the flock for the wolf. And so are all men made equal to the dust, no matter how great or small, how hollow or holy. All must be made to endure the same level, namely that of the earth of which we were built; the dust in which the python writhes and whispers its poisonous prophecy. But it must come to pass. What the spirits have seen they have not ordained. They are as much subject to it as we of mortal kind."

"But then," interrupted Mihai, gaining some ground in this new world he was awakening to, "we are not mortal, are we?"

"Well if dying does not make you mortal, I can't say what does!" laughed Kronstadt. "And you've died, so mortal you must be!"

"But we are... alive?" Mihai realised that he was asking a question.

"Yes," said the knight. "We have been judged. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so have we paid the price for taking up the sword, by losing our life to this very instrument of justice. Yes, you have already come to this conclusion in your heart. I, too, am bound to a second waking after death by this blade."

The Teuton drew the gleaming sword at his side, and held it up to the shimmering gold of the candles. It was of a similar pattern to that which Mihai had lost to the boyar.

"Is this, then, our judgement?" asked Mihai.

The knight responded in a voice that bore the weight of knowledge lived: "We are those that have suffered the judgement prematurely through the baptism of blood. Ours is to watch over the poor and the needy, the widow and the orphan, the downcast and the oppressed. If Alexandru and his ilk are the wolf, we are the shepherd's hound, and this blade is our collar. Thus we are bound, Mihai."

We are bound to the place and people to which the sword is bound that made us what we are. It is our power, and our weakness; our freedom and the margin of our world. It is the judgement by which we are called and condemned. It is justice."

"Well I have no sword," said Mihai.

"Not yet," said Kronstadt. "But if you can muster some courage from your revival, you may pay the boyar a visit, and reclaim it. What is a second death? Things grow easier with practice."

And so Mihai arose. Kronstadt gripped his arm in greeting again, and watched as the Vlach departed. Mihai then ascended the path to the house of the boyar again. The night was so brightly lit by the moon, that it felt as though he were in a dream. The smoking chimneys of the houses below the boyar's house seemed so peaceful, the lights beyond the windows so inviting

and warm, and yet so much blood had been shed here in recent times. And for what? Was it so easy to grow accustomed to the evil in the hearts of men?

When he arrived at the broad stair that led in, he saw that the guards at the door had fallen asleep during their watch, pale statues, quietly snoring as they leaned expertly against their spears. Thus Mihai entered the hall without rousing any notice. Within, he saw again the Mongol warriors before they saw him. Their armour gleamed like the hide of dragons in the dull flickering of the lamps.

Perhaps they were some remnant that had left behind the machinations the Khan, in order to carve out a quieter life of opportunity in an upturned land.

It was the same Mongol that had seen Mihai arrive with Radu that morning who noticed that they were no longer alone. At the sight of Mihai, his eyes widened, his mouth opened, and he screamed something in his foreign speech. His comrades started into action, yet did not know what action they were meant to take, and were immediately overcome with hesitation as they also recognised the man who had returned from the dead.

By this time, Alexandru the boyar had stood up, his face pale and sleek with a sudden perspiration. What was he faced with? In his hands he held the dark sword of Ilion. The Sword of Mihai. He raised it, holding it by the blade, hilt upward, and said: "Take the accursed thing! Take it and leave me and my lands forever! You are banished! Banished!"

The Mongol that had spotted Mihai shouted a command. The others looked from their commander to the intruder and back, then they took up a defensive position. At this, Mihai noticed that a fifth had joined their company; the one who had been smoking a pipe at the entrance of the town that morning. The one who had spat before Radu and his entrance into Radu's own hometown. Their leader looked at Mihai, noticed that he had come to a halt, and gave the signal to his men that they should hold their positions.

For a time now, the tingling in Mihai's right hand had grown stronger, and it was as though an ancient voice were trying to whisper to him through that sensation: Raise the hand of your might, Mihai son of Ilion! He thought to hear it say. And so he did, raising an open hand slowly above his head.

In response, the room grew silent, all held their breath, all waited for a sign to occur. Then, in one dreadful motion, the blade drew itself up, cutting itself free from the hand that had held it.

Alexandru screamed, claspings his arm and baring his teeth. The sword, which still hovered above the boyar, awaited Mihai's command.

It was in this moment, that a servant entered. It was Radu. He came in with his hands stretched out before him, wearing clean clothes, his eyes wide. He had heard the commotion, and could no longer hold himself back. A formless hope had awoken in his heart. When his eyes alit on Mihai, his mouth fell open to complete the surprised expression of his face.

"What are you waiting for?" cried the boyar to his guard, drawing the gazes of those present back onto him. "Kill him! Put an end to this sorcery! Why do you hesitate?"

"We have killed him already!" said the commander of the Mongols exasperatedly. "Should he haunt us when he has done with you? You have paid us good money, boyar, but coin has its limits. Even if there is not much else that a man desires in this world."

"Then have done with me!" screamed the boyar, turning to Mihai with a pain-tortured face.

But Mihai had no desire to take this life. There was no purpose, no honour in it. This was all too dark a tale for his soul, though he had endured much. The memory of the slain priest, the memory of his slaughtered father, these inspired in him a brief lust for vengeance; yet there was a fear in him. There, in his very middle, he knew that he still feared God, and that taking this life would be against one of the holy ten commands. He was not boyar yet. This man, Alexandru, was. His eyes moved to meet those of his old friend, Radu. There he saw his conscience reflected. Barely noticeable, Radu shook his head; though it may have been out of bewilderment. Yet Mihai grew convinced by this little motion that there must be a way that does greater justice. He had to but find it.

"You feel this burden, Mihai. That is good," said Kronstadt, who now stood in the doorway behind him. He had donned his tall helm, and the voice sounded as though it were spoken through a bucket.

Laughable in another setting, but here it gave the scene an even

stranger character; the world was become a nightmare. "This is the judgement that comes after death. You have taken up the sword; you have become a very angel of death. The life of this villain is in your hand. How will you act?"

There are only two paths before you: Slay the man, and fulfil the turning of the Wheel of Fortune, or spare him, and fulfil the law by dying in his stead. The sword would be bestowed unto him. He would wield it, now free of the burden of prophecy, slaying God knows how many more in his depravity. Perhaps your old friend Radu, who is already merely a plaything in this puppet's hand, will be the first to fall to it."

Silence benighted their tense company once more. A war raged in the heart of Mihai, and cold sweat bled from his brow. Though he was compelled to take the life, something in his very middle spoke against this final act.

Suddenly, the commander of the Mongols leapt toward the wooden throne, driving his halberd through the chest of the boyar. The victim barbed looked up at his murderer with wide eyes and a gaping mouth, spluttering out the last contents of his throat. Then Alexandru's body slackened, and he crumpled to the floor, dead.

Mihai gasped in horror, and withdrew his hand from where he had held it. At once the blade that had hovered over the throne darted towards him, though it bent in the air, and landed in his sheath, which still hung belted at his side. Mihai looked down at the dark steel of the hilt, and shuddered.

"He is dead," said the Mongol in his easterling voice. He had proclaimed it as a simple fact, as a recognition of the fact that he no longer had any reason to remain in that hall. The only one that might still stand in his way, he seemed to imply with these few words, and with his cat-like eyes, was Mihai and his Teutonic friend.

"By your hand!" said Mihai hoarsely. "Why did you kill him? You have taken up the sword, and so must be put to the sword. That is the law of this land, however much it was twisted before."

The Mongols frightened and looked at one another with large eyes. They quietly exchanged a few words of admonition and fear. Then their commander spoke again: "We have taken the guilt of this death from you, oh boyar of the Red Tower. If you let us pass, we shall be beyond your marks by sunrise."

"If ever I see you again," growled Mihai, "You shall reap the lot of your works here, for you have merely committed the crime that I could not; but a crime it remains!"

They wasted no further time, and Mihai watched as they scurried by him, their scale livery clinking as they went. For a while their rustling was still heard, as was the sound of the guards awaking, and chasing after them with questions. They would likely soon return to see what had driven the warriors from their master's hall. Mihai, meanwhile, passed by the long banners that framed the hall on either side and ascended to the throne where the boyar's body lay crumpled on the floor, the life that had been in him spread pooling and spilling over the lip of the few stairs that led up to it.

Radu also drew nearer, though slowly. It was not for his age, but out of wonder. "How can this be?" he asked.

"It is grace, old Radu. I know no other answer," said Mihai.

"I am curious, Mihai," said Kronstadt. "Why did you not carry out the law of the sword? What you have done is not strictly speaking a just act. It is your mandate as acting boyar. Whether you will remain the ruler of this land shall be seen. But, by letting those men flee, you have set a dangerous precedent, and though you may want to cover up what you have done here this night, rumour always spreads, and truth always finds a way to assert itself at the least practical moment."

"Again I say what a ruler should be hesitant to say: Grace, my friend," said Mihai. "I have no other explanation. I was given the chance for a new life as well, and I do not doubt that they will remember this night. But should they ever return, they will not be spared. I have killed men before, but not like this. Yet in some ways this all seems a great curse, Kronstadt. I have inherited this vale by the prophecy of this sword. But it feels an empty victory over an enemy that I never wanted. Look how he has died: betrayed in his most bitter need! The wound on him proves that he had no loyalty. All that moved this man was the power to sit on this throne, but what did he ever use it for, other than to remain perched atop it?"

"You have a more pressing matter to consider, Mihai," said Kronstadt. "For the question that has not been dealt a fatal blow, a question that your actions have only amplified, is this: How will you sit on the throne if the people will have you? Will you sit

upon it with cowardice? With justice? With tyranny?"

Mihai looked briefly at the amazed Radu, but could not share his wonder. He strode up toward the throne, and gently touched the dark wood of its armrest. There he lingered but a moment, breathed in the stained air, then lowered himself into the tall chair. His eyes were closed as he sat there, chewing on the thoughts he now was faced with as though they were black-bread. When he opened his eyes, Kronstadt stood before him, his right hand resting on the pommel of his own burden-bringer. An air of expectation was about the Teuton, and Mihai knew that it was good so.

Then Mihai said: "If I am not alone in this, Kronstadt—if your land is my neighbour-land—then I would rule with justice. Those that seek to drive fear into the hearts of men shall fear me, and those that know only fear, shall have my mercy. And in all things, I shall submit to the Laws of God, so that my passions rule neither me nor my people."



Autumn Song

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Know'st thou not at the fall of the leaf
How the heart feels a languid grief
Laid on it for a covering,
And how sleep seems a goodly thing
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf?

And how the swift beat of the brain
Falters because it is in vain,
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf
Knowest thou not? and how the chief
Of joys seems—not to suffer pain?

Know'st thou not at the fall of the leaf
How the soul feels like a dried sheaf
Bound up at length for harvesting,
And how death seems a comely thing
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf?

The Stream's Secret

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

What thing unto mine ear
Wouldst thou convey,—what secret thing,
O wandering water ever whispering?
Surely thy speech shall be of her.
Thou water, O thou whispering wanderer,
What message dost thou bring?

Say, hath not Love leaned low
This hour beside thy far well-head,
And there through jealous hollowed fingers said
The thing that most I long to know—
Murmuring with curls all dabbled in thy flow
And washed lips rosy red?

He told it to thee there
Where thy voice hath a louder tone;
But where it welters to this little moan
His will decrees that I should hear.
Now speak: for with the silence is no fear,
And I am all alone.

Shall Time not still endow
One hour with life, and I and she
Slake in one kiss the thirst of memory?
Say, streams, lest Love should disavow
Thy service, and the bird upon the bough
Sing first to tell it me.

What whisperest thou? Nay, why
Name the dead hours? I mind them well.
Their ghosts in many darkened doorways dwell
With desolate eyes to know them by.
That hour must still be born ere it can die
Of that I'd have thee tell.

But hear, before thou speak!
Withhold, I pray, the vain behest
That while the maze hath still its bower for quest
My burning heart should cease to seek.
Be sure that Love ordained for souls more meek
His roadside dells of rest.

Stream, when this silver thread
In flood-time is a torrent brown,
May any bulwark bind thy foaming crown?
Shall not the waters surge and spread
And to the crannied boulders of their bed
Still shoot the dead drift down?

Let no rebuke find place
In speech of thine: or it shall prove
That thou dost ill expound the words of Love.
Even as thine eddy's rippling race
Would blur the perfect image of his face
I will have none thereof.

O learn and understand
That 'gainst the wrongs himself did wreak
Love sought her aid; until her shadowy cheek
And eyes beseeching gave command;
And compassed in her close compassionate hand
My heart must burn and speak.

For then at last we spoke
What eyes so oft had told to eyes
Through that long-linging silence whose half-sighs
Alone the buried secret broke,
Which with snatched hands and lips' reverberate stroke
Then from the heart did rise.

But she is far away
Now; nor the hours of night grown hoar
Bring yet to me, long gazing from the door,
The wind-stirred robe of roseate gray
And rose-crown of the hour that leads the day
When we shall meet once more.

Dark as thy blinded wave
When brimming midnight floods the glen,—
Bright as the laughter of thy runnels when
The dawn yields all the light they crave;
Even so these hours to wound and that to save
Are sisters in Love's ken.

Oh sweet her bending grace
Then when I kneel beside her feet;
And sweet her eyes' o'erhanging heaven; and sweet
The gathering folds of her embrace;
And her fall'n hair at last shed round my face
When breaths and tears shall meet.

Beneath her sheltering hair,
In the warm silence near her breast,
Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest;
As in some still trance made aware
That day and night have wrought to fulness there
And Love has built our nest.

And as in the dim grove,
When the rains cease that hushed them long,
'Mid glistening boughs the song-birds wake to song,—
So from our hearts deep-shrined in love,
While the leaves throb beneath, around, above,
The quivering notes shall throng.

Till tenderest words found vain
Draw back to wonder mute and deep,
And closed lips in closed arms a silence keep,
Subdued by memory's circling strain,—
The wind-rapt sound that the wind brings again
While all the willows weep.

Then by her summoning art
Shall memory conjure back the sere
Autumnal Springs, from many a dying year
Born dead; and, bitter to the heart,
The very ways where now we walk apart
Who then shall cling so near.

And with each thought new-grown,
Some sweet caress or some sweet name
Low-breathed shall let me know her thought the same:
Making me rich with every tone
And touch of the dear heaven so long unknown
That filled my dreams with flame.

Pity and love shall burn
In her pressed cheek and cherishing hands;
And from the living spirit of love that stands
Between her lips to soothe and yearn,
Each separate breath shall clasp me round in turn
And loose my spirit's bands.

Oh passing sweet and dear,
Then when the worshipped form and face
Are felt at length in darkling close embrace;
Round which so oft the sun shone clear,
With mocking light and pitiless atmosphere,
In many an hour and place.

Ah me! with what proud growth
Shall that hour's thirsting race be run;
While, for each several sweetness still begun
Afresh, endures love's endless drouth;
Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks, sweet eyes, sweet mouth,
Each singly wooed and won.

Yet most with the sweet soul
Shall love's espousals then be knit;
What time the governing cloud sheds peace from it
O'er tremulous wings that touch the goal,
And on the unmeasured height of Love's control
The lustral fires are lit.

Therefore, when breast and cheek
Now part, from long embraces free,—
Each on the other gazing shall but see
A self that has no need to speak:
All things unsought, yet nothing more to seek,—
One love in unity.

O water wandering past,—
Albeit to thee I speak this thing,
O water, thou that wanderest whispering,
Thou keep'st thy counsel to the last.
What spell upon thy bosom should Love cast,
Its secret thence to wring?

Nay, must thou hear the tale
Of the past days,—the heavy debt
Of life that obdurate time withholds,—ere yet
To win thine ear these prayers prevail,
And by thy voice Love's self with high All-hail
Yield up the amulet?

How should all this be told?—
All the sad sum of wayworn days,—
Heart's anguish in the impenetrable maze;
And on the waste uncoloured wold
The visible burthen of the sun grown cold
And the moon's labouring gaze?

Alas! shall hope be nurs'd
On life's all-succouring breast in vain,
And made so perfect only to be slain?
Or shall not rather the sweet thirst
Even yet rejoice the heart with warmth dispers'd
And strength grown fair again?

Stands it not by the door!—
Love's Hour—Till she and I shall meet
With bodiless form and unapparent feet
That cast no shadow yet before,
Though round its head the dawn begins to pour
The breath that makes day sweet?

Its eyes invisible
Watch till the dial's thin-thrown shade
Be born,—yea, till the journeying line be laid
Upon the point that wakes the spell,
And there in lovelier light than tongue can tell
Its presence stands array'd.

Its soul remembers yet
Those sunless hours that passed it by;
And still it hears the night's disconsolate cry,
And feels the branches wringing wet
Cast on its brow, that may not once forget,
Dumb tears from the blind sky.

But oh! when now her foot
Draws near, for whose sake night and day
Were long in weary longing sighed away,—
The hour of Love, 'mid airs grown mute,
Shall sing beside the door, and Love's own lute
Thrill to the passionate lay.

Thou know'st, for Love has told
Within thine ear, O stream, how soon
That song shall lift its sweet appointed tune.
O tell me, for my lips are cold,
And in my veins the blood is waxing old
Even while I beg the boon.

So, in that hour of sighs
Assuaged, shall we beside this stone
Yield thanks for grace; while in thy mirror shown
The twofold image softly lies,
Until we kiss, and each in other's eyes
Is imaged all alone.

Still silent? Can no art
Of Love's then move thy pity? Nay,
To thee let nothing come that owns his sway:
Let happy lovers have no part
With thee; nor even so sad and poor a heart
As thou hast spurned to-day.

To-day? Lo! night is here.
The glen grows heavy with some veil
Risen from the earth or fall'n to make earth pale;
And all stands hushed to eye and ear,
Until the night-wind shake the shade like fear
And every covert quail.

Ah! by another wave
On other airs the hour must come
Which to thy heart, my love, shall call me home.
Between the lips of the low cave
Against that night the lapping waters lave,
And the dark lips are dumb.

But there Love's self doth stand,
And with Life's weary wings far flown,
And with Death's eyes that make the water moan,
Gathers the water in his hand:
And they that drink know nought of sky or land
But only love alone.

O soul-sequestered face
Far off,—O were that night but now!
So even beside that stream even I and thou
Through thirsting lips should draw Love's grace,
And in the zone of that supreme embrace
Bind aching breast and brow.

O water whispering
Still through the dark into mine ears,—
As with mine eyes, is it not now with hers?—
Mine eyes that add to thy cold spring,
Wan water, wandering water weltering,
This hidden tide of tears.



The Poetry of Alexander Ross



Lodestone

Pray not for the walls and roof, but rather
the tools to build them plumb and true. Let not
your spark fade on the shelf as you lather
in the light of fools. Fortitude forgot,

I've found, is worse than never learned, the kiss
of bedrock less precious to the castle
wrought on clay. Hear, again, the singsong hiss
of the sawteeth biting pine, the hassle

of each burl and knot, a clarion call
to perseverance; to heft the hammer,
honoring the rise no more than the fall,
and even in your deepest pleas not stammer,

but speak them steady, equal to their worth.
Lodestone of the inner eye, seeking truest north.

“O gods, what a horse do they turn away, for lack of skill and heart to handle him!”
—Plutarch

Bucephalus

Nay, said the tamers who would quell my flame,
and woe to them for trying, for it took
the hand of Philip's heir to grasp my mane
and show me the sun. Together, we shook

this disc from Mallia to Macedon,
outstripping the hordes of the Persian plain
to crown atop the heap a hegemon.
With an iron will and Thessalian strain,

propelled by the words of Aristotle,
my sovereign rides on to this day. Postpone
death, ye may, ye mortals, but to throttle
death takes a myth. He mounted his un-alone.

For the greatest of men once anchored his feet
fast to the storm of the greatest of steeds.

Alexander Ross is an American
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family, war, and water.
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Antelope Hill, Apocalypse
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Anti-Comte

By Thomas Sprantzes



I - I looked over my shoulder as I ascended the nameless hill (for none of the hills in that region have names), and between the rows of tenements that stank of urine and tobacco, the city of Lexington trembled, as though seen through water, in the heat rising from the asphalt. The evening star hovered in the blackness ahead of me, and its cold ray prompted these meditations: Wretched am I and most wretched, who have loaded myself with cares, and must roll back under their weight into the crater behind me! the bilge of the world, into which run all greed and ambition to fester. Ahead of me shines a star, whose point of light no earthly power can dim; but man must counterfeit the glory of God, and has crafted his seven days of creation to fog his eyes, lest the heavenly radiance dazzle them. God made the evening and the morning; man made lamps to bring day at his pleasure. God made the firmament; man made cars to pollute it. God made the green herb; man made cement to thwart it. God made the moon and stars; man made streetlights to drown them out. God made the fish; man made culverts to bury them. God made the birds and beasts; man made garbage to degrade them. God made men and women; man made guns to kill them. God rested; man never rests.

Here I paused to weep, but my heart was stony, and rated the pleasures of God nobler, but less certain than those of man. I had come from a drinking-bout and, though I scorned, could not regret my attendance there. But ere I could chastise myself, behold a man stood at the hilltop with a white board on an easel, upon which was depicted an other sphere checked with ornament and umber and braced with fantastic jug-handles of flame. "Plasma, sir," he said as I approached, and I was so puzzled that I drew closer and asked him what was the charge of his peculiar heraldry.

"I don't know what heraldry is," he said, "but this is the Sun. This is what it really looks like. See how it's made of plasma? Conspiracy theorists don't want you to know that because then you'd realize the universe functions according to fixed laws, and soon enough you'd be using them to your own advantage. But if they can keep people in the dark, they can be the ones in control." "What is 'plasma'?"

He smiled weakly. "Are you serious?"

"Yes. What is 'plasma'?"

His eyes bulged. "It's one of the four states of matter. You know, solid, liquid, gas, plasma. The atoms in a plasma have so much energy that they ionize and move freely through space without being attracted by each other."

I was sorry to find this man held captive by the teaching of Democritus, though I forbore to dispute it openly with him. But I thought on his curious assertion that atoms could "attract" one another, and seeing that it afforded a potential means of his deliverance, I asked him, "What ordinarily attracts one atom to another?"

"The electromagnetic force. The negatively-charged electron cloud of one atom will deform the electron cloud of another away from itself, allowing the first atom to attract the positively-charged nucleus of the second."

"What are these 'forces' and 'charges' of which you speak?"

"What, did you never finish fifth grade? Didn't you ever learn about the four fundamental forces in school?"

At this point the evening star began to shine more intensely, until it was as bright as noonday, and a pane of cloudy white light emanated from it and struck the pavement beside us. Down upon it slid a young woman holding in each hand a pitcher of water, and when she had alighted, she declared, so stridently it pained my ears, that there was no such thing as "force" or "charge," and that the atoms really attracted each other by means of ropes, which linked each atom with every other in the universe.

"What is this crap?" said the materialist. "Are you seeing it too?"

"I see a lovely star-maiden," I responded, "but I confess myself entirely ignorant of the means and purpose of her coming hither."

"Who are you calling 'maiden'?" screeched the star-girl.

I blushed.

"Is this supposed to be an 'alien encounter'?" said the materialist. "It's one of the worst on record."

"Excuse me?" said the star-girl. "I'm not an alien."

"What are you, then?" he jeered. "A hologram?"

"I'm Sophia," she boasted.

"OK, but what are you?"

"Sophia! The thirtieth Aeon!"

I paled, marveling at the damsel's power of self-accusation.

Said the materialist, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll have you know this world is an emanation of thirty beings..."

began the star-girl, no doubt intending to babble some heretical nonsense.

"Nay," quod I, not knowing what I said, "but the world is held together by angels, and I shall prove it to you both. Ecce mysterium magnum!" And I produced an orb of chrystal the size of an orange, in which appeared a little man with white feathered wings and very long arms, which the orb curved and foreshortened so that they stopped within a hair's breadth of its edge. In either of his hands was a globe of blue light.

"What's this?" said the materialist. "Do you expect me to believe this rubbish too?"

"Excuse me," said the little man, "I can hear you."

"A talking rope!" cried the star-girl.

"Talking ropes indeed!" said the materialist. "I've had quite enough of this." And he tucked his board and easel under his arm and plodded away.

II - Now I reproached myself inwardly for my profanation of the Celestial Hierarchy, the sudden glory of which, like the Sun's light after eclipse, had caused the materialist's pupils to shrink, and himself to see naught but a white-hot oblivion, and that with great anguish; while, had the dawn come upon him by degrees, he might have been able to bear its first ruddy glow, and thence attain to the contemplation of its brilliant Cause at noonday. But here my thoughts broke off, for the star-girl exclaimed to the departing materialist, who was halfway down the hill, "Good riddance, you moron!"

The materialist looked over his shoulder with a murderous scowl, but did not slack in his downward progress.

"That wasn't very kind, you know," said the little man in the orb.

"I don't care, you know," said the star-girl. "I don't take advice from subatomic particles. How are we able to see you, anyway? I thought something needed a rope to attach to it in order for any impulse from it to be transferred to an observer, but there's no way another rope could attach to you, since you're a rope already."

"Allow me to explain," I said, finding myself surprisingly knowledgeable. "A rope actually presents numerous points of attachment for certain smaller, second-order ropes, or 'sub-ropes,' as some call them, and by means of these sub-ropes impulses can be transmitted directly from rope to rope across vast distances. Our friend Gamaliel here, for instance, is at this moment somewhere in the Andromeda Galaxy; yet we are able to communicate with him quite easily by means of the sub-ropes linking the various points of his body to this chrystal orb you see before you."

"Doesn't that make the so-called 'first-order rope' a composite being?" asked the star-girl.

"It does," said I, "and the 'atoms,' so to speak, of the first-order ropes, if a carrier of force can be said to have atoms, are all held together by other second-order ropes."

"So these second-order ropes, then, are the real fundamental building-blocks of force?"

"Assuredly not," said Gamaliel. "Indeed, if you would like to meet one of the Archangels, or 'second-order ropes,' as you prefer to call them, I have here a sphere of angelic chrystal, which is happily linked to your orb of material chrystal by other Archangels. In this angelic sphere may be perceived one of the Archangels, Zophiel, the impressions of whom are communicated to the sphere by certain Principalities, and thence by other fellow Archangels to your material orb."

"Principalities!" cried the star-girl. "What are those?"

"They are what you might call 'third-order ropes,'" replied Gamaliel, "though I would advise you not to address them as such, should you ever have occasion to speak with them."

"And the third-order ropes may be spoken with too! No doubt through the agency of ropes of an even higher order?"

"Yes," said Gamaliel; "the choir above them is that of the Powers. But I hardly think they would be willing to grant you an interview; they are of a higher order, in a more accurate sense than that in which you have thus far been using the term, and they often find it rather difficult to communicate with material beings at such a remove."

"Very well, then," said the star-girl, "but now let us speak with Zophiel."

Gamaliel lifted his head and revealed hanging at his throat a pearly sphere, in which appeared the even smaller figure of a man resembling himself in every way, save that the smaller man, rather than holding a globe in his left hand, was clasping the much larger hand of a figure otherwise outside the field of vision.

"Good evening, Zophiel," I said; "we come from Gamaliel, with the object of showing this young woman here that the world is

held together by angels."

"Can she see what now she sees and disbelieve?" asked Zophiel.

"I can," said the star-girl, "and that more easily than before. This is just silly. Wasn't one order of angels enough to hold everything together? Why is there another one on top of it to make things more complicated?"

"Leaving aside the mean and selfish bent of your inquiry," answered Zophiel, "you may wish to know that Angels cannot interact directly with matter. They can only interact directly with Archangels such as myself. In fact, if you were to look very closely at the image of Gamaliel visible to you in your material orb, you would perceive an infinitesimal gap between each of his hands and the globe it grasps. That gap is bridged by Archangels, who are invisible in your material orb for reasons of which I am sure Gamaliel has already apprised you."

"I don't believe he has," I interposed, "but I will take the opportunity to clarify that, since there are no Powers connecting the Archangels whose hands Gamaliel is holding to Zophiel's angelic sphere, there is no way for our material orb to receive any impulses from those Archangels, and therefore it cannot represent them to us."

"In any event," continued Zophiel, "the other Archangels and I serve the very necessary function of connecting the Angels to the Principalities who form the next stage in the bond between any two material atoms."

"Do you mean to tell me," said the star-girl, "that Archangels, as well as Angels, are incapable of interacting directly with matter?"

"That is exactly the case," said Zophiel.

"How many more steps are there?"

"There are nine choirs in total; after the Powers come the Virtues, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim."

"Then the Seraphim can grab directly onto matter?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"Then what does?" said the star-girl in exasperation.

"God."

"God?" she shrieked.

"Yes, God. Every Seraph has at all times one hand around that of a Cherub and the other in that of God; and God, for His part, has His other hand on the atom of whose end of the bond the Seraph is the penultimate stage, and so He completes that bond."

The star-girl stared at her hands, reasoning within herself.

III - She having long been silent, I asked Zophiel, "How is it, by the way, that the angels never become entangled, despite often spanning the universe for the sake of communicating some infinitesimal attraction from one end of it to the other?"

"You should know that as well as I," he replied. "The different choirs of angels are all mutually incorporeal; they interact only by means of their ability to grasp the hands of angels of the choir immediately higher or lower. As for angels of the same choir, just as with matter, their apparent mutual impermeability is only an illusion, suggested by the fact that most material atoms are bound by the angels to all other material atoms in such a way that each pair experiences a repulsion approaching infinity as the apparent distance between the atoms approaches zero. In fact, I will give you a demonstration. Pick up two pebbles from the ground, if you would."

I did as he said.

"Now roll them against each other."

I did, and they impacted each other with a faint click.

"I have now kindly asked the Angels holding each atom of the one pebble to every atom of the other, and vice versa, to cease communicating force for a moment, and to suffer the pebbles to become mutually non-existent. They should now pass without resistance through one another, although nowise altered in their other properties."

I rolled the pebbles together in my hand, but it was just as he had said; they passed through each other as though they were ghostly images, though I continued to feel the full pressure of each on my hand throughout the process.

"That is a clever trick," said the star-girl slowly, "but it's nothing sleight-of-hand can't do."

"Is that so?" said Zophiel. "Would you like to prove that to us?"

"If you insist!" she said, blushing a little. She bent down, took a pebble in her hand, and bade us all observe it; then she closed her hand, and when she opened it again, the pebble was gone.

"Where has the pebble gone?" I asked.

"Never mind that!" she snapped. "I want to see him try it."

"If you insist," said Zophiel with a sigh. He gestured to another pebble, still on the ground, and said that he would make it disappear; and instantaneously, without any accompanying manifestation, the pebble was gone from its place.

"Where has it gone?" mimicked the star-girl.

"On top of your head," replied Zophiel.

And indeed, the very same pebble was sitting on top of the star-girl's head, half-buried in her hair.

"How did you do that?" she questioned.

"It was really quite simple. I asked all of the angels who were holding onto the pebble's atoms to adjust the strength of the force they communicated between their two hands such that those holding the pebble's atoms to the atoms now immediately surrounding the pebble would henceforth communicate the strongest force, and those holding the pebble's atoms to other atoms progressively further away a progressively weaker force."

"Then the pebble has not actually moved?" asked the star-girl.

"Nothing ever actually moves," said Zophiel. "There is in fact no such thing as space as you perceive it; or rather, it is your interpretation of the fact that certain atoms act more or less strongly upon certain others, according as the angels binding them together have been ordered to communicate more or less of the force applied on one of their hands to the other. We have certain standing orders which we feel bound at most times to obey, and these give the impression that space is a definite, measurable field and that the forces operate according to fixed laws. But there is nothing to stop us from instantaneously adjusting the degree to which we communicate force between atoms, thereby producing the illusion, if it can be called that, of teleportation."

"If only the materialist could have heard that!" I exclaimed.

"He has," said Zophiel. "He has been hearing us the whole time; the air in our vicinity has been continually linked to the air within his ears, and no matter where he runs, he cannot escape our conversation. Would you like to see his reaction?"

I nodded, though I thought the whole proceeding rather sinister.

"Observe," said Zophiel. Suddenly the materialist appeared before us, sweating and shaking, running frantically, but never moving. I understood that Zophiel had not really arranged for him to be brought back, but had caused an apparition to be shown to us by directing the angels connecting the atoms in our bodies to the atoms in the materialist's body to increase the strength of the force they communicated until it was as though we were floating a short distance away from him; though indeed we also remained where we were, and when we looked upon the image of the materialist, it appeared fused with the objects perceptible from our original location. And he must have seen our apparitions similarly, for he looked toward us, then opened his mouth in a silent scream, turned his back to us, and ran even more frantically than before.

"Now let us no more juggle with space, which is but a relation," said Zophiel, and the image of the materialist disappeared. Then Gamaliel lowered his head and covered over with his chin the pearlescent sphere in which Zophiel had appeared.

IV - "I have a fancy," said the star-girl, "and I wish to try it, though I almost fear to think what will be the result."

"And what is that?" asked Gamaliel.

"I wish to be completely cut off, for a split second, from the rest of the material universe; that is, I wish the Angels linking the atoms in my body to all of the other atoms in the universe to momentarily refrain from communicating any force at all."

"That freak is funest," said Gamaliel, "and I have besides no power to effect it."

"Who does?" asked the star-girl.

"God only; for of a truth, what you wish to experience is vulgarly called hell."

"Then I will pray that He might grant me a foretaste of it."

And the star-girl began to pray, and in the midst of her prayer she was gone.

A minute later, the star-girl reappeared in her place, screaming like one tortured, flushed purple and gasping for breath, eyes round as coins, her jaw nearly resting on her bosom. At length she quieted.

"Well?" asked Gamaliel.

The star-girl did not reply.

"That was only a foretaste, of course," continued Gamaliel; "in hell proper your body would not have retained its integrity. You would have been nothing, a piece of consciousness with no communication from outside; not immersed in a void, because your faculty of sight would have deserted you, and left you unable even to envision a blackness such as you just experienced, and your other faculties likewise, so that you would have been empty of any sensation, or any imagination of sensation; you would have been timeless, spaceless, without any knowledge or memory, thought or emotion, not knowing that you existed, but only

experiencing existence, unable to do anything more or less; for existence is the one gift God refuses to revoke; beg Him ever so sweetly, He will never uncreate you, no matter how little of you is left. For even if you should be the most infinitesimal point of a consciousness, only experiencing, and not experiencing anything in the concrete, because having no remaining faculty to do so, still God would hold the last remaining particle of your being in His hand, and never let it go.”

“What are we, Gamaliel?” I asked, suddenly conscious of an enigma whose hidden resolution, like the sun before dawn, yet shed a dim twilight of understanding upon my soul.

The world around me lost all significance, as though it were a veil about to be parted. My vision failed in blackness, and the voice of Gamaliel answering grew distant. I dove to the ground and clutched at it, but it dissolved within my grasp.

I awoke lying in my bed, and I could not remember a word of what Gamaliel had responded.

Roses of Shadow

Chapter IX: Ex Oriente Lux (Part II)

Luke Gilfedder

Luke Gilfedder is a writer from Manchester. He recently published a book on the life and work of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis (Logos Verlag Berlin, 2025), and his debut novel, *Die When I Say When*, is forthcoming from SNN Books in Winter 2026. He writes essays and fiction for publications including *Islander Magazine*, *Rain Taxi*, *The Jackdaw*, *The Brazen Head*, *The Decadent Serpent*, *The Miskatonian*, and *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*.

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At five a.m., amid blackness and dinning rain, the summoning bell chimed. It pierced a seemingly pointless dream about Moscow in the rain (mushrooming onion domes, polished ballroom floors, Pushkin's famous nanny, Krasnaya Moskva, Mother?). Groaning, Alexei righted himself on his bunk and massaged his forehead. He glanced around at the row of young cripples surrounding him. They were soldiers, but not Russian soldiers, moaning something that sounded nevertheless Slavonic.

The ward door opened, and Leila bustled in, all smiles in her crisp white dress. She wore her coif far back on her head, with a fringe of blonde hair showing in front that made her look like a boy actor in the part of a damsel. Very lissomly, she busy-bodied about the infirmary—plumping a pillow here, redressing a wound there—every movement exuding a Russian liveliness that was purely professional.

"Sit still, Ivan!" Leila whispered hotly to one of the soldiers. "It won't hurt."

Alexei swivelled his head to look, through narrowed eyes, at the other patients. They were all somnolent or surveying, straight in front of them, the vast Mitteleuropean wastes, a land which had been destroyed but which, he felt, had taken on a purity by that destruction. There was something, Alexei groped at the thought, something in the Russian soul that corresponded to the immensity, vagueness and infinitude of this continent: the wintry fields' encrimsoned glow, the shabby towns, big trains chuffing between them with wood sparks spitting from their funnels, the wolves desolate on the steppelands, Anna Karenina dead under the wheels...

"Alexei? Alexei, are you okay?"

Leila had reached his bed. She held out her hand and felt his cheek, pale as marble, and as cold. She could not believe how well the operation had gone. She was, she thought with a pang, pleased to find the bandaged boy had turned out so handsome. Immediately, she reproved herself. Why should a scarred face have been any more horrid to look at than one whose tissues were healthy yet whose expression revealed an interior corruption? Father Quintus would probably say that in a less materialistic age it would not be thus...

The door creaked open again and, as though he were an actor entering dead on cue, the abbot himself hobbled in on his cane, followed by Father Anzelm. Some of the soldiers, those unmaimed enough to do so, crossed themselves fumble-handedly. Leila bowed, smiling to herself at the contrast: Anzelm clodhopping along like the last of the aurochs, while the ancient Irishman's tread was as light as the footfall of an angel.

"You called me, Leila?"

"Yes, Father. Where is Gregor?"

"He wished to retire for the night. Tell me," Quintus turned to look at Alexei, lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper, "how is our patient doing?"

Leila studied the abbot's gaze: some joy not quite of this earth lightened in those eyes—swift as the eyes of a rabbit—among so many wrinkles; for the abbot, she had heard rumours, was very old indeed, older than could be believed. She caught herself staring and said:

"He—he's doing well, Father." She drew the curtains around the bed, adding under her breath: "Too well, in fact..."

"Too well? What do you mean, my dear? Is anything the matter?"

She blushed, curling a blonde tendril of hair behind her ear.

"Last night, Father, one of the soldiers tried to... touch me. And Aleks got very violent again—"

"And did you let him? Touch you?"

"No! Of course not. Besides," she whispered, "you know what Miro's like. He'd get awfully jealous."

Quintus gave a wry smile, then bent to touch Alexei's matted hair.

"Why did you do that, my boy?"

Alexei kept staring at the black plain, as mute as a death's-head with a bone in his mouth. Muzzle flare from hundreds of weapon slits flickered on the horizon like camera flashes at a parade.

Quintus whispered to Leila:

"Again, you say? How often has this been happening?"

"Oh, only this past week, Father. But he's been getting more violent each time."

The abbot stroked his chin, muttering. "I see. This might be a sign..."

Alexei put his hand against the window, like a child on a misted pane, staring out at the Eastern sky. Leila's gaze met his in the reflection. What the boy's eyes said at that moment, she could not comprehend, nor, in all likelihood, could the Prince himself.

Yet a fleeting moment of communication shot between them, charged with an emotion that transcended ordinary love and hate, an emotion that sprang from some uncanny tie. She tried to formulate it. It was not up to them to feel anything for this land, she thought, for this dusty old abbey, these old stones, this ancient Magyar Keep on which an irrelevant and perhaps disregarded metaphysic had been plastered. Not here, but their motherland, Russia...

"I—can't—bear—it—any—longer," a soldier drawled between groans, repeating even more painfully, "I—can't—bear—it!"

Leila cast a worried frown at Quintus. "Excuse me, Fathers. I'll be back in a minute."

She opened and drew the curtains, revealing in a flash the long rows of variously bandaged, raving and moaning soldiers. Quintus sighed, resting his weight on his cane.

"So much waste. So much cruelty."

"Like nature herself," Alexei said, temporarily inspired.

"What was that, my boy?"

"Nothing."

The boy tore his gaze from the black plain and fixed his green eyes squarely on Quintus. The cold light made the abbot look even ancients than he was: his face wrinkled like wedding cake left out in the rain, his grey Audenesque forelock... Quintus brushed it from his eyes and lowered himself to sit on the edge of the bed.

"And do you think it's natural, all this killing, Alexei?"

The boy shrugged.

"Address the Abbot as Father when he speaks to you, boy," said Anzelm. He had remained standing, a rain-pool forming about his boots. Quintus shot him a glare, as to say, 'tread carefully, Anzelm.' He leaned forward and touched Alexei's hand: a small, white, impractical-looking thing.

"Would you like a drink, Alexei?"

A nod.

"Good. Anzelm, give him something to drink. Do you remember, Alexei, how you came to be here? Answer yes or no."

"No."

"But you remember Father Anzelm, don't you?"

Alexei gave a sullen "yes" as he took the wine from Anzelm, sipped it, and set the glass down. He stared at Anzelm for an overlong second.

"Do you like the wine, Alexei?"

A tight smile crossed the boy's mouth. "Yes. Although Plato forbade children to drink it before eighteen."

Quintus and Anzelm glanced at each other in surprise.

Awkwardly, they both cleared their throats at the same instant.

"Eighteen? How do you know your age?"

"I heard Leila tell him. The peasant boy."

"Miro?"

"Yes. One of the urchins."

"They are refugees, Alexei," reproved Quintus. "Not urchins. Refugees, from the war."

Alexei jerked his shoulder sullenly and scowled. "Either way. They will die. When Herrut drops the bomb."

A skein of lightning broke across the sky, its jag suspended like a stunned man against a cliff. Within seconds came the thunder, rumbling from great bass speakers all over the heavens.

"And what would you do, my boy? If you were out there? Say, in Herrut's place? Would you stop it?"

"I don't know."

Anzelm grunted. "So is it right, Alexei, that all those people are dying? That more will die?"

"The cut worm forgives the plow."

"What was that, boy?"

"Nothing."

"Alexei," Quintus cut in, "answer Brother Anzelm seriously. Do you really think the war is good?"

He sipped his wine slowly, as if the question required careful deliberation. After a long half-minute, he managed the word:

"No."

"And why not?"

"Because war is a waste."

"And what is wrong with wasting life?"

Alexei lowered his eyes and fixed them to a spot in the carpet as if he were making a strong effort to say nothing but what he ought.

"Because he who unjustly kills a man, defaces the image of God."

"And why is that so, Alexei?"

"Because such remains of God's image are still upon fallen man."

Anzelm smiled approval: "Good. And what of Satan? Is man made in Satan's image, too?"

Alexei glared up suddenly. "No. Satan is the most beautiful creature God ever made."

Another flash of lightning skinned the landscape, ripping its black hide off so that no part of its anatomy was not exposed to the floodlight. With newgathered frown, Anzelm resumed:

"Because he is the Father of Lies, yes? Because he is a great Deceiver?"

A shrug. "Yes. Because of that."

"And what does the Devil want?"

"Power." Alexei cocked his head toward the window, listening to the dread-rattling thunder. He intoned, a little reverently, "Power. Like God."

"Like God?"

"Yes. He wants to have power in the universe."

Quintus held up a hand to cut off Anzelm's retort. He asked, in a quiet voice, "But Alexei, God only uses power to serve His vision of what the universe could be, yes? Not for its own sake." Alexei shrugged again, watching the rain hit the window, flatten out, and slide down in a thick wave, like melted gelatin.

"Is God not all-powerful, Alexei?"

"No. The Devil can defeat God."

"But God willed it to be so, did he not? To give us free will. A decision, I dare say, that he made with much fear and trembling."

Alexei nodded again, a slow inclination of his cruel-cut profile. The thunder outside continued to rumble, but there was no lightning to be seen now over the Eastern sky, just a roar like distant artillery.

"And what is more important than power, Alexei?"

"Love." Alexei lisped. "Love, so the Church teaches. But it is a mistake."

"A mistake?"

Alexei turned back to the abbot and placed a hand on his gnarled fingers.

"Because love, Father, comes only as a reward for power."

"Who told you that? Was it the soldiers? Try to remember."

"No."

Anzelm almost shouted: "Who, then?"

Alexei's lip curled in a sneer. "Miro. He told me. He said they do not understand. They meaning you. You monks. He said that you are full of love but are nonetheless timid and cowardly and hate yourselves for being so—it poisons you. That it has poisoned us all."

The abbot's cane shook imperceptibly, his arthritic fingers tightening around the grip. "Alexei," he said, in a dry-mouthed croak. "Did Miro really say that?"

Smiling, a little pin-prickingly, Alexei leaned back, his arm curving gracefully around the bedpost like a handle on a delicate vase. "Yes, Father. He said when others are weak, they feel the weakness in others, and they are sympathetic to it. That is what the Church calls love. But it's not nourishing. It is just emptiness. Emptiness travelling back and forth."

"You mean, it's waste?" Quintus offered, his eyes brightening. "Like this war is waste?"

Alexei considered that. "Yeah. Waste. Like the war."

"So that is what you meant, my boy, when you say power is important? You only meant it as a way to love? Real love?"

A small shrug of concurrence.

"I guess. There are certain moments... moments when I feel strong and yet also feel compassion. I know real goodness is present then. Agh—" he grimaced, as if he had just bitten his tongue. "Where have I said that before?"

"Easy, Alexei, easy. Try to remember. Let me help—"

"Help? I don't need help."

Something flashed in his green eyes, glinting, far back, like a forest pool in the shadow of trees. He clawed at his forehead.

"Sometimes I remember... sometimes it comes back... that night... a farm... Soldiers..."

Quintus and Anzelm exchanged glances.

"What comes back, Alexei? Try to remember."

"I... I can't... it hurts."

A moment of dead silence. One of those charged silences which seem about to split like a fired shell. It didn't. It hung heavy and solid, like the air in catacombs. Anzelm shifted his weight from foot to foot, and after a long moment, he said:

"Do you know who you are, boy?"

Alexei stiffened, suddenly wary; an animal, unsure of its handler.

"I am Alexei..."

"And your family name?"

Alexei narrowed his eyes on the abbot, the pupils attenuated to needle-points.

"You know, Father. You know who I am."

"So do you, my boy. That night. What do you remember?"

"I can't. It hurts. It hurts like..."

"Like what? What do you feel?"

Alexei went on kneading his forehead with the palm of his hand, his eyes flashing a cold flat green.

"Burning... like fire... like a crystal, melting in my chest... heat... terrible heat... metal."

"A crash? A plane crash?"

"No... someone... Someone I had killed."

"Someone you had killed? How?"

"How? I don't know, I don't know... Perhaps I dreamed it..." He pressed his fingers deeper into his forehead, making dents. "Burning... burning..." He glared up at Anzelm. "You could tell me... you could stop it."

Anzelm said nothing. Of a sudden, Alexei pounded the bed and hurled the wine goblet against the shocked brick wall. Through the rippling curtains, soldiers shed their Slaviness and gaped.

"Tell me! Tell me!"

He leapt off the bed and seized Anzelm by the neck of his robe. "Stop toying with me, you friar-lout! If you know who I am, tell me! Tell me, for God's sake!"

Quintus shouted: "Leila! Quick!" But she was already through the curtains and dragging Alexei back from the recoiling monk. He thrashed about with arms wholly lacking muscle.

"Get off me!"

"We are trying to help you, Alexei!" Anzelm jerked out, dusting down his robe. "We want to help you, we do! But you must trust us!"

Leila womanhandled him onto the bed. He slumped back and, as a regular Childe Harold, lapsed into pensive indolence.

Quintus redrew the curtains and rounded on the boy, shaking as if an earthquake had passed.

"Alexei, look at me."

But he would not. He would hang his head till doomsday rather than face the music of the abbot's stare.

"Suppose I never find out who I am. Suppose I'm trapped in this bloody monastery forever..."

"You are free to do as you please."

"I thought," said Alexei, not smiling, "I was here as a hostage."

Quintus lit a restorative cigarette and offered one to Alexei. He took it and smoked it, unhandily, like a girl smoking her first. A certain tired depression, very Russian, had come over both.

"Trust me, my boy. We want your memory to return. That's what we've been working on. But we want it to come of its own accord. It is only a matter of days now."

That was crap and he knew it. "Crap and you know it," spat Alexei. "Miro said you're only playing with me. That you're experimenting on me, using me."

Quintus took a shaky drag on his cigarette.

"You were in an accident, Alexei. We—Leila, Father Anzelm—we've been trying to heal you."

"Heal me? Why, was I sick?"

"Very."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That you have never known who you are."

"I don't understand, Father. Everyone knows who they are."

"Do they?" The abbot smiled his involuntarily patronising smile. "How do you know you'd be any more who you were if you had all your memories? Do you think those men do?" Quintus gestured with his eyes towards the soldiers. "A very old friend once told me, Alexei, that most men are empty inside. That we are all like Peer Gynt's onion. Peel away the surface layers, and what is left?"

"We are not, then," returned Alexei, glowering, "like the Matrioshka? Grandmother enclosed in grandmother enclosed in grandmother enclosed in grandmother."

"No," Quintus blew smoke, fanned it with his hand, and stared out of the window, "at least, not anymore."

"But we can change that," Anzelm interposed, "together. If the world comes together—"

"You and your bloody brotherhood-of-man hypocrisy," snapped Alexei. This examination was really going well. "Sod you and your teachings for a start. I don't care. I find out who I am, without your help."

The rain persisted in its assault on the abbey's roof, and for long seconds, its angry rat-a-tat-tat was the only sound in the dim infirmary.

"But if you don't tell me who I am, Father," Alexei resumed, "it

will be the worse for you when I do remember."

Anzelm raised his beefy hand, as if to strike him. "What do you mean by that, boy?"

Quintus stopped Anzelm with his cane and rose shakily from the bed.

"Come, Anzelm. We'd better go."

Anzelm, still flushed red as a turkey-cock, nodded. But as they reached the curtain, Quintus turned and said: "Vecher. Does that name mean anything to you, Alexei?"

"Vecher," Alexei repeated with a meaningful leer. "Vecher... who was he?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he was the person you killed."

"What are you talking about, Father?" Leila protested, stroking Alexei's hair. "Alexei never killed anyone. He's just a boy."

Alexei shrugged off her caressive touch, his stare locked on Quintus.

"And you, Father? Have you never hurt anyone?"

Quintus smiled. "You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I were not a Catholic, my boy. Without supernatural aid, I would hardly be a human being."

"That sounds like a threat."

"Oh, come, my boy," said Quintus. "I would never hurt you. Get some rest. We will resume tomorrow." He nodded to Leila, who slipped a capsule into the cup of water she placed on Alexei's bedside table. "Get some rest."

Alexei watched them leave, like a mouse watching a cat going away. Or vice versa, Quintus thought darkly. It was hard to tell.

"Thank you, Leila," Quintus said once they were through the curtains. "Ring my office if anything happens, won't you?"

*

The two monks stepped out into the corridor. The night was cold; the grey, ghostly reflection of the moon, dividing itself into strips, slanted on the stone wall of the cloister. The whole abbey seemed filled to the brim with thick darkness on the inside, and glazed by moonlight on the outside, with black broken shadows that slithered down the slate roofs and tumbled into the silent courtyards below.

"Well, his tabula is depressing rasa," Anzelm muttered. "Strange how he remembers nothing, absolutely nothing, of his past, except the killings."

Quintus's cigarette smouldered lopsidedly and bitterly in his hand. "You know what they say. If something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in; only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory."

"You've been reading old Gunpowder Head again, I see."

But Quintus wasn't listening. He stared back at the barred window of the infirmary, Alexei's silhouette lit by a candle's low flame.

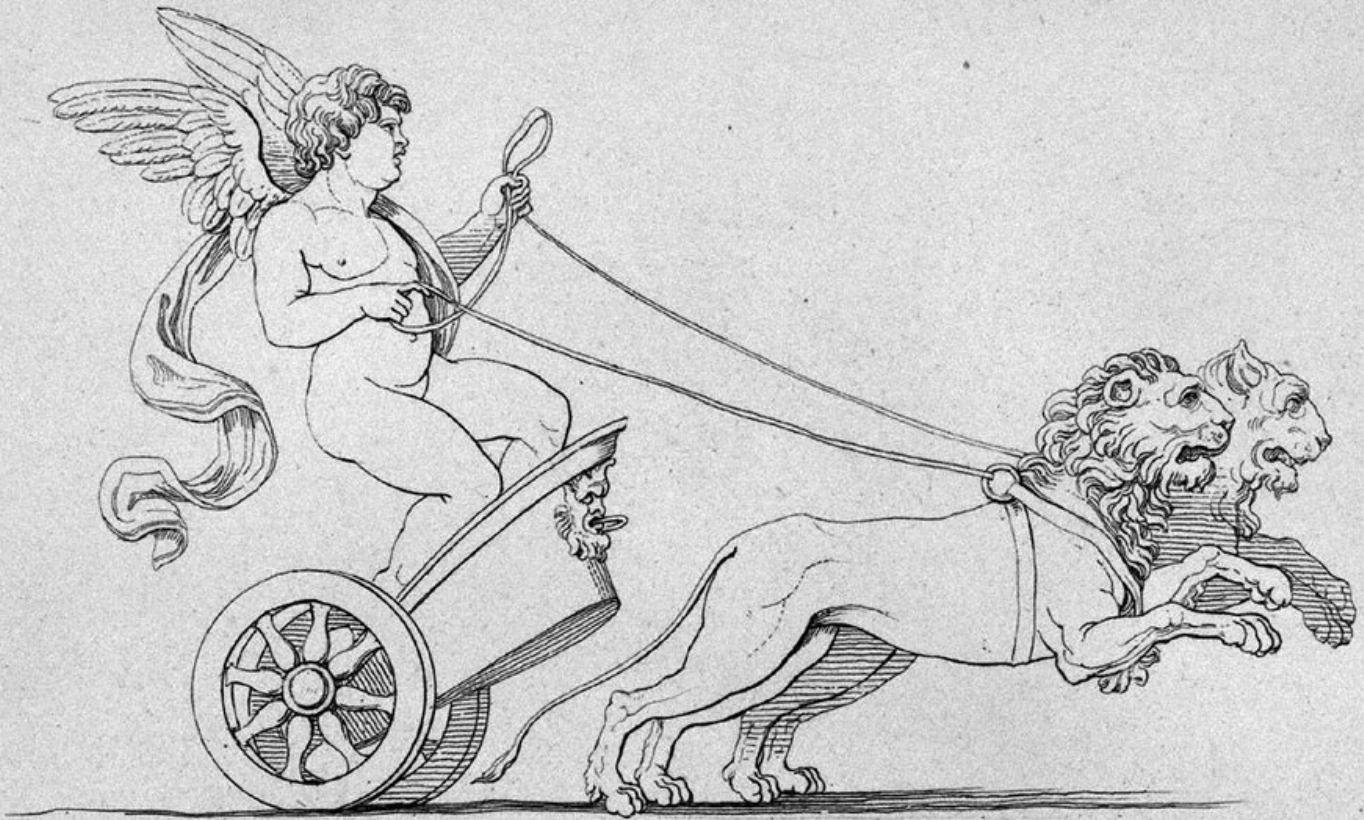
"I fear the worst. If we've failed with that boy, then all is lost. We've failed God."

He crushed his cigarette under his sandal, sighed, and shuffled down the stone corridor, the tap-taps of his cane receding, small and lonely, into the dark of the abbey. From a nook in the corner, moonlight fell upon the face of a boy. Miro smiled, a silver glint, and slipped into Leila's chamber.



Atys

Translated by Leigh Hunt
from Catullus' Poem 63



Genius of Cybele
Giovanni Battista Piranesi

"I need not apologize to such readers as I address, for the plain-speaking in the translation of Atys. I think that voluptuousness, in the proper sense, is rather an ill-used personage; but grossness I abominate; there is neither in this poem; and he would be guilty of the real grossness, the essence of which is inapplicability and degradation, who should not see that all other associations in it are overcome by its gravity and awefulness. It comes among the other pieces indeed, like a spectre at noon-day; yet it is not unsuited to the general disposition of the work; still less is it a mere tale of horror, easy to imagine, or with excitement only for exhausted or callous nerves. It is one of the most striking lessons ever thrown out against a gloomy and ascetic enthusiasm, whatever fantastic sacrifice it may think to make, or whatever may be its notion of a tyrannical deity."—from Hunt's preface to *Foliage*; or *Poems Original and Translated* (1818)

Atys o'er the distant waters, driving in his rapid bark,
Soon with foot of wild impatience touch'd the Phrygian forest dark,
Where amid the awful shades possessed by mighty Cybele,
In his zealous frenzy blind,
And wand'ring in his hapless mind,
With flinty knife he gave to earth the weights that stamp virility.
Then as the widowed being saw it's wretched limbs bereft of man,
And the unaccustom'd blood that on the ground polluting ran,
With snowy hand it snatch'd in haste the timbrel's airy round on high,
That opens with the trumpet's blast, thy rites, Maternal Mystery;
And upon it's whirling fingers, while the hollow parchment rung,
Thus in outcry tremulous to it's wild companions sung:—
Now come along, come along with me,
Worshippers of Cybele,
To the lofty groves of the deity!
Ye vagabond herds that bear the name
Of the Dindymenian dame!
Who seeking strange lands, like the banished of home,
With Atys, with Atys distractedly roam;
Who your limbs have unmann'd in a desperate hour
With a frantic disdain of the Cyprian pow'r;
Who have carried my sect through the dreadful salt sea,
Rouse, rouse your wild spirits careeringly!
No delay, no delay,
But together away,
And follow me up to the Dame all-compelling,
To her high Phrygian groves and her dark Phrygian dwelling,
Where the cymbals they clash, and the drums they resound,
And the Phrygian's curv'd pipe pours it's moanings around,
Where the ivy-crown'd priestesses toss with their brows,
And send the shrill howl through their deity's house,
Where they shriek, and they scour, and they madden about,—
'Tis there we go bounding in mystical rout.

No sooner had spoken
This voice half-broken,
When suddenly from quiv'ring tongues arose the universal cry,
The timbrels with a boam resound, the cymbals with a clash reply,
And up the verdant Ida with a quicken'd step the chorus flew,
While Atys with the timbrel's smite the terrible procession drew;
Raging, panting, wild, and witless, through the sullen shades it broke,
Like the fierce, unconquer'd heifer bursting from her galling yoke;
And on pursue the sacred crew, till at the door of Cybele,
Faint and fasting, down they sink, in pale immovability:
The heavy sleep—the heavy sleep—grows o'er their failing eyes,
And lock'd in dead repose the rabid frenzy lies.

But when the Sun look'd out with eyes of light
Round the firm earth, wild seas, and skies of morning white,
Scaring the ling'ring shades
With echo-footed steeds,
Sleep took his flight from Atys, hurrying
To his Pasithea's arms on tremulous wing;
And the poor dreamer woke, oppressed with sadness,
To mem'ry woke and to collected madness.—
Struck with it's loss, with what it was, and where,
Back trod the wretched being in despair
To the sea-shore, and stretching forth it's eye
O'er the wide waste of waters and of sky,
Thus to it's country cried with tears of misery:—

My country, oh my country, parent state,
Whom, like a very slave and runagate,
Wretch that I am, I left for wilds like these,
This wilderness of snows and matted trees,
To house with shiv'ring beasts and learn their wants,
A fierce intruder on their sullen haunts,—

Where shall I fancy thee? Where cheat mine eye
With tricking out thy quarter in the sky?
Fain, while my wits a little space are free,
Would my poor eyeballs strain their points on thee!
Am I then torn from home and far away?
Doom'd through these woods to trample, day by day,
Far from my kindred, friends, and native soil,
The mall, the race, and wrestlers bright with oil?
Ah wretch, bewail, bewail; and think for this
On all thy past variety of bliss!
I was the charm of life, the social spring,
First in the race, and brightest in the ring:
Warm with the stir of welcome was my home;
And when I rose betimes, my friends would come
Smiling and pressing in officious scores,
Thick as the flow'rs that hang at lovers' doors:—
And shall I then a ministring madman be
To angry gods?—A howling devotee?—
A slave to bear what never senses can,—
Half of myself, sexless,—a sterile man?
And must I feel, with never-varied woes,
Th' o'erhanging winter of these mountain snows?
Skulking through ghastly woods for evermore,
Like the lean stag, or the brute vagrant boar?
Ah me! Ah me! Already I repent;
E'en now, e'en now I feel my shame and punishment!

As thus with rosy lips the wretch grew loud,
Startling the ears of heav'n's imperial crowd,
The Mighty Mistress o'er her lion yoke
Bow'd in her wrath,—and loos'ning as she spoke
The left-hand savage, scatterer of herds,
Rous'd his fell nature with impetuous words:—

Fly, ruffian, fly, indignant and amain,
And scare this being, who resists my reign,
Back to the horror-breathing woods again!
Lash thee, and fly, and shake with sinewy might
Thine ireful hair, and as at dead of night
Fill the wild echoes with rebellowing fright!

Threatning she spoke, and loos'd the vengeance dire,
Who, gath'ring all his rage, and glaring fire,
Starts with a roar, and scours beneath her eyes
Scatt'ring the splinter'd bushes as he flies:
Down by the sea he spies the wretch at last,
And springs precipitous:—the wretch as fast,
Flies raving back into his living grave,
And there for ever dwells, a savage and a slave.

O Goddess! Mistress! Cybele! dread name!
O mighty Pow'r! O Dindymenian dame!
Far from my home thy visitations be:
Drive others mad, not me:
Drive others into impulse wild and fierce insanity!



Featured Art: Iona

Samuel Peploe and Francis Cadell were two of the four artists known as the Scottish Colourists, (also included John Duncan Fergusson and Leslie Hunter). Peploe (1871–1935) was a Post-Impressionist painter known for his bold use of color and meticulous execution, while Cadell (1883–1937) was noted for his vibrant landscapes and elegant interiors. Both artists were heavily influenced by French painting, particularly the works of Cézanne and Matisse, which shaped their approach to light and color.

Francis Cadell first visited Iona in 1912, drawn by its wild landscape, white sand beaches, and geological diversity. He introduced his friend Samuel Peploe to the island in 1920, and the two returned to paint there virtually every summer until Cadell's death in 1935. While Cadell painted a wide range of subjects across the island, Peploe concentrated almost exclusively on the northern end of Iona, analyzing its rocks, sands, and views toward Mull.

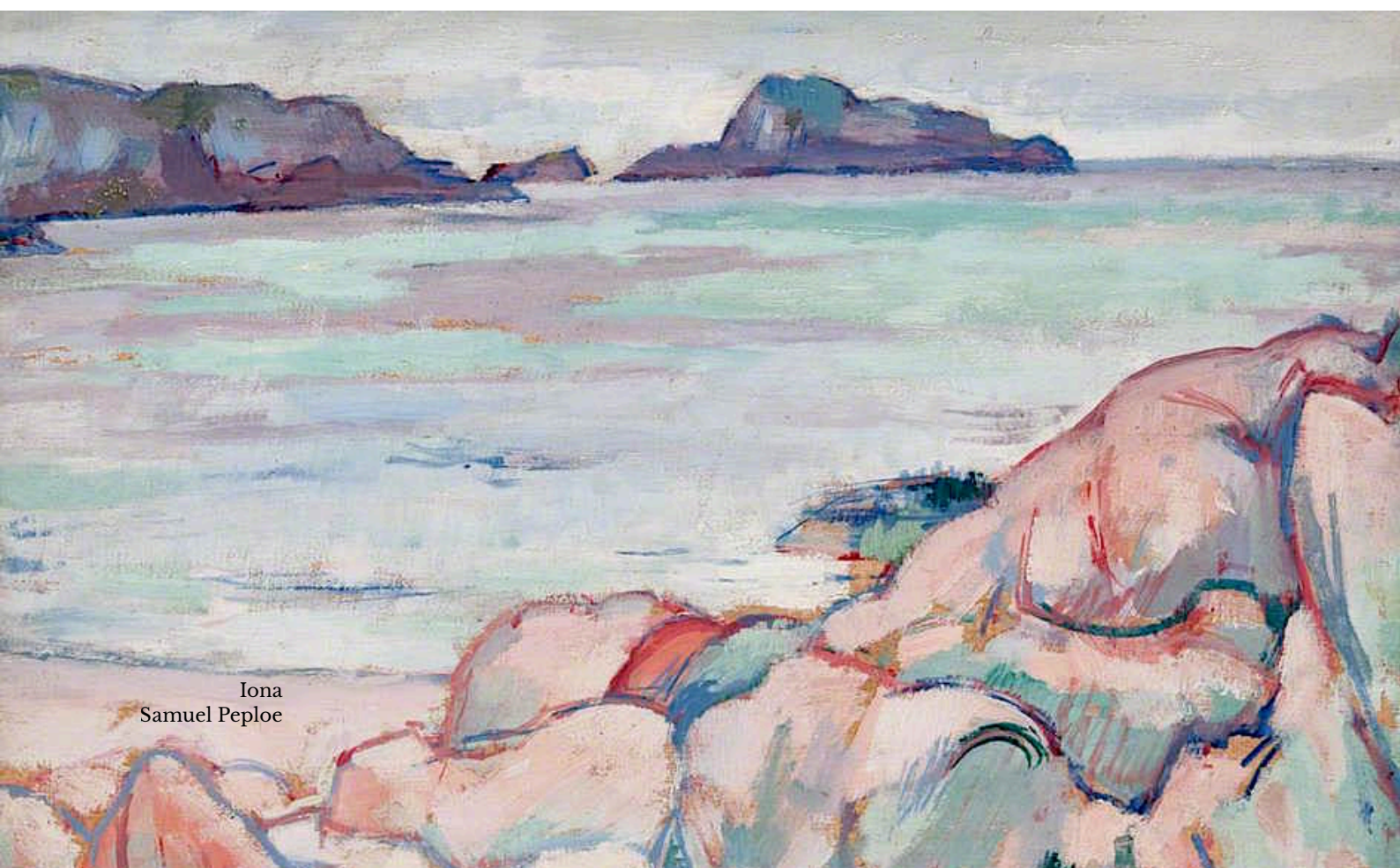
Peploe's Iona paintings are characterized by a deliberately reduced palette, often employing a dry, chalky texture achieved by leaching excess oil from his paint. He was fascinated by the island's dramatic, changeable weather, painting the same scenes in bright sunshine, grey skies, and stormy conditions to capture the elusive quality of the light. Their Iona works are highly regarded for capturing the unique atmospheric conditions of the Inner Hebrides.

Stormy Weather, Iona
Samuel Peploe





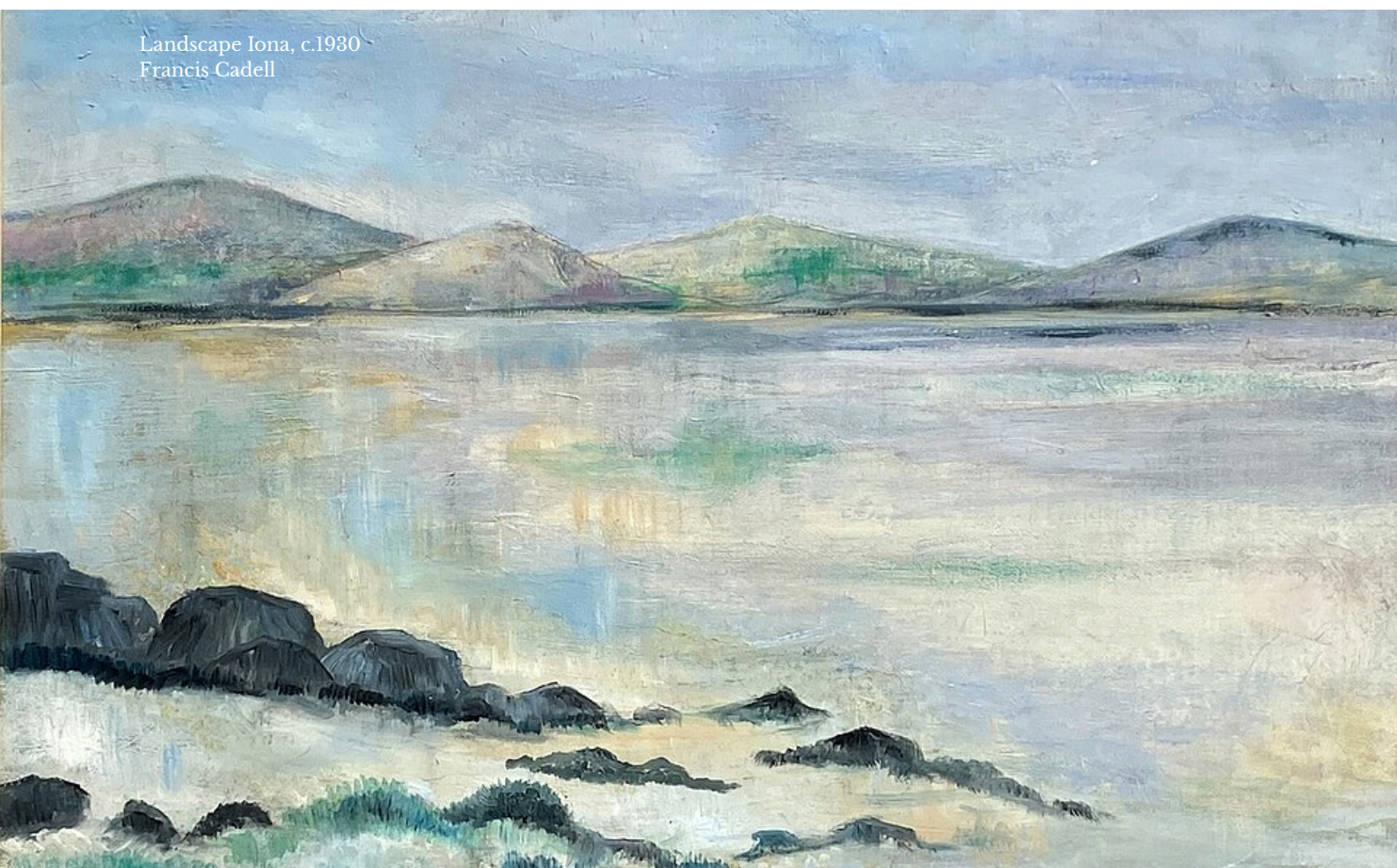
A Rocky Shore, Iona
Samuel Peploe



Iona
Samuel Peploe



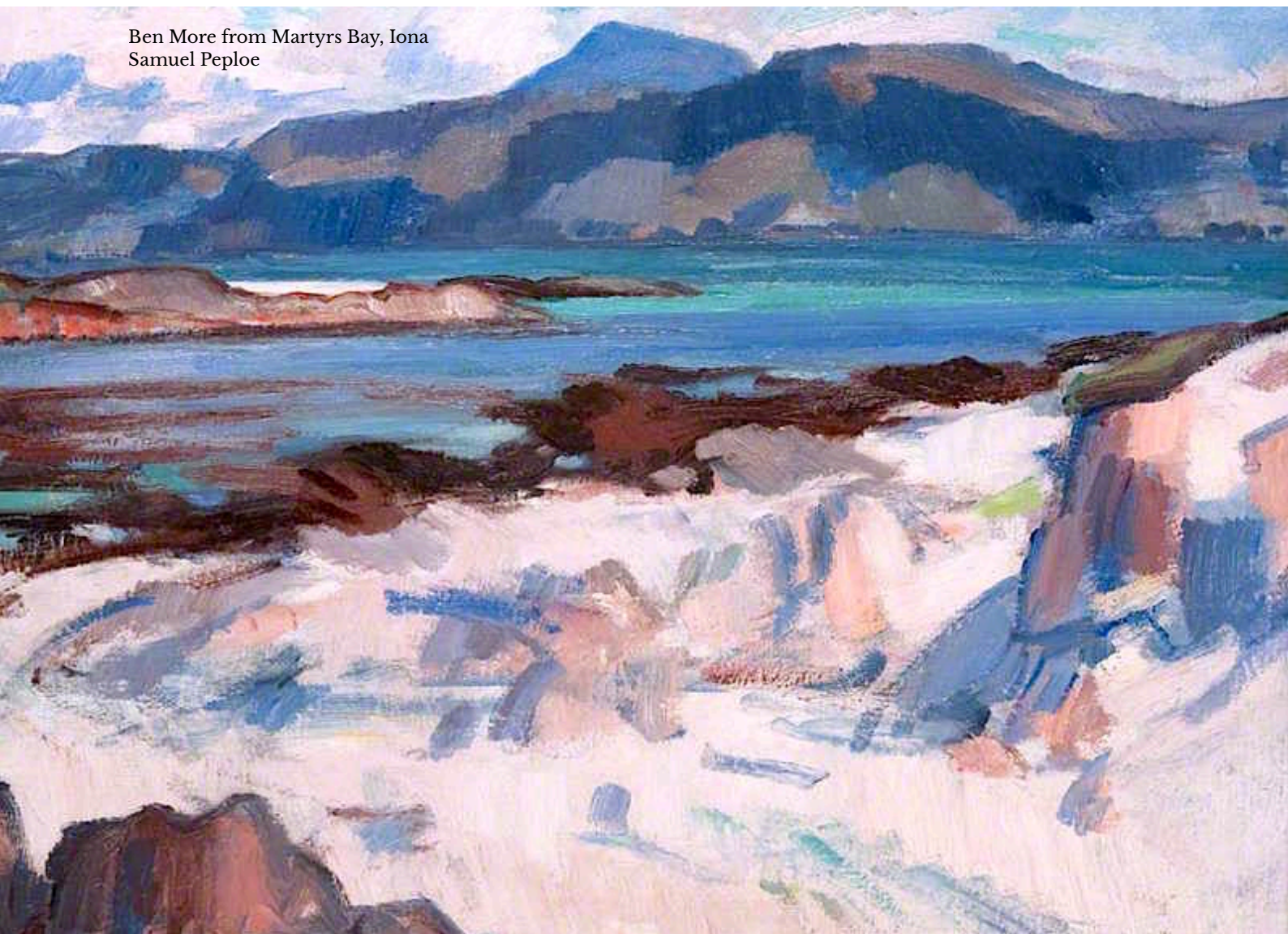
Lunga from Iona Francis Cadell



Landscape Iona, c.1930
Francis Cadell



Cathedral Rock, Iona
Samuel John Peploe

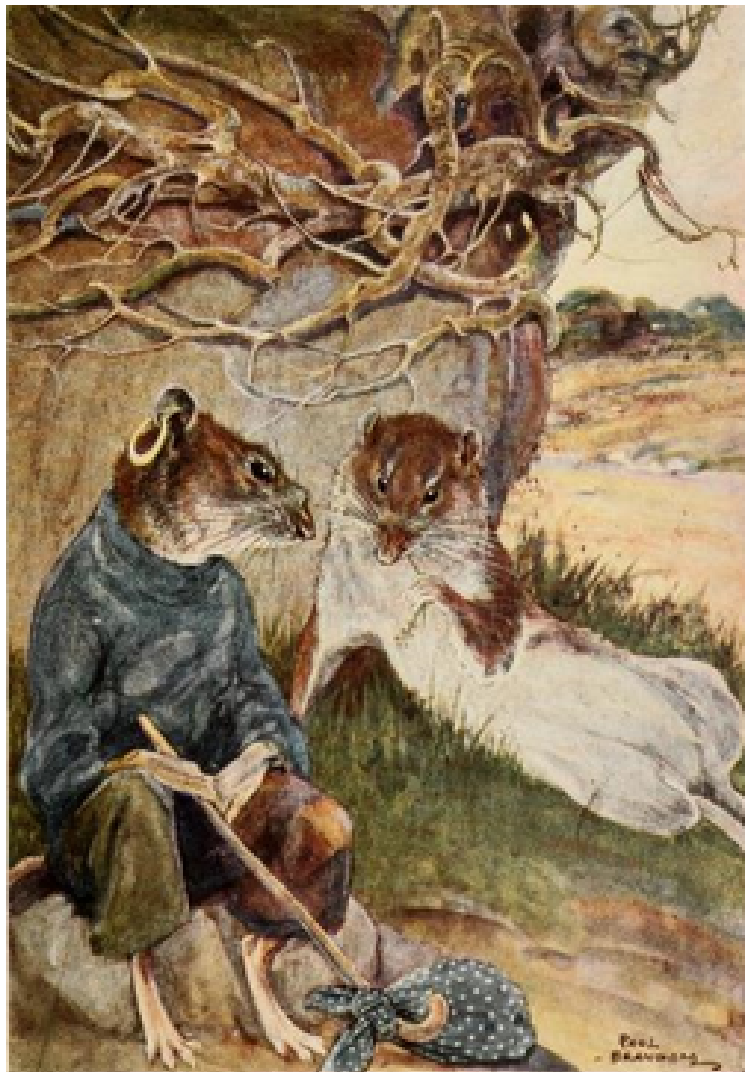


Ben More from Martyrs Bay, Iona
Samuel Peploe

The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame

"It's a hard life, by all accounts," murmured the Rat



IX WAYFARERS ALL

THE Water Rat was restless, and he did not exactly know why. To all appearance the summer's pomp was still at fullest height, and although in the tilled acres green had given way to gold, though rowans were reddening, and the woods were dashed here and there with a tawny fierceness, yet light and warmth and colour were still present in undiminished measure, clean of any chilly premonitions of the passing year. But the constant chorus of the orchards and hedges had shrunk to a casual evensong from a few yet unwearied performers; the robin was beginning to assert himself once more; and there was a feeling in the air of change and departure. The cuckoo, of course, had long been silent; but many another feathered friend, for months a part of the familiar landscape and its small society, was missing too, and it seemed that the ranks thinned steadily day by day. Rat, ever observant of all winged movement, saw that it was taking daily a southing tendency; and even as he lay in bed at night he thought he could make out, passing in the darkness overhead, the beat and quiver of impatient pinions, obedient to the peremptory call. Nature's Grand Hotel has its Season, like the others. As the guests one by one pack, pay, and depart, and the seats at the table-d'hôte shrink pitifully at each succeeding meal; as suites of rooms are closed, carpets taken up, and waiters sent away; those boarders who are staying on, en pension, until the next year's full re-opening, cannot help being somewhat affected by all these flittings and farewells, this eager discussion of plans, routes, and fresh quarters, this daily shrinkage in the stream of comradeship. One gets unsettled, depressed, and inclined to be querulous. Why this craving for change? Why not stay on quietly here, like us, and be jolly? You don't know this hotel out of the season, and what fun we have among ourselves, we fellows who remain and see the whole interesting year out. All very true, no doubt, the others always reply; we quite envy you—and some other year perhaps—but just now we have engagements—and there's the bus at the door—our time is up! So they depart, with a smile and a nod, and we miss them, and feel resentful. The Rat was a self-sufficing sort of animal, rooted to the land, and, whoever went, he stayed; still, he could not help noticing what was in the air, and feeling some of its influence in his bones.

It was difficult to settle down to anything seriously, with all this flitting going on. Leaving the water-side, where rushes stood thick and tall in a stream that was becoming sluggish and low, he wandered country-wards, crossed a field or two of pasturage already looking dusty and parched, and thrust into the great sea of wheat, yellow, wavy, and murmurous, full of quiet motion and small whisperings. Here he often loved to wander, through the forest of stiff strong stalks that carried their own golden sky away over his head—a sky that was always dancing, shimmering, softly talking; or swaying strongly to the passing wind and recovering itself with a toss and a merry laugh. Here, too, he had many small friends, a society complete in itself, leading full and busy lives, but always with a spare moment to gossip, and exchange news with a visitor. Today, however, though they were civil enough, the field-mice and harvest-mice seemed preoccupied. Many were digging and tunnelling busily; others, gathered together in small groups, examined plans and drawings of small flats, stated to be desirable and compact, and situated conveniently near the Stores. Some were hauling out dusty trunks and dress-baskets, others were already elbow-deep packing their belongings; while everywhere piles and bundles of wheat, oats, barley, beech-mast and nuts, lay about ready for transport.

"Here's old Ratty!" they cried as soon as they saw him. "Come and bear a hand, Rat, and don't stand about idle!"

"What sort of games are you up to?" said the Water Rat severely. "You know it isn't time to be thinking of winter quarters yet, by a long way!"

"O yes, we know that," explained a field-mouse rather shamefacedly; "but it's always as well to be in good time, isn't it? We really must get all the furniture and baggage and stores moved out of this before those horrid machines begin clicking round the fields; and then, you know, the best flats get picked up so quickly nowadays, and if you're late you have to put up with anything; and they want such a lot of doing up, too, before they're fit to move into. Of course, we're early, we know that; but we're only just making a start."

"O, bother starts," said the Rat. "It's a splendid day. Come for a row, or a stroll along the hedges, or a picnic in the woods, or something."

"Well, I think not to-day, thank you," replied the field-mouse hurriedly. "Perhaps some other day—when we've more time—" The Rat, with a snort of contempt, swung round to go, tripped

over a hat-box, and fell, with undignified remarks. "If people would be more careful," said a field-mouse rather stiffly, "and look where they're going, people wouldn't hurt themselves—and forget themselves. Mind that hold-all, Rat! You'd better sit down somewhere. In an hour or two we may be more free to attend to you."

"You won't be 'free' as you call it, much this side of Christmas, I can see that," retorted the Rat grumpily, as he picked his way out of the field.

He returned somewhat despondently to his river again—his faithful, steady-going old river, which never packed up, flitted, or went into winter quarters.

In the osiers which fringed the bank he spied a swallow sitting. Presently it was joined by another, and then by a third; and the birds, fidgeting restlessly on their bough, talked together earnestly and low.

"What, already," said the Rat, strolling up to them. "What's the hurry? I call it simply ridiculous."

"O, we're not off yet, if that's what you mean," replied the first swallow. "We're only making plans and arranging things. Talking it over, you know—what route we're taking this year, and where we'll stop, and so on. That's half the fun!"

"Fun?" said the Rat; "now that's just what I don't understand. If you've 'got' to leave this pleasant place, and your friends who will miss you, and your snug homes that you've just settled into, why, when the hour strikes I've no doubt you'll go bravely, and face all the trouble and discomfort and change and newness, and make believe that you're not very unhappy. But to want to talk about it, or even think about it, till you really need—"

"No, you don't understand, naturally," said the second swallow. "First, we feel it stirring within us, a sweet unrest; then back come the recollections one by one, like homing pigeons. They flutter through our dreams at night, they fly with us in our wheelings and circlings by day. We hunger to inquire of each other, to compare notes and assure ourselves that it was all really true, as one by one the scents and sounds and names of long-forgotten places come gradually back and beckon to us."

"Couldn't you stop on for just this year?" suggested the Water Rat, wistfully. "We'll all do our best to make you feel at home. You've no idea what good times we have here, while you are far away."

"I tried 'stopping on' one year," said the third swallow. "I had grown so fond of the place that when the time came I hung back and let the others go on without me. For a few weeks it was all well enough, but afterwards, O the weary length of the nights! The shivering, sunless days! The air so clammy and chill, and not an insect in an acre of it! No, it was no good; my courage broke down, and one cold, stormy night I took wing, flying well inland on account of the strong easterly gales. It was snowing hard as I beat through the passes of the great mountains, and I had a stiff fight to win through; but never shall I forget the blissful feeling of the hot sun again on my back as I sped down to the lakes that lay so blue and placid below me, and the taste of my first fat insect! The past was like a bad dream; the future was all happy holiday as I moved southwards week by week, easily, lazily, lingering as long as I dared, but always heeding the call! No, I had had my warning; never again did I think of disobedience."

"Ah, yes, the call of the South, of the South!" twittered the other two dreamily. "Its songs, its hues, its radiant air! O, do you remember—" and, forgetting the Rat, they slid into passionate reminiscence, while he listened fascinated, and his heart burned within him. In himself, too, he knew that it was vibrating at last, that chord hitherto dormant and unsuspected. The mere chatter of these southern-bound birds, their pale and second-hand reports, had yet power to awaken this wild new sensation and thrill him through and through with it; what would one moment of the real thing work in him—one passionate touch of the real southern sun, one waft of the authentic odor? With closed eyes he dared to dream a moment in full abandonment, and when he looked again the river seemed steely and chill, the green fields grey and lightless. Then his loyal heart seemed to cry out on his weaker self for its treachery.

"Why do you ever come back, then, at all?" he demanded of the swallows jealously. "What do you find to attract you in this poor drab little country?"

"And do you think," said the first swallow, "that the other call is not for us too, in its due season? The call of lush meadow-grass, wet orchards, warm, insect-haunted ponds, of browsing cattle, of haymaking, and all the farm-buildings clustering round the House of the perfect Eaves?"

"Do you suppose," asked the second one, "that you are the only

living thing that craves with a hungry longing to hear the cuckoo's note again?"

"In due time," said the third, "we shall be home-sick once more for quiet water-lilies swaying on the surface of an English stream. But to-day all that seems pale and thin and very far away. Just now our blood dances to other music." They fell a-twittering among themselves once more, and this time their intoxicating babble was of violet seas, tawny sands, and lizard-haunted walls. Restlessly the Rat wandered off once more, climbed the slope that rose gently from the north bank of the river, and lay looking out towards the great ring of Downs that barred his vision further southwards—his simple horizon hitherto, his Mountains of the Moon, his limit behind which lay nothing he had cared to see or to know. To-day, to him gazing South with a new-born need stirring in his heart, the clear sky over their long low outline seemed to pulsate with promise; to-day, the unseen was everything, the unknown the only real fact of life. On this side of the hills was now the real blank, on the other lay the crowded and coloured panorama that his inner eye was seeing so clearly. What seas lay beyond, green, leaping, and crested! What sun-bathed coasts, along which the white villas glittered against the olive woods! What quiet harbours, thronged with gallant shipping bound for purple islands of wine and spice, islands set low in languorous waters!

He rose and descended river-wards once more; then changed his mind and sought the side of the dusty lane. There, lying half-buried in the thick, cool under-hedge tangle that bordered it, he could muse on the metalled road and all the wondrous world that it led to; on all the wayfarers, too, that might have trodden it, and the fortunes and adventures they had gone to seek or found unseeking—out there, beyond—beyond!

Footsteps fell on his ear, and the figure of one that walked somewhat wearily came into view; and he saw that it was a Rat, and a very dusty one. The wayfarer, as he reached him, saluted with a gesture of courtesy that had something foreign about it—hesitated a moment—then with a pleasant smile turned from the track and sat down by his side in the cool herbage. He seemed tired, and the Rat let him rest unquestioned, understanding something of what was in his thoughts; knowing, too, the value all animals attach at times to mere silent companionship, when the weary muscles slacken and the mind marks time.

The wayfarer was lean and keen-featured, and somewhat bowed at the shoulders; his paws were thin and long, his eyes much wrinkled at the corners, and he wore small gold ear rings in his neatly-set well-shaped ears. His knitted jersey was of a faded blue, his breeches, patched and stained, were based on a blue foundation, and his small belongings that he carried were tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief.

When he had rested awhile the stranger sighed, snuffed the air, and looked about him.

"That was clover, that warm whiff on the breeze," he remarked; "and those are cows we hear cropping the grass behind us and blowing softly between mouthfuls. There is a sound of distant reapers, and yonder rises a blue line of cottage smoke against the woodland. The river runs somewhere close by, for I hear the call of a moorhen, and I see by your build that you're a freshwater mariner. Everything seems asleep, and yet going on all the time. It is a goodly life that you lead, friend; no doubt the best in the world, if only you are strong enough to lead it!"

"Yes, it's the life, the only life, to live," responded the Water Rat dreamily, and without his usual whole-hearted conviction.

"I did not say exactly that," replied the stranger cautiously; "but no doubt it's the best. I've tried it, and I know. And because I've just tried it—six months of it—and know it's the best, here am I, footsore and hungry, tramping away from it, tramping southwards, following the old call, back to the old life, the life which is mine and which will not let me go."

"Is this, then, yet another of them?" mused the Rat. "And where have you just come from?" he asked. He hardly dared to ask where he was bound for; he seemed to know the answer only too well.

"Nice little farm," replied the wayfarer, briefly. "Upalong in that direction—" he nodded northwards. "Never mind about it. I had everything I could want—everything I had any right to expect of life, and more; and here I am! Glad to be here all the same, though, glad to be here! So many miles further on the road, so many hours nearer to my heart's desire!"

His shining eyes held fast to the horizon, and he seemed to be listening for some sound that was wanting from that inland acreage, vocal as it was with the cheerful music of pasturage and farmyard.

"You are not one of us," said the Water Rat, "nor yet a farmer; nor even, I should judge, of this country."

"Right," replied the stranger. "I'm a seafaring rat, I am, and the port I originally hail from is Constantinople, though I'm a sort of a foreigner there too, in a manner of speaking. You will have heard of Constantinople, friend? A fair city, and an ancient and glorious one. And you may have heard, too, of Sigurd, King of Norway, and how he sailed thither with sixty ships, and how he and his men rode up through streets all canopied in their honour with purple and gold; and how the Emperor and Empress came down and banqueted with him on board his ship. When Sigurd returned home, many of his Northmen remained behind and entered the Emperor's body-guard, and my ancestor, a Norwegian born, stayed behind too, with the ships that Sigurd gave the Emperor. Seafarers we have ever been, and no wonder; as for me, the city of my birth is no more my home than any pleasant port between there and the London River. I know them all, and they know me. Set me down on any of their quays or foreshores, and I am home again."

"I suppose you go great voyages," said the Water Rat with growing interest. "Months and months out of sight of land, and provisions running short, and allowanced as to water, and your mind communing with the mighty ocean, and all that sort of thing?"

"By no means," said the Sea Rat frankly. "Such a life as you describe would not suit me at all. I'm in the coasting trade, and rarely out of sight of land. It's the jolly times on shore that appeal to me, as much as any seafaring. O, those southern seaports! The smell of them, the riding-lights at night, the glamour!" "Well, perhaps you have chosen the better way," said the Water Rat, but rather doubtfully. "Tell me something of your coasting, then, if you have a mind to, and what sort of harvest an animal of spirit might hope to bring home from it to warm his latter days with gallant memories by the fireside; for my life, I confess to you, feels to me to-day somewhat narrow and circumscribed."

"My last voyage," began the Sea Rat, "that landed me eventually in this country, bound with high hopes for my inland farm, will serve as a good example of any of them, and, indeed, as an epitome of my highly-coloured life. Family troubles, as usual, began it. The domestic storm-cone was hoisted, and I shipped myself on board a small trading vessel bound from Constantinople, by classic seas whose every wave throbs with a deathless memory, to the Grecian Islands and the Levant. Those were golden days and balmy nights! In and out of harbour all the time—old friends everywhere—sleeping in some cool temple or ruined cistern during the heat of the day—feasting and song after sundown, under great stars set in a velvet sky! Thence we turned and coasted up the Adriatic, its shores swimming in an atmosphere of amber, rose, and aquamarine; we lay in wide land-locked harbours, we roamed through ancient and noble cities, until at last one morning, as the sun rose royally behind us, we rode into Venice down a path of gold. O, Venice is a fine city, wherein a rat can wander at his ease and take his pleasure! Or, when weary of wandering, can sit at the edge of the Grand Canal at night, feasting with his friends, when the air is full of music and the sky full of stars, and the lights flash and shimmer on the polished steel prows of the swaying gondolas, packed so that you could walk across the canal on them from side to side! And then the food—do you like shellfish? Well, well, we won't linger over that now."

He was silent for a time; and the Water Rat, silent too and enthralled, floated on dream-canal and heard a phantom song pealing high between vaporous grey wave-lapped walls.

"Southwards we sailed again at last," continued the Sea Rat, "coasting down the Italian shore, till finally we made Palermo, and there I quitted for a long, happy spell on shore. I never stick too long to one ship; one gets narrow-minded and prejudiced. Besides, Sicily is one of my happy hunting-grounds. I know everybody there, and their ways just suit me. I spent many jolly weeks in the island, staying with friends up country. When I grew restless again I took advantage of a ship that was trading to Sardinia and Corsica; and very glad I was to feel the fresh breeze and the sea-spray in my face once more."

"But isn't it very hot and stuffy, down in the—hold, I think you call it?" asked the Water Rat.

The seafarer looked at him with the suspicion of a wink. "I'm an old hand," he remarked with much simplicity. "The captain's cabin's good enough for me."

"It's a hard life, by all accounts," murmured the Rat, sunk in deep thought.

"For the crew it is," replied the seafarer gravely, again with the

ghost of a wink.

"From Corsica," he went on, "I made use of a ship that was taking wine to the mainland. We made Alassio in the evening, lay to, hauled up our wine-casks, and hove them overboard, tied one to the other by a long line. Then the crew took to the boats and rowed shorewards, singing as they went, and drawing after them the long bobbing procession of casks, like a mile of porpoises. On the sands they had horses waiting, which dragged the casks up the steep street of the little town with a fine rush and clatter and scramble. When the last cask was in, we went and refreshed and rested, and sat late into the night, drinking with our friends, and next morning I took to the great olive-woods for a spell and a rest. For now I had done with islands for the time, and ports and shipping were plentiful; so I led a lazy life among the peasants, lying and watching them work, or stretched high on the hillside with the blue Mediterranean far below me. And so at length, by easy stages, and partly on foot, partly by sea, to Marseilles, and the meeting of old shipmates, and the visiting of great ocean-bound vessels, and feasting once more. Talk of shell-fish! Why, sometimes I dream of the shell-fish of Marseilles, and wake up crying!"

"That reminds me," said the polite Water Rat; "you happened to mention that you were hungry, and I ought to have spoken earlier. Of course, you will stop and take your midday meal with me? My hole is close by; it is some time past noon, and you are very welcome to whatever there is."

"Now I call that kind and brotherly of you," said the Sea Rat. "I was indeed hungry when I sat down, and ever since I inadvertently happened to mention shell-fish, my pangs have been extreme. But couldn't you fetch it along out here? I am none too fond of going under hatches, unless I'm obliged to; and then, while we eat, I could tell you more concerning my voyages and the pleasant life I lead—at least, it is very pleasant to me, and by your attention I judge it commends itself to you; whereas if we go indoors it is a hundred to one that I shall presently fall asleep."

"That is indeed an excellent suggestion," said the Water Rat, and hurried off home. There he got out the luncheon-basket and packed a simple meal, in which, remembering the stranger's origin and preferences, he took care to include a yard of long French bread, a sausage out of which the garlic sang, some cheese which lay down and cried, and a long-necked straw-covered flask wherein lay bottled sunshine shed and garnered on far Southern slopes. Thus laden, he returned with all speed, and blushed for pleasure at the old seaman's commendations of his taste and judgment, as together they unpacked the basket and laid out the contents on the grass by the roadside.

The Sea Rat, as soon as his hunger was somewhat assuaged, continued the history of his latest voyage, conducting his simple hearer from port to port of Spain, landing him at Lisbon, Oporto, and Bordeaux, introducing him to the pleasant harbours of Cornwall and Devon, and so up the Channel to that final quayside, where, landing after winds long contrary, storm-driven and weather-beaten, he had caught the first magical hints and heraldings of another Spring, and, fired by these, had sped on a long tramp inland, hungry for the experiment of life on some quiet farmstead, very far from the weary beating of any sea. Spell-bound and quivering with excitement, the Water Rat followed the Adventurer league by league, over stormy bays, through crowded roadsteads, across harbour bars on a racing tide, up winding rivers that hid their busy little towns round a sudden turn; and left him with a regretful sigh planted at his dull inland farm, about which he desired to hear nothing.

By this time their meal was over, and the Seafarer, refreshed and strengthened, his voice more vibrant, his eye lit with a brightness that seemed caught from some far-away sea-beacon, filled his glass with the red and glowing vintage of the South, and, leaning towards the Water Rat, compelled his gaze and held him, body and soul, while he talked. Those eyes were of the changing foam-streaked grey-green of leaping Northern seas; in the glass shone a hot ruby that seemed the very heart of the South, beating for him who had courage to respond to its pulsation. The twin lights, the shifting grey and the steadfast red, mastered the Water Rat and held him bound, fascinated, powerless. The quiet world outside their rays receded far away and ceased to be. And the talk, the wonderful talk flowed on—or was it speech entirely, or did it pass at times into song—chanty of the sailors weighing the dripping anchor, sonorous hum of the shrouds in a tearing North-Easter, ballad of the fisherman hauling his nets at sundown against an apricot sky, chords of guitar and mandoline from gondola or caique? Did it change into the cry of the wind, plaintive at first, angrily shrill as it freshened, rising to a tearing

whistle, sinking to a musical trickle of air from the leech of the belling sail? All these sounds the spell-bound listener seemed to hear, and with them the hungry complaint of the gulls and the sea-mews, the soft thunder of the breaking wave, the cry of the protesting shingle. Back into speech again it passed, and with beating heart he was following the adventures of a dozen seaports, the fights, the escapes, the rallies, the comradeships, the gallant undertakings; or he searched islands for treasure, fished in still lagoons and dozed day-long on warm white sand. Of deep-sea fishings he heard tell, and mighty silver gatherings of the mile-long net; of sudden perils, noise of breakers on a moonless night, or the tall bows of the great liner taking shape overhead through the fog; of the merry home-coming, the headland rounded, the harbour lights opened out; the groups seen dimly on the quay, the cheery hail, the splash of the hawser; the trudge up the steep little street towards the comforting glow of red-curtained windows.

Lastly, in his waking dream it seemed to him that the Adventurer had risen to his feet, but was still speaking, still holding him fast with his sea-grey eyes.

"And now," he was softly saying, "I take to the road again, holding on south-westwards for many a long and dusty day; till at last I reach the little grey sea town I know so well, that clings along one steep side of the harbour. There through dark doorways you look down flights of stone steps, overhung by great pink tufts of valerian and ending in a patch of sparkling blue water. The little boats that lie tethered to the rings and stanchions of the old sea-wall are gaily painted as those I clambered in and out of in my own childhood; the salmon leap on the flood tide, schools of mackerel flash and play past quay-sides and foreshores, and by the windows the great vessels glide, night and day, up to their moorings or forth to the open sea. There, sooner or later, the ships of all seafaring nations arrive; and there, at its destined hour, the ship of my choice will let go its anchor. I shall take my time, I shall tarry and bide, till at last the right one lies waiting for me, warped out into midstream, loaded low, her bowsprit pointing down harbour. I shall slip on board, by boat or along hawser; and then one morning I shall wake to the song and tramp of the sailors, the clink of the capstan, and the rattle of the anchor-chain coming merrily in. We shall break out the jib and the foresail, the white houses on the harbour side will glide slowly past us as she gathers steering-way, and the voyage will have begun! As she forges towards the headland she will clothe herself with canvas; and then, once outside, the sounding slap of great green seas as she heels to the wind, pointing South!"

"And you, you will come too, young brother; for the days pass, and never return, and the South still waits for you. Take the Adventure, heed the call, now ere the irrevocable moment passes! 'Tis but a banging of the door behind you, a blithesome step forward, and you are out of the old life and into the new! Then some day, some day long hence, jog home here if you will, when the cup has been drained and the play has been played, and sit down by your quiet river with a store of goodly memories for company. You can easily overtake me on the road, for you are young, and I am ageing and go softly. I will linger, and look back; and at last I will surely see you coming, eager and light-hearted, with all the South in your face!"

The voice died away and ceased as an insect's tiny trumpet dwindles swiftly into silence; and the Water Rat, paralysed and staring, saw at last but a distant speck on the white surface of the road. Mechanically he rose and proceeded to repack the luncheon-basket, carefully and without haste. Mechanically he returned home, gathered together a few small necessities and special treasures he was fond of, and put them in a satchel; acting with slow deliberation, moving about the room like a sleep-walker; listening ever with parted lips. He swung the satchel over his shoulder, carefully selected a stout stick for his wayfaring, and with no haste, but with no hesitation at all, he stepped across the threshold just as the Mole appeared at the door.

"Why, where are you off to, Ratty?" asked the Mole in great surprise, grasping him by the arm.

"Going South, with the rest of them," murmured the Rat in a dreamy monotone, never looking at him. "Seawards first and then on shipboard, and so to the shores that are calling me!"

He pressed resolutely forward, still without haste, but with dogged fixity of purpose; but the Mole, now thoroughly alarmed, placed himself in front of him, and looking into his eyes saw that they were glazed and set and turned a streaked and shifting grey—not his friend's eyes, but the eyes of some other animal! Grappling with him strongly he dragged him inside, threw him

down, and held him.

The Rat struggled desperately for a few moments, and then his strength seemed suddenly to leave him, and he lay still and exhausted, with closed eyes, trembling. Presently the Mole assisted him to rise and placed him in a chair, where he sat collapsed and shrunken into himself, his body shaken by a violent shivering, passing in time into an hysterical fit of dry sobbing. Mole made the door fast, threw the satchel into a drawer and locked it, and sat down quietly on the table by his friend, waiting for the strange seizure to pass. Gradually the Rat sank into a troubled doze, broken by starts and confused murmurings of things strange and wild and foreign to the unenlightened Mole; and from that he passed into a deep slumber.

Very anxious in mind, the Mole left him for a time and busied himself with household matters; and it was getting dark when he returned to the parlour and found the Rat where he had left him, wide awake indeed, but listless, silent, and dejected. He took one hasty glance at his eyes; found them, to his great gratification, clear and dark and brown again as before; and then sat down and tried to cheer him up and help him to relate what had happened to him.

Poor Ratty did his best, by degrees, to explain things; but how could he put into cold words what had mostly been suggestion? How recall, for another's benefit, the haunting sea voices that had sung to him, how reproduce at second-hand the magic of the Seafarer's hundred reminiscences? Even to himself, now the spell was broken and the glamour gone, he found it difficult to account for what had seemed, some hours ago, the inevitable and only thing. It is not surprising, then, that he failed to convey to the Mole any clear idea of what he had been through that day.

To the Mole this much was plain: the fit, or attack, had passed away, and had left him sane again, though shaken and cast down by the reaction. But he seemed to have lost all interest for the time in the things that went to make up his daily life, as well as in all pleasant forecastings of the altered days and doings that the changing season was surely bringing.

Casually, then, and with seeming indifference, the Mole turned his talk to the harvest that was being gathered in, the towering wagons and their straining teams, the growing ricks, and the large moon rising over bare acres dotted with sheaves. He talked of the reddening apples around, of the browning nuts, of jams and preserves and the distilling of cordials; till by easy stages such as these he reached midwinter, its hearty joys and its snug home life, and then he became simply lyrical.

By degrees the Rat began to sit up and to join in. His dull eye brightened, and he lost some of his listening air.

Presently the tactful Mole slipped away and returned with a pencil and a few half-sheets of paper, which he placed on the table at his friend's elbow.

"It's quite a long time since you did any poetry," he remarked. "You might have a try at it this evening, instead of—well, brooding over things so much. I've an idea that you'll feel a lot better when you've got something jotted down—if it's only just the rhymes."

The Rat pushed the paper away from him wearily, but the discreet Mole took occasion to leave the room, and when he peeped in again some time later, the Rat was absorbed and deaf to the world; alternately scribbling and sucking the top of his pencil. It is true that he sucked a good deal more than he scribbled; but it was joy to the Mole to know that the cure had at least begun.

Before Parting

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A month or twain to live on honeycomb
Is pleasant; but one tires of scented time,
Cold sweet recurrence of accepted rhyme,
And that strong purple under juice and foam
Where the wine's heart has burst;
Nor feel the latter kisses like the first.

Once yet, this poor one time; I will not pray
Even to change the bitterness of it,
The bitter taste ensuing on the sweet,
To make your tears fall where your soft hair lay
All blurred and heavy in some perfumed wise
Over my face and eyes.

And yet who knows what end the scythèd wheat
Makes of its foolish poppies' mouths of red?
These were not sown, these are not harvested,
They grow a month and are cast under feet
And none has care thereof,
As none has care of a divided love.

I know each shadow of your lips by rote,
Each change of love in eyelids and eyebrows;
The fashion of fair temples tremulous
With tender blood, and colour of your throat;
I know not how love is gone out of this,
Seeing that all was his.

Love's likeness there endures upon all these:
But out of these one shall not gather love.
Day hath not strength nor the night shade enough
To make love whole and fill his lips with ease,
As some bee-built cell
Feels at filled lips the heavy honey swell.

I know not how this last month leaves your hair
Less full of purple colour and hid spice,
And that luxurious trouble of closed eyes
Is mixed with meaner shadows and waste care;
And love, kissed out by pleasure, seems not yet
Worth patience to regret.



Xélucha

By Matthew Phipps Shiel



'He goeth after her . . . and knoweth not . . .'

[From a diary]

Three days ago! by heaven, it seems an age. But I am shaken—my reason is debauched. A while since, I fell into a momentary coma precisely resembling an attack of *petit mal*. 'Tombs, and worms, and epitaphs'—that is my dream. At my age, with my physique, to walk staggering, like a man stricken! But all that will pass: I must collect myself—my reason is debauched. Three days ago! it seems an age! I sat on the floor before an old cista full of letters. I lighted upon a packet of Cosmo's. Why, I had forgotten them! they are turning sere! Truly, I can no more call myself a young man. I sat reading, listlessly, rapt back by memory. To muse is to be lost! of that evil habit I must wring the neck, or look to perish. Once more I threaded the mazy sphere-harmony of the minuet, reeled in the waltz, long pomps of candelabra, the noonday of the bacchanal, about me. Cosmo was the very tsar and maharajah of the Sybarites! the Priap of the *détraqués*! In every unexpected alcove of the Roman Villa was a couch, raised high, with necessary foot-stool, flanked and canopied with mirrors of clarified gold. Consumption fastened upon him; reclining at last at table, he could, till warmed, scarce lift the wine! his eyes were like two fat glow-worms, coiled together! they seemed haloed with vaporous emanations of phosphorus! Desperate, one could see, was the secret struggle with the Devourer. But to the end the princely smile persisted calm; to the end—to the last day—he continued among that comic crew unchallenged choragus of all the rites, I will not say of Paphos, but of Chemos! and Baal-Peor! Warmed, he did not refuse the revel, the dance, the darkened chamber. It was utterly black, rayless; approached by a secret passage; in shape circular; the air hot, haunted always by odours of balms, bdellium, hints of dulcimer and flute; and radiated round with a hundred thick-strewn ottomans of Morocco. Here Lucy Hill stabbed to the heart Caccofogo, mistaking the scar on his back for the scar of Soriac. In a bath of malachite the Princess Eglā, waking late one morning, found Cosmo lying stiffly dead, the water covering him wholly.

'But in God's name, *Mérimée*!' (so he wrote), 'to think of *Xélucha* dead! *Xélucha*! Can a moon-beam, then, perish of suppurations? Can the rainbow be eaten by worms? Ha! ha! ha! laugh with me, my friend: "*elle dérangera l'Enfer*"! She will introduce the *pas de tarantule* into Tophet! *Xélucha*, the feminine! *Xélucha* recalling the splendid harlots of history! Weep with me—*manat rara meas lacrima per genas*! expert as Thargelia; cultured as *Aspatia*; purple as *Semiramis*. She comprehended the human tabernacle, my friend, its secret springs and tempers, more intimately than any savant of Salamanca who breathes. Tarare—but *Xélucha* is not dead! Vitality is not mortal; you cannot wrap flame in a shroud. *Xélucha*! where then is she? Translated, perhaps—rapt to a constellation like the daughter of Leda. She journeyed to Hindostan, accompanied by the train and appurtenance of a Begum, threatening descent upon the Emperor of Tartary. I spoke of the desolation of the West; she kissed me, and promised return. Mentioned you, too, *Mérimée*—"her Conqueror"—"*Mérimée*, Destroyer of Woman." A breath from the conservatory rioted among the ambery whiffs of her forelocks, sending it singly a-wave over that thulite tint you know. Costumed cap-à-pie, she had, my friend, the dainty little completeness of a daisy mirrored bright in the eye of the browsing ox. A simile of Milton had for years, she said, inflamed the lust of her Eye: "The barren plains of Sericana, where Chinese drive with sails and wind their cany wagons light." I, and the Sabæans, she assured me, wrongly considered Flame the whole of being; the other half of things being Aristotle's quintessential light. In the Ourania Hierarchia and the Faust-book you meet a completeness: burning Seraph, Cherûb full of eyes. *Xélucha* combined them. She would reconquer the Orient for Dionysius, and return. I heard of her blazing at Delhi; drawn in a chariot by lions. Then this rumour—probably false. Indeed, it comes from a source somewhat turgid. Like Odin, Arthur, and the rest, *Xélucha*—will reappear.'

Soon subsequently, Cosmo lay down in his balneum of malachite, and slept, having drawn over him the water as a coverlet. I, in England, heard little of *Xélucha*: first that she was alive, then dead, then alighted at old Tadmor in the Wilderness, Palmyra now. Nor did I greatly care, *Xélucha* having long since turned to apples of Sodom in my mouth. Till I sat by the cista of letters and re-read Cosmo, she had for some years passed from my active memories.

The habit is now confirmed in me of spending the greater part of the day in sleep, while by night I wander far and wide through the city under the sedative influence of a tincture which has

become necessary to my life. Such an existence of shadow is not without charm; nor, I think, could many minds be steadily subjected to its conditions without elevation, deepened awe. To travel alone with the Primordial cannot but be solemn. The moon is of the hue of the glow-worm; and Night of the sepulchre. Nux bore not less Thanatos than Hupnos, and the bitter tears of Isis redundate to a flood. At three, if a cab rolls by, the sound has the augustness of thunder. Once, at two, near a corner, I came upon a priest, seated, dead, leering, his legs bent. One arm, supported on a knee, pointed with rigid accusing forefinger obliquely upward. By exact observation, I found that he indicated Betelgeux, the star "α" which shoulders the wet sword of Orion. He was hideously swollen, having perished of dropsy. Thus in all Supremes is a grotesquerie; and one of the sons of Night is—Buffo.

In a London square deserted, I should imagine, even in the day, I was aware of the metallic, silvery-clinking approach of little shoes. It was three in a heavy morning of winter, a day after my rediscovery of Cosmo. I had stood by the railing, regarding the clouds sail as under the sea-legged pilotage of a moon wrapped in cloaks of inclemency. Turning, I saw a little lady, very gloriously dressed. She had walked straight to me. Her head was bare, and crisped with the amber stream which rolled lax to a globe, kneaded thick with jewels, at her nape. In the redundancy of her décolleté development, she resembled Parvati, mound-hipped love-goddess of the luscious fancy of the Brahmin.

She addressed to me the question: 'What are you doing there, darling?'

Her loveliness stirred me, and Night is bon camarade. I replied: 'Sunning myself by means of the moon.'

'All that is borrowed lustre,' she returned, 'you have got it from old Drummond's Flowers of Sion.'

Looking back, I cannot remember that this reply astonished me, though it should—of course—have done so. I said:

'On my soul, no; but you?'

'You might guess whence I come!'

'You are dazzling. You come from Paz.'

'Oh, farther than that, my son! Say a subscription ball in Soho.'

'Yes? . . . and alone? in the cold? on foot . . .?'

'Why, I am old, and a philosopher. I can pick you out riding Andromeda yonder from the hidden Ram. They are in error, M'sieur, who suppose an atmosphere on the broad side of the moon. I have reason to believe that on Mars dwells a race whose lids are transparent like glass; so that the eyes are visible during sleep; and every varying dream moves imaged forth to the beholder in tiny panorama on the limpid iris. You cannot imagine me a mere fille! To be escorted is to admit yourself a woman, and that is improper in Nowhere. Young Eos drives an équipage à quatre, but Artemis "walks" alone. Get out of my borrowed light in the name of Diogenes! I am going home.'

'Far?'

'Near Piccadilly.'

'But a cab?'

'No cabs for me, thank you. The distance is a mere nothing. Come.'

We walked forward. My companion at once put an interval between us, quoting from the Spanish Curate that the open is an enemy to love. The Talmudists, she twice insisted, rightly held the hand the sacred part of the person, and at that point also contact was for the moment interdict. Her walk was extremely rapid. I followed. Not a cat was anywhere visible. We reached at length the door of a mansion in St. James's. There was no light. It seemed tenantless, the windows all uncurtained, pasted across, some of them, with the words, To Let. My companion, however, flitted up the steps, and, beckoning, passed inward. I, following, slammed the door, and was in darkness. I heard her ascend, and presently a region of glimmer above revealed a stairway of marble, curving broadly up. On the floor where I stood was no carpet, nor furniture: the dust was very thick. I had begun to mount when, to my surprise, she stood by my side, returned; and whispered:

'To the very top, darling.'

She soared nimbly up, anticipating me. Higher, I could no longer doubt that the house was empty but for us. All was a vacuum full of dust and echoes. But at the top, light streamed from a door, and I entered a good-sized oval saloon, at about the centre of the house. I was completely dazzled by the sudden resplendence of the apartment. In the midst was a spread table, square, opulent with gold plate, fruit, dishes; three ponderous chandeliers of electric light above; and I noticed also (what was very bizarre) one little candlestick of common tin containing an

old soiled curve of tallow, on the table. The impression of the whole chamber was one of gorgeousness not less than Assyrian. An ivory couch at the far end was made sun-like by a head-piece of chalcedony forming a sea for the sport of emerald ichthyotauri. Copper hangings, panelled with mirrors in iasperated crystal, corresponded with a dome of flame and copper; yet this latter, I now remember, produced upon my glance an impression of actual grime. My companion reclined on a small Sigma couch, raised high to the table-level in the Semitic manner, visible to her saffron slippers of satin. She pointed me a seat opposite. The incongruity of its presence in the middle of this arrogance of pomp so tickled me, that no power could have kept me from a smile: it was a grimy chair, mean, all wood, nor was I long in discovering one leg somewhat shorter than its fellows.

She indicated wine in a black glass bottle, and a tumbler, but herself made no pretence of drinking or eating. She lay on hip and elbow, petite, resplendent, and looked gravely upward. I, however, drank.

'You are tired,' I said, 'one sees that.'

'It is precious little that you see!' she returned, dreamy, hardly glancing.

'How! your mood is changed, then? You are morose.'

'You never, I think, saw a Norse passage-grave?'

'And abrupt.'

'Never?'

'A passage-grave? No.'

'It is worth a journey! They are circular or oblong chambers of stone, covered by great earth-mounds, with a "passage" of slabs connecting them with the outer air. All round the chamber the dead sit with head resting upon the bent knees, and consult together in silence.'

'Drink wine with me, and be less Tartarean.'

'You certainly seem to be a fool,' she replied with perfect sardonic iciness. 'Is it not, then, highly romantic? They belong, you know, to the Neolithic age. As the teeth fall, one by one, from the lipless mouths—they are caught by the lap. When the lap thins—they roll to the floor of stone. Thereafter, every tooth that drops all round the chamber sharply breaks the silence.'

'Ha! ha! ha!'

'Yes. It is like a century-slow, circularly-successive dripping of slime in some cavern of the far subterrene.'

'Ha! ha! This wine seems heady! They express themselves in a dialect largely dental.'

'The Ape, on the other hand, in a language wholly guttural.'

A town-clock tolled four. Our talk was holed with silences, and heavy-paced. The wine's yeasty exhalation reached my brain. I saw her through mist, dilating large, uncertain, shrinking again to dainty compactness. But amorosness had died within me.

'Do you know,' she asked, 'what has been discovered in one of the Danish Kjökkenmöddings by a little boy? It was ghastly. The skeleton of a huge fish with human—'

'You are most unhappy.'

'Be silent.'

'You are full of care.'

'I think you a great fool.'

'You are racked with misery.'

'You are a child. You have not even an instinct of the meaning of the word.'

'How! Am I not a man? I, too, miserable, careful?'

'You are not, really, anything—until you can create.'

'Create what?'

'Matter.'

'That is foppish. Matter cannot be created, nor destroyed.'

'Truly, then, you must be a creature of unusually weak intellect. I see that now. Matter does not exist, then, there is no such thing, really—it is an appearance, a spectrum—every writer not imbecile from Plato to Fichte has, voluntary or involuntary, proved that for good. To create it is to produce an impression of its reality upon the senses of others; to destroy it is to wipe a wet rag across a scribbled slate.'

'Perhaps. I do not care. Since no one can do it.'

'No one? You are mere embryo—'

'Who then?'

'Anyone, whose power of Will is equivalent to the gravitating force of a star of the First Magnitude.'

'Ha! ha! ha! By heaven, you choose to be facetious. Are there then wills of such equivalence?'

'There have been three, the founders of religions. There was a fourth: a cobbler of Herculaneum, whose mere volition induced the cataclysm of Vesuvius in 79, in direct opposition to the gravity

of Sirius. There are more fames than you have ever sung, you know. The greater number of disembodied spirits, too, I feel certain—'

'By heaven, I cannot but think you full of sorrow! Poor wight! come, drink with me. The wine is thick and boon. Is it not Setian? It makes you sway and swell before me, I swear, like a purple cloud of evening—'

'But you are mere clayey ponderance!—I did not know that!—you are no companion! your little interest revolves round the lowest centres.'

'Come—forget your agonies—'

'What, think you, is the portion of the buried body first sought by the worm?'

'The eyes! the eyes!'

'You are hideously wrong—you are so utterly at sea—'

'My God!'

She had bent forward with such rage of contradiction as to approach me closely. A loose gown of amber silk, wide-sleeved, had replaced her ball attire, though at what opportunity I could not guess; wondering, I noticed it as she now placed her palms far forth upon the table. A sudden wafture as of spice and orange-flowers, mingled with the abhorrent faint odour of mortality over-ready for the tomb, greeted my sense. A chill crept upon my flesh.

'You are so hopelessly at fault—'

'For God's sake—'

'You are so miserably deluded! Not the eyes at all!'

'Then, in Heaven's name, what?'

Five tolled from a clock.

'The Uvula! the soft drop of mucous flesh, you know, suspended from the palate above the glottis. They eat through the face-cloth and cheek, or crawl by the lips through a broken tooth, filling the mouth. They make straight for it. It is the deliciæ of the vault.'

At her horror of interest I grew sick, at her odour, and her words. Some unspeakable sense of insignificance, of debility, held me dumb.

'You say I am full of sorrows. You say I am racked with woe; that I gnash with anguish. Well, you are a mere child in intellect. You use words without realization of meaning like those minds in what Leibnitz calls "symbolical consciousness." But suppose it were so—'

'It is so.'

'You know nothing.'

'I see you twist and grind. Your eyes are very pale. I thought they were hazel. They are of the faint bluishness of phosphorus shimmerings seen in darkness.'

'That proves nothing.'

'But the "white" of the sclerotic is dyed to yellow. And you look inward. Why do you look so palely inward, so woe-worn, upon your soul? Why can you speak of nothing but the sepulchre, and its rottenness? Your eyes seem to me wan with centuries of vigil, with mysteries and millenniums of pain.'

'Pain! but you know so little of it! you are wind and words! of its philosophy and rationale nothing!'

'Who knows?'

'I will give you a hint. It is the sub-consciousness in conscious creatures of Eternity, and of eternal loss. The least prick of a pin not Pæan and Æsculapius and the powers of heaven and hell can utterly heal. Of an everlasting loss of pristine wholeness the conscious body is sub-conscious, and "pain" is its sigh at the tragedy. So with all pain—greater, the greater the loss. The hugest of losses is, of course, the loss of Time. If you lose that, any of it, you plunge at once into the transcendentalisms, the infinitudes, of Loss; if you lose all of it—'

'But you so wildly exaggerate! Ha! ha! You rant, I tell you, of commonplaces with the woe—'

'Hell is where a clear, untrammelled Spirit is sub-conscious of lost Time; where it boils and writhes with envy of the living world; hating it for ever, and all the sons of Life!'

'But curb yourself! Drink—I implore—I implore—for God's sake—but once—'

'To hasten to the snare—that is woe! to drive your ship upon the lighthouse rock—that is Marah! To wake, and feel it irrevocably true that you went after her—and the dead were there—and her guests were in the depths of hell—and you did not know it!—though you might have. Look out upon the houses of the city this dawning day: not one, I tell you, but in it haunts some soul—walking up and down the old theatre of its little Day—goading imagination by a thousand childish tricks, vraisemblances—elaborately duping itself into the momentary

fantasy that it still lives, that the chance of life is not for ever and for ever lost—yet riving all the time with under-memories of the wasted Summer, the lapsed brief light between the two eternal glooms—riving I say and shriek to you!—riving, *Mérimée*, you destroying fiend—

She had sprung—tall now, she seemed to me—between couch and table.

'*Mérimée*!' I screamed,——'my name, harlot, in your maniac mouth! By God, woman, you terrify me to death!' I too sprang, the hairs of my head catching stiff horror from my fancies.

'Your name? Can you imagine me ignorant of your name, or anything concerning you? *Mérimée*! Why, did you not sit yesterday and read of me in a letter of *Cosmo's*?'

'Ah-h . . .', hysteria bursting high in sob and laughter from my arid lips—'Ah! ha! ha! *Xélucha*! My memory grows palsied and grey, *Xélucha*! pity me—my walk is in the very valley of shadow!—senile and sere!—observe my hair, *Xélucha*, its grizzled growth—trepidant, *Xélucha*, clouded—I am not the man you knew, *Xélucha*, in the palaces—of *Cosmo*! You are *Xélucha*!'

'You rave, poor worm!' she cried, her face contorted by a species of malicious contempt. '*Xélucha* died of cholera ten years ago at Antioch. I wiped the froth from her lips. Her nose underwent a green decay before burial. So far sunken into the brain was the left eye—'

'You are—you are *Xélucha*!' I shrieked; 'voices now of thunder howl it within my consciousness—and by the holy God, *Xélucha*, though you blight me with the breath of the hell you are, I shall clasp you,—living or damned—'

I rushed toward her. The word '*Madman*!' hissed as by the tongues of ten thousand serpents through the chamber, I heard; a belch of pestilent corruption puffed poisonous upon the putrid air; for a moment to my wildered eyes there seemed to rear itself, swelling high to the roof, a formless tower of ragged cloud, and before my projected arms had closed upon the very emptiness of inanity, I was tossed by the operation of some Behemoth potency far-circling backward to the utmost circumference of the oval, where, my head colliding, I fell, shocked, into insensibility.

.....

When the sun was low toward night, I lay awake, and listlessly observed the grimy roof, and the sordid chair, and the candlestick of tin, and the bottle of which I had drunk. The table was small, filthy, of common deal, uncovered. All bore the appearance of having stood there for years. But for them, the room was void, the vision of luxury thinned to air. Sudden memory flashed upon me. I scrambled to my feet, and plunged and tottered, bawling, through the twilight into the street.



Meditation under Stars

George Meredith

What links are ours with orbs that are
So resolutely far:
The solitary asks, and they
Give radiance as from a shield:
Still at the death of day,
The seen, the unrevealed.
Implacable they shine
To us who would of Life obtain
An answer for the life we strain
To nourish with one sign.
Nor can imagination throw
The penetrative shaft: we pass
The breath of thought, who would divine
If haply they may grow
As Earth; have our desire to know;

If life comes there to grain from grass,
And flowers like ours of toil and pain;
Has passion to beat bar,
Win space from cleaving brain;
The mystic link attain,
Whereby star holds on star.

Those visible immortals beam
Allurement to the dream:
Ireful at human hungers brook
No question in the look.
For ever virgin to our sense,
Remote they wane to gaze intense:
Prolong it, and in ruthlessness they smite
The beating heart behind the ball of sight:
Till we conceive their heavens hoar,
Those lights they raise but sparkles froze,
And Earth, our blood-warm Earth, a shuddering prey
To that frigidity of brainless ray.
Yet space is given for breath of thought
Beyond our bounds when musing: more
When to that musing love is brought,
And love is asked of love's wherefore.
'Tis Earth's, her gift; else have we nought:
Her gift, her secret, here our tie.
And not with her and yonder sky?
Bethink you: were it Earth alone
Breeds love, would not her region be
The sole delight and throne
Of generous Deity?

To deeper than this ball of sight
Appeal the lustrous people of the night.
Fronting yon shoreless, sown with fiery sails,
It is our ravenous that quails,
Flesh by its craven thirsts and fears distraught.
The spirit leaps alight,
Doubts not in them is he,
The binder of his sheaves, the sane, the right:
Of magnitude to magnitude is wrought,
To feel it large of the great life they hold:
In them to come, or vaster interwolved,
The issues known in us, our unsolved solved:
That there with toil Life climbs the self-same Tree,
Whose roots enrichment have from ripeness dropped.
So may we read and little find them cold:
Let it but be the lord of Mind to guide
Our eyes; no branch of Reason's growing lopped;
Nor dreaming on a dream; but fortified
By day to penetrate black midnight; see,
Hear, feel, outside the senses; even that we,
The specks of dust upon a mound of mould,
We who reflect those rays, though low our place,
To them are lastingly allied.

So may we read, and little find them cold:
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.
The fire is in them whereof we are born;
The music of their motion may be ours.
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.
Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.
Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face:
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

Captain Burle

By Emile Zola



Soldier
Vasily Surikov

CHAPTER I THE SWINDLE

It was nine o'clock. The little town of Vauchamp, dark and silent, had just retired to bed amid a chilly November rain. In the Rue des Recollets, one of the narrowest and most deserted streets of the district of Saint-Jean, a single window was still alight on the third floor of an old house, from whose damaged gutters torrents of water were falling into the street. Mme Burle was sitting up before a meager fire of vine stocks, while her little grandson Charles pored over his lessons by the pale light of a lamp.

The apartment, rented at one hundred and sixty francs per annum, consisted of four large rooms which it was absolutely impossible to keep warm during the winter. Mme Burle slept in the largest chamber, her son Captain and Quartermaster Burle occupying a somewhat smaller one overlooking the street, while little Charles had his iron cot at the farther end of a spacious drawing room with mildewed hangings, which was never used. The few pieces of furniture belonging to the captain and his mother, furniture of the massive style of the First Empire, dented and worn by continuous transit from one garrison town to another, almost disappeared from view beneath the lofty ceilings whence darkness fell. The flooring of red-colored tiles was cold and hard to the feet; before the chairs there were merely a few threadbare little rugs of poverty-stricken aspect, and athwart this desert all the winds of heaven blew through the disjointed doors and windows.

Near the fireplace sat Mme Burle, leaning back in her old yellow velvet armchair and watching the last vine branch smoke, with that stolid, blank stare of the aged who live within themselves. She would sit thus for whole days together, with her tall figure, her long stern face and her thin lips that never smiled. The widow of a colonel who had died just as he was on the point of becoming a general, the mother of a captain whom she had followed even in his campaigns, she had acquired a military stiffness of bearing and formed for herself a code of honor, duty and patriotism which kept her rigid, desiccated, as it were, by the stern application of discipline. She seldom, if ever, complained. When her son had become a widower after five years of married life she had undertaken the education of little Charles as a matter of course, performing her duties with the severity of a sergeant drilling recruits. She watched over the child, never tolerating the slightest waywardness or irregularity, but compelling him to sit up till midnight when his exercises were not finished, and sitting up herself until he had completed them. Under such implacable despotism Charles, whose constitution was delicate, grew up pale and thin, with beautiful eyes, inordinately large and clear, shining in his white, pinched face.

During the long hours of silence Mme Burle dwelt continuously upon one and the same idea: she had been disappointed in her son. This thought sufficed to occupy her mind, and under its influence she would live her whole life over again, from the birth of her son, whom she had pictured rising amid glory to the highest rank, till she came down to mean and narrow garrison life, the dull, monotonous existence of nowadays, that stranding in the post of a quartermaster, from which Burle would never rise and in which he seemed to sink more and more heavily. And yet his first efforts had filled her with pride, and she had hoped to see her dreams realized. Burle had only just left Saint-Cyr when he distinguished himself at the battle of Solferino, where he had captured a whole battery of the enemy's artillery with merely a handful of men. For this feat he had won the cross; the papers had recorded his heroism, and he had become known as one of the bravest soldiers in the army. But gradually the hero had grown stout, embedded in flesh, timorous, lazy and satisfied. In 1870, still a captain, he had been made a prisoner in the first encounter, and he returned from Germany quite furious, swearing that he would never be caught fighting again, for it was too absurd. Being prevented from leaving the army, as he was incapable of embracing any other profession, he applied for and obtained the position of captain quartermaster, "a kennel," as he called it, "in which he would be left to kick the bucket in peace." That day Mme Burle experienced a great internal disruption. She felt that it was all over, and she ever afterward preserved a rigid attitude with tightened lips. A blast of wind shook the Rue des Recollets and drove the rain angrily against the windowpanes. The old lady lifted her eyes from the smoking vine roots now dying out, to make sure that Charles was not falling asleep over his Latin exercise. This lad, twelve years of age, had become the old lady's supreme hope, the one human being in whom she centered her obstinate yearning for glory. At first she had hated him with all the loathing she had felt for his mother, a weak and pretty young lacemaker whom the

captain had been foolish enough to marry when he found out that she would not listen to his passionate addresses on any other condition. Later on, when the mother had died and the father had begun to wallow in vice, Mme Burle dreamed again in presence of that little ailing child whom she found it so hard to rear. She wanted to see him robust, so that he might grow into the hero that Burle had declined to be, and for all her cold ruggedness she watched him anxiously, feeling his limbs and instilling courage into his soul. By degrees, blinded by her passionate desires, she imagined that she had at last found the man of the family. The boy, whose temperament was of a gentle, dreamy character, had a physical horror of soldiering, but as he lived in mortal dread of his grandmother and was extremely shy and submissive, he would echo all she said and resignedly express his intention of entering the army when he grew up. Mme Burle observed that the exercise was not progressing. In fact, little Charles, overcome by the deafening noise of the storm, was dozing, albeit his pen was between his fingers and his eyes were staring at the paper. The old lady at once struck the edge of the table with her bony hand; whereupon the lad started, opened his dictionary and hurriedly began to turn over the leaves. Then, still preserving silence, his grandmother drew the vine roots together on the hearth and unsuccessfully attempted to rekindle the fire.

At the time when she had still believed in her son she had sacrificed her small income, which he had squandered in pursuits she dared not investigate. Even now he drained the household; all its resources went to the streets, and it was through him that she lived in penury, with empty rooms and cold kitchen. She never spoke to him of all those things, for with her sense of discipline he remained the master. Only at times she shuddered at the sudden fear that Burle might someday commit some foolish misdeed which would prevent Charles from entering the army.

She was rising up to fetch a fresh piece of wood in the kitchen when a fearful hurricane fell upon the house, making the doors rattle, tearing off a shutter and whirling the water in the broken gutters like a spout against the window. In the midst of the uproar a ring at the bell startled the old lady. Who could it be at such an hour and in such weather? Burle never returned till after midnight, if he came home at all. However, she went to the door. An officer stood before her, dripping with rain and swearing savagely.

"Hell and thunder!" he growled. "What cursed weather!" It was Major Laguitte, a brave old soldier who had served under Colonel Burle during Mme Burle's palmy days. He had started in life as a drummer boy and, thanks to his courage rather than his intellect, had attained to the command of a battalion, when a painful infirmity—the contraction of the muscles of one of his thighs, due to a wound—obliged him to accept the post of major. He was slightly lame, but it would have been imprudent to tell him so, as he refused to own it.

"What, you, Major?" said Mme Burle with growing astonishment.

"Yes, thunder," grumbled Laguitte, "and I must be confoundedly fond of you to roam the streets on such a night as this. One would think twice before sending even a parson out."

He shook himself, and little rivulets fell from his huge boots onto the floor. Then he looked round him.

"I particularly want to see Burle. Is the lazy beggar already in bed?"

"No, he is not in yet," said the old woman in her harsh voice.

The major looked furious, and, raising his voice, he shouted: "What, not at home? But in that case they hoaxed me at the cafe, Melanie's establishment, you know. I went there, and a maid grinned at me, saying that the captain had gone home to bed. Curse the girl! I suspected as much and felt like pulling her ears!"

After this outburst he became somewhat calmer, stamping about the room in an undecided way, withal seeming greatly disturbed. Mme Burle looked at him attentively.

"Is it the captain personally whom you want to see?" she said at last.

"Yes," he answered.

"Can I not tell him what you have to say?"

"No."

She did not insist but remained standing without taking her eyes off the major, who did not seem able to make up his mind to leave. Finally in a fresh burst of rage he exclaimed with an oath: "It can't be helped. As I am here you may as well know—after all, it is, perhaps, best."

He sat down before the chimney piece, stretching out his

muddy boots as if a bright fire had been burning. Mme Burle was about to resume her own seat when she remarked that Charles, overcome by fatigue, had dropped his head between the open pages of his dictionary. The arrival of the major had at first interested him, but, seeing that he remained unnoticed, he had been unable to struggle against his sleepiness. His grandmother turned toward the table to slap his frail little hands, whitening in the lamplight, when Laguitte stopped her.

"No—no!" he said. "Let the poor little man sleep. I haven't got anything funny to say. There's no need for him to hear me."

The old lady sat down in her armchair; deep silence reigned, and they looked at one another.

"Well, yes," said the major at last, punctuating his words with an angry motion of his chin, "he has been and done it; that hound Burle has been and done it!"

Not a muscle of Mme Burle's face moved, but she became livid, and her figure stiffened. Then the major continued: "I had my doubts. I had intended mentioning the subject to you. Burle was spending too much money, and he had an idiotic look which I did not fancy. Thunder and lightning! What a fool a man must be to behave so filthily!"

Then he thumped his knee furiously with his clenched fist and seemed to choke with indignation. The old woman put the straightforward question:

"He has stolen?"

"You can't have an idea of it. You see, I never examined his accounts; I approved and signed them. You know how those things are managed. However, just before the inspection—as the colonel is a crotchety old maniac—I said to Burle: 'I say, old man, look to your accounts; I am answerable, you know,' and then I felt perfectly secure. Well, about a month ago, as he seemed queer and some nasty stories were circulating, I peered a little closer into the books and pottered over the entries. I thought everything looked straight and very well kept—"

At this point he stopped, convulsed by such a fit of rage that he had to relieve himself by a volley of appalling oaths. Finally he resumed: "It isn't the swindle that angers me; it is his disgusting behavior to me. He has gammoned me, Madame Burle. By God! Does he take me for an old fool?"

"So he stole?" the mother again questioned.

"This evening," continued the major more quietly, "I had just finished my dinner when Gagneux came in—you know Gagneux, the butcher at the corner of the Place aux Herbes? Another dirty beast who got the meat contract and makes our men eat all the diseased cow flesh in the neighborhood! Well, I received him like a dog, and then he let it all out—blurted out the whole thing, and a pretty mess it is! It appears that Burle only paid him in dribblets and had got himself into a muddle—a confusion of figures which the devil himself couldn't disentangle. In short, Burle owes the butcher two thousand francs, and Gagneux threatens that he'll inform the colonel if he is not paid. To make matters worse, Burle, just to blind me, handed me every week a forged receipt which he had squarely signed with Gagneux's name. To think he did that to me, his old friend! Ah, curse him!"

With increasing profanity the major rose to his feet, shook his fist at the ceiling and then fell back in his chair. Mme Burle again repeated: "He has stolen. It was inevitable."

Then without a word of judgment or condemnation she added simply: "Two thousand francs—we have not got them. There are barely thirty francs in the house."

"I expected as much," said Laguitte. "And do you know where all the money goes? Why, Melanie gets it—yes, Melanie, a creature who has turned Burle into a perfect fool. Ah, those women! Those fiendish women! I always said they would do for him! I cannot conceive what he is made of! He is only five years younger than I am, and yet he is as mad as ever. What a woman hunter he is!"

Another long silence followed. Outside the rain was increasing in violence, and throughout the sleepy little town one could hear the crashing of slates and chimney pots as they were dashed by the blast onto the pavements of the streets.

"Come," suddenly said the major, rising, "my stopping here won't mend matters. I have warned you—and now I'm off."

"What is to be done? To whom can we apply?" muttered the old woman drearily.

"Don't give way—we must consider. If I only had the two thousand francs—but you know that I am not rich."

The major stopped short in confusion. This old bachelor, wifeless and childless, spent his pay in drink and gambled away at ecarte whatever money his cognac and absinthe left in his pocket. Despite that, however, he was scrupulously honest from a sense

of discipline.

"Never mind," he added as he reached the threshold. "I'll begin by stirring him up. I shall move heaven and earth! What! Burle, Colonel Burle's son, condemned for theft! That cannot be! I would sooner burn down the town. Now, thunder and lightning, don't worry; it is far more annoying for me than for you."

He shook the old lady's hand roughly and vanished into the shadows of the staircase, while she held the lamp aloft to light the way. When she returned and replaced the lamp on the table she stood for a moment motionless in front of Charles, who was still asleep with his face lying on the dictionary. His pale cheeks and long fair hair made him look like a girl, and she gazed at him dreamily, a shade of tenderness passing over her harsh countenance. But it was only a passing emotion; her features regained their look of cold, obstinate determination, and, giving the youngster a sharp rap on his little hand, she said:

"Charles—your lessons."

The boy awoke, dazed and shivering, and again rapidly turned over the leaves. At the same moment Major Laguitte, slamming the house door behind him, received on his head a quantity of water falling from the gutters above, whereupon he began to swear in so loud a voice that he could be heard above the storm. And after that no sound broke upon the pelted downpour save the slight rustle of the boy's pen traveling over the paper. Mme Burle had resumed her seat near the chimney piece, still rigid, with her eyes fixed on the dead embers, preserving, indeed, her habitual attitude and absorbed in her one idea.

CHAPTER II THE CAFE

The Café de Paris, kept by Melanie Cartier, a widow, was situated on the Place du Palais, a large irregular square planted with meager, dusty elm trees. The place was so well known in Vauchamp that it was customary to say, "Are you coming to Melanie's?" At the farther end of the first room, which was a spacious one, there was another called "the divan," a narrow apartment having sham leather benches placed against the walls, while at each corner there stood a marble-topped table. The widow, deserting her seat in the front room, where she left her little servant Phrosine, spent her evenings in the inner apartment, ministering to a few customers, the usual frequenters of the place, those who were currently styled "the gentlemen of the divan." When a man belonged to that set it was as if he had a label on his back; he was spoken of with smiles of mingled contempt and envy.

Mme Cartier had become a widow when she was five and twenty. Her husband, a wheelwright, who on the death of an uncle had amazed Vauchamp by taking the Café de Paris, had one fine day brought her back with him from Montpellier, where he was wont to repair twice a year to purchase liqueurs. As he was stocking his establishment he selected, together with divers beverages, a woman of the sort he wanted—of an engaging aspect and apt to stimulate the trade of the house. It was never known where he had picked her up, but he married her after trying her in the cafe during six months or so. Opinions were divided in Vauchamp as to her merits, some folks declaring that she was superb, while others asserted that she looked like a drum-major. She was a tall woman with large features and coarse hair falling low over her forehead. However, everyone agreed that she knew very well how to fool the sterner sex. She had fine eyes and was wont to fix them with a bold stare on the gentlemen of the divan, who colored and became like wax in her hands. She also had the reputation of possessing a wonderfully fine figure, and southerners appreciate a statuesque style of beauty.

Cartier had died in a singular way. Rumor hinted at a conjugal quarrel, a kick, producing some internal tumor. Whatever may have been the truth, Melanie found herself encumbered with the cafe, which was far from doing a prosperous business. Her husband had wasted his uncle's inheritance in drinking his own absinthe and wearing out the cloth of his own billiard table. For a while it was believed that the widow would have to sell out, but she liked the life and the establishment just as it was. If she could secure a few customers the bigger room might remain deserted. So she limited herself to repapering the divan in white and gold and recovering the benches. She began by entertaining a chemist. Then a vermicelli maker, a lawyer and a retired magistrate put in an appearance; and thus it was that the cafe remained open, although the waiter did not receive twenty orders a day. No objections were raised by the authorities, as appearances were kept up; and, indeed, it was not deemed advisable to interfere, for some respectable folks might have been worried.

Of an evening five or six well-to-do citizens would enter the

front room and play at dominoes there. Although Cartier was dead and the Café de Paris had got a queer name, they saw nothing and kept up their old habits. In course of time, the waiter having nothing to do, Melanie dismissed him and made Phrosine light the solitary gas burner in the corner where the domino players congregated. Occasionally a party of young men, attracted by the gossip that circulated through the town, would come in, wildly excited and laughing loudly and awkwardly. But they were received there with icy dignity. As a rule they did not even see the widow, and even if she happened to be present she treated them with withering disdain, so that they withdrew, stammering and confused. Melanie was too astute to indulge in any compromising whims. While the front room remained obscure, save in the corner where the few townsfolk rattled their dominoes, she personally waited on the gentlemen of the divan, showing herself amiable without being free, merely venturing in moments of familiarity to lean on the shoulder of one or another of them, the better to watch a skillfully played game of ecarte.

One evening the gentlemen of the divan, who had ended by tolerating each other's presence, experienced a disagreeable surprise on finding Captain Burle at home there. He had casually entered the café that same morning to get a glass of vermouth, so it seemed, and he had found Melanie there. They had conversed, and in the evening when he returned Phrosine immediately showed him to the inner room.

Two days later Burle reigned there supreme; still he had not frightened the chemist, the vermicelli maker, the lawyer or the retired magistrate away. The captain, who was short and dumpy, worshiped tall, plump women. In his regiment he had been nicknamed "Petticoat Burle" on account of his constant philandering. Whenever the officers, and even the privates, met some monstrous-looking creature, some giantess puffed out with fat, whether she were in velvet or in rags, they would invariably exclaim, "There goes one to Petticoat Burle's taste!" Thus Melanie, with her opulent presence, quite conquered him. He was lost—quite wrecked. In less than a fortnight he had fallen to vacuous imbecility. With much the expression of a whipped hound in the tiny sunken eyes which lighted up his bloated face, he was incessantly watching the widow in mute adoration before her masculine features and stubby hair. For fear that he might be dismissed, he put up with the presence of the other gentlemen of the divan and spent his pay in the place down to the last copper. A sergeant reviewed the situation in one sentence: "Petticoat Burle is done for; he's a buried man!"

It was nearly ten o'clock when Major Laguitte furiously flung the door of the café open. For a moment those inside could see the deluged square transformed into a dark sea of liquid mud, bubbling under the terrible downpour. The major, now soaked to the skin and leaving a stream behind him, strode up to the small counter where Phrosine was reading a novel.

"You little wretch," he yelled, "you have dared to gammon an officer; you deserve—"

And then he lifted his hand as if to deal a blow such as would have felled an ox. The little maid shrank back, terrified, while the amazed domino players looked, openmouthed. However, the major did not linger there—he pushed the divan door open and appeared before Melanie and Burle just as the widow was playfully making the captain sip his grog in small spoonfuls, as if she were feeding a pet canary. Only the ex-magistrate and the chemist had come that evening, and they had retired early in a melancholy frame of mind. Then Melanie, being in want of three hundred francs for the morrow, had taken advantage of the opportunity to cajole the captain.

"Come," she said, "open your mouth; ain't it nice, you greedy piggy-wiggy?"

Burle, flushing scarlet, with glazed eyes and sunken figure, was sucking the spoon with an air of intense enjoyment.

"Good heavens!" roared the major from the threshold. "You now play tricks on me, do you? I'm sent to the roundabout and told that you never came here, and yet all the while here you are, adding your silly brains."

Burle shuddered, pushing the grog away, while Melanie stepped angrily in front of him as if to shield him with her portly figure, but Laguitte looked at her with that quiet, resolute expression well known to women who are familiar with bodily chastisement.

"Leave us," he said curtly.

She hesitated for the space of a second. She almost felt the gust of the expected blow, and then, white with rage, she joined Phrosine in the outer room.

When the two men were alone Major Laguitte walked up to Burle, looked at him and, slightly stooping, yelled into his face

these two words: "You pig!"

The captain, quite dazed, endeavored to retort, but he had not time to do so.

"Silence!" resumed the major. "You have bamboozled a friend. You palmed off on me a lot of forged receipts which might have sent both of us to the gallows. Do you call that proper behavior? Is that the sort of trick to play a friend of thirty years' standing?" Burle, who had fallen back in his chair, was livid; his limbs shook as if with ague. Meanwhile the major, striding up and down and striking the tables wildly with his fists, continued: "So you have become a thief like the veriest scribbling cur of a clerk, and all for the sake of that creature here! If at least you had stolen for your mother's sake it would have been honorable! But, curse it, to play tricks and bring the money into this shanty is what I cannot understand! Tell me—what are you made of at your age to go to the dogs as you are going all for the sake of a creature like a grenadier!"

"YOU gamble—" stammered the captain.

"Yes, I do—curse it!" thundered the major, lashed into still greater fury by this remark. "And I am a pitiful rogue to do so, because it swallows up all my pay and doesn't redound to the honor of the French army. However, I don't steal. Kill yourself, if it pleases you; starve your mother and the boy, but respect the regimental cashbox and don't drag your friends down with you." He stopped. Burle was sitting there with fixed eyes and a stupid air. Nothing was heard for a moment save the clatter of the major's heels.

"And not a single copper," he continued aggressively. "Can you picture yourself between two gendarmes, eh?"

He then grew a little calmer, caught hold of Burle's wrists and forced him to rise.

"Come!" he said gruffly. "Something must be done at once, for I cannot go to bed with this affair on my mind—I have an idea."

In the front room Melanie and Phrosine were talking eagerly in low voices. When the widow saw the two men leaving the divan she moved toward Burle and said coaxingly: "What, are you going already, Captain?"

"Yes, he's going," brutally answered Laguitte, "and I don't intend to let him set foot here again."

The little maid felt frightened and pulled her mistress back by the skirt of her dress; in doing so she imprudently murmured the word "drunkard" and thereby brought down the slap which the major's hand had been itching to deal for some time past. Both women having stooped, however, the blow only fell on Phrosine's back hair, flattening her cap and breaking her comb. The domino players were indignant.

"Let's cut it," shouted Laguitte, and he pushed Burle on the pavement. "If I remained I should smash everyone in the place."

To cross the square they had to wade up to their ankles in mud. The rain, driven by the wind, poured off their faces. The captain walked on in silence, while the major kept on reproaching him with his cowardice and its disastrous consequences. Wasn't it sweet weather for tramping the streets? If he hadn't been such an idiot they would both be warmly tucked in bed instead of paddling about in the mud. Then he spoke of Gagneux—a scoundrel whose diseased meat had on three separate occasions made the whole regiment ill. In a week, however, the contract would come to an end, and the fiend himself would not get it renewed.

"It rests with me," the major grumbled. "I can select whomsoever I choose, and I'd rather cut off my right arm than put that poisoner in the way of earning another copper." Just then he slipped into a gutter and, half choked by a string of oaths, he gasped:

"You understand—I am going to rout up Gagneux. You must stop outside while I go in. I must know what the rascal is up to and if he'll dare to carry out his threat of informing the colonel tomorrow. A butcher—curse him! The idea of compromising oneself with a butcher! Ah, you aren't over-proud, and I shall never forgive you for all this."

They had now reached the Place aux Herbes. Gagneux's house was quite dark, but Laguitte knocked so loudly that he was eventually admitted. Burle remained alone in the dense obscurity and did not even attempt to seek any shelter. He stood at a corner of the market under the pelting rain, his head filled with a loud buzzing noise which prevented him from thinking. He did not feel impatient, for he was unconscious of the flight of time. He stood there looking at the house, which, with its closed door and windows, seemed quite lifeless. When at the end of an hour the major came out again it appeared to the captain as if he had only just gone in.

Laguitte was so grimly mute that Burle did not venture to question him. For a moment they sought each other, groping about in the dark; then they resumed their walk through the somber streets, where the water rolled as in the bed of a torrent. They moved on in silence side by side, the major being so abstracted that he even forgot to swear. However, as they again crossed the Place du Palais, at the sight of the Café de Paris, which was still lit up, he dropped his hand on Burle's shoulder and said, "If you ever re-enter that hole I—"

"No fear!" answered the captain without letting his friend finish his sentence.

Then he stretched out his hand.

"No, no," said Laguitte, "I'll see you home; I'll at least make sure that you'll sleep in your bed tonight."

They went on, and as they ascended the Rue des Recollets they slackened their pace. When the captain's door was reached and Burle had taken out his latchkey he ventured to ask:

"Well?"

"Well," answered the major gruffly, "I am as dirty a rogue as you are. Yes! I have done a scurrilous thing. The fiend take you! Our soldiers will eat carrion for three months longer."

Then he explained that Gagneux, the disgusting Gagneux, had a horribly level head and that he had persuaded him—the major—to strike a bargain. He would refrain from informing the colonel, and he would even make a present of the two thousand francs and replace the forged receipts by genuine ones, on condition that the major bound himself to renew the meat contract. It was a settled thing.

"Ah," continued Laguitte, "calculate what profits the brute must make out of the meat to part with such a sum as two thousand francs."

Burle, choking with emotion, grasped his old friend's hands, stammering confused words of thanks. The vileness of the action committed for his sake brought tears into his eyes.

"I never did such a thing before," growled Laguitte, "but I was driven to it. Curse it, to think that I haven't those two thousand francs in my drawer! It is enough to make one hate cards. It is my own fault. I am not worth much; only, mark my words, don't begin again, for, curse it—I shan't."

The captain embraced him, and when he had entered the house the major stood a moment before the closed door to make certain that he had gone upstairs to bed. Then as midnight was striking and the rain was still belaboring the dark town, he slowly turned homeward. The thought of his men almost broke his heart, and, stopping short, he said aloud in a voice full of compassion:

"Poor devils! what a lot of cow beef they'll have to swallow for those two thousand francs!"

CHAPTER III AGAIN?

The regiment was altogether nonplused: Petticoat Burle had quarreled with Melanie. When a week had elapsed it became a proved and undeniable fact; the captain no longer set foot inside the Café de Paris, where the chemist, it was averred, once more reigned in his stead, to the profound sorrow of the retired magistrate. An even more incredible statement was that Captain Burle led the life of a recluse in the Rue des Recollets. He was becoming a reformed character; he spent his evenings at his own fireside, hearing little Charles repeat his lessons. His mother, who had never breathed a word to him of his manipulations with Gagneux, maintained her old severity of demeanor as she sat opposite to him in her armchair, but her looks seemed to imply that she believed him reclaimed.

A fortnight later Major Laguitte came one evening to invite himself to dinner. He felt some awkwardness at the prospect of meeting Burle again, not on his own account but because he dreaded awakening painful memories. However, as the captain was mending his ways he wished to shake hands and break a crust with him. He thought this would please his old friend.

When Laguitte arrived Burle was in his room, so it was the old lady who received the major. The latter, after announcing that he had come to have a plate of soup with them, added, lowering his voice:

"Well, how goes it?"

"It is all right," answered the old lady.

"Nothing queer?"

"Absolutely nothing. Never away—in bed at nine—and looking quite happy."

"Ah, confound it," replied the major, "I knew very well he only wanted a shaking. He has some heart left, the dog!"

When Burle appeared he almost crushed the major's hands in

his grasp, and standing before the fire, waiting for the dinner, they conversed peacefully, honestly, together, extolling the charms of home life. The captain vowed he wouldn't exchange his home for a kingdom and declared that when he had removed his braces, put on his slippers and settled himself in his armchair, no king was fit to hold a candle to him. The major assented and examined him. At all events his virtuous conduct had not made him any thinner; he still looked bloated; his eyes were bleared, and his mouth was heavy. He seemed to be half asleep as he repeated mechanically: "Home life! There's nothing like home life, nothing in the world!"

"No doubt," said the major; "still, one mustn't exaggerate—take a little exercise and come to the cafe now and then."

"To the cafe, why?" asked Burle. "Do I lack anything here? No, no, I remain at home."

When Charles had laid his books aside Laguitte was surprised to see a maid come in to lay the cloth.

"So you keep a servant now," he remarked to Mme Burle.

"I had to get one," she answered with a sigh. "My legs are not what they used to be, and the household was going to rack and ruin. Fortunately Cabrol let me have his daughter. You know old Cabrol, who sweeps the market? He did not know what to do with Rose—I am teaching her how to work."

Just then the girl left the room.

"How old is she?" asked the major.

"Barely seventeen. She is stupid and dirty, but I only give her ten francs a month, and she eats nothing but soup."

When Rose returned with an armful of plates Laguitte, though he did not care about women, began to scrutinize her and was amazed at seeing so ugly a creature. She was very short, very dark and slightly deformed, with a face like an ape's: a flat nose, a huge mouth and narrow greenish eyes. Her broad back and long arms gave her an appearance of great strength.

"What a snout!" said Laguitte, laughing, when the maid had again left the room to fetch the cruets.

"Never mind," said Burle carelessly, "she is very obliging and does all one asks her. She suits us well enough as a scullion."

The dinner was very pleasant. It consisted of boiled beef and mutton hash. Charles was encouraged to relate some stories of his school, and Mme Burle repeatedly asked him the same question: "Don't you want to be a soldier?" A faint smile hovered over the child's wan lips as he answered with the frightened obedience of a trained dog, "Oh yes, Grandmother." Captain Burle, with his elbows on the table, was masticating slowly with an absent-minded expression. The big room was getting warmer; the single lamp placed on the table left the corners in vague gloom. There was a certain amount of heavy comfort, the familiar intimacy of penurious people who do not change their plates at every course but become joyously excited at the unexpected appearance of a bowl of whipped egg cream at the close of the meal.

Rose, whose heavy tread shook the floor as she paced round the table, had not yet opened her mouth. At last she stopped behind the captain's chair and asked in a gruff voice: "Cheese, sir?"

Burle started. "What, eh? Oh yes—cheese. Hold the plate tight."

He cut a piece of Gruyere, the girl watching him the while with her narrow eyes. Laguitte laughed; Rose's unparalleled ugliness amused him immensely. He whispered in the captain's ear, "She is ripping! There never was such a nose and such a mouth! You ought to send her to the colonel's someday as a curiosity. It would amuse him to see her."

More and more struck by this phenomenal ugliness, the major felt a paternal desire to examine the girl more closely.

"Come here," he said, "I want some cheese too."

She brought the plate, and Laguitte, sticking the knife in the Gruyere, stared at her, grinning the while because he discovered that she had one nostril broader than the other. Rose gravely allowed herself to be looked at, waiting till the gentleman had done laughing.

She removed the cloth and disappeared. Burle immediately went to sleep in the chimney corner while the major and Mme Burle began to chat. Charles had returned to his exercises.

Quietude fell from the loft ceiling; the quietude of a middle-class household gathered in concord around their fireside. At nine o'clock Burle woke up, yawned and announced that he was going off to bed; he apologized but declared that he could not keep his eyes open. Half an hour later, when the major took his leave, Mme Burle vainly called for Rose to light him downstairs; the girl must have gone up to her room; she was, indeed, a regular hen, snoring the round of the clock without waking.

"No need to disturb anybody," said Laguitte on the landing; "my legs are not much better than yours, but if I get hold of the

banisters I shan't break any bones. Now, my dear lady, I leave you happy; your troubles are ended at last. I watched Burle closely, and I'll take my oath that he's guileless as a child. Dash it—after all, it was high time for Petticoat Burle to reform; he was going downhill fast."

The major went away fully satisfied with the house and its inmates; the walls were of glass and could harbor no equivocal conduct. What particularly delighted him in his friend's return to virtue was that it absolved him from the obligation of verifying the accounts. Nothing was more distasteful to him than the inspection of a number of ledgers, and as long as Burle kept steady, he—Laguitté—could smoke his pipe in peace and sign the books in all confidence. However, he continued to keep one eye open for a little while longer and found the receipts genuine, the entries correct, the columns admirably balanced. A month later he contented himself with glancing at the receipts and running his eye over the totals. Then one morning, without the slightest suspicion of there being anything wrong, simply because he had lit a second pipe and had nothing to do, he carelessly added up a row of figures and fancied that he detected an error of thirteen francs. The balance seemed perfectly correct, and yet he was not mistaken; the total outlay was thirteen francs more than the various sums for which receipts were furnished. It looked queer, but he said nothing to Burle, just making up his mind to examine the next accounts closely. On the following week he detected a fresh error of nineteen francs, and then, suddenly becoming alarmed, he shut himself up with the books and spent a wretched morning poring over them, perspiring, swearing and feeling as if his very skull were bursting with the figures. At every page he discovered thefts of a few francs—the most miserable petty thefts—ten, eight, eleven francs, latterly, three and four; and, indeed, there was one column showing that Burle had pilfered just one franc and a half. For two months, however, he had been steadily robbing the cashbox, and by comparing dates the major found to his disgust that the famous lesson respecting Gagneux had only kept him straight for one week! This last discovery infuriated Laguitté, who struck the books with his clenched fists, yelling through a shower of oaths:

"This is more abominable still! At least there was some pluck about those forged receipts of Gagneux. But this time he is as contemptible as a cook charging twopence extra for her cabbages. Powers of hell! To pilfer a franc and a half and clap it in his pocket! Hasn't the brute got any pride then? Couldn't he run away with the safe or play the fool with actresses?"

The pitiful meanness of these pilferings revolted the major, and, moreover, he was enraged at having been duped a second time, deceived by the simple, stupid dodge of falsified additions. He rose at last and paced his office for a whole hour, growling aloud.

"This gives me his measure. Even if I were to thresh him to a jelly every morning he would still drop a couple of coins into his pocket every afternoon. But where can he spend it all? He is never seen abroad; he goes to bed at nine, and everything looks so clean and proper over there. Can the brute have vices that nobody knows of?"

He returned to the desk, added up the subtracted money and found a total of five hundred and forty-five francs. Where was this deficiency to come from? The inspection was close at hand, and if the crotchety colonel should take it into his head to examine a single page, the murder would be out and Burle would be done for.

This idea froze the major, who left off cursing, picturing Mme Burle erect and despairing, and at the same time he felt his heart swell with personal grief and shame.

"Well," he muttered, "I must first of all look into the rogue's business; I will act afterward."

As he walked over to Burle's office he caught sight of a skirt vanishing through the doorway. Fancying that he had a clue to the mystery, he slipped up quietly and listened and speedily recognized Melanie's shrill voice. She was complaining of the gentlemen of the divan. She had signed a promissory note which she was unable to meet; the bailiffs were in the house, and all her goods would be sold. The captain, however, barely replied to her. He alleged that he had no money, whereupon she burst into tears and began to coax him. But her blandishments were apparently ineffectual, for Burle's husky voice could be heard repeating, "Impossible! Impossible!" And finally the widow withdrew in a towering passion. The major, amazed at the turn affairs were taking, waited a few moments longer before entering the office, where Burle had remained alone. He found him very calm, and despite his furious inclination to call him names he also

remained calm, determined to begin by finding out the exact truth.

The office certainly did not look like a swindler's den. A cane-seated chair, covered with an honest leather cushion, stood before the captain's desk, and in a corner there was the locked safe. Summer was coming on, and the song of a canary sounded through the open window. The apartment was very neat and tidy, redolent of old papers, and altogether its appearance inspired one with confidence.

"Wasn't it Melanie who was leaving here as I came along?" asked Laguitté.

Burle shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he mumbled. "She has been dunning me for two hundred francs, but she can't screw ten out of me—not even tenpence."

"Indeed!" said the major, just to try him. "I heard that you had made up with her."

"I? Certainly not. I have done with the likes of her for good." Laguitté went away, feeling greatly perplexed. Where had the five hundred and forty-five francs gone? Had the idiot taken to drinking or gambling? He decided to pay Burle a surprise visit that very evening at his own house, and maybe by questioning his mother he might learn something. However, during the afternoon his leg became very painful; latterly he had been feeling in ill-health, and he had to use a stick so as not to limp too outrageously. This stick grieved him sorely, and he declared with angry despair that he was now no better than a pensioner. However, toward the evening, making a strong effort, he pulled himself out of his armchair and, leaning heavily on his stick, dragged himself through the darkness to the Rue des Recollets, which he reached about nine o'clock. The street door was still unlocked, and on going up he stood panting on the third landing, when he heard voices on the upper floor. One of these voices was Burle's, so he fancied, and out of curiosity he ascended another flight of stairs. Then at the end of a passage on the left he saw a ray of light coming from a door which stood ajar. As the creaking of his boots resounded, this door was sharply closed, and he found himself in the dark.

"Some cook going to bed!" he muttered angrily. "I'm a fool." All the same he groped his way as gently as possible to the door and listened. Two people were talking in the room, and he stood aghast, for it was Burle and that fright Rose! Then he listened, and the conversation he heard left him no doubt of the awful truth. For a moment he lifted his stick as if to beat down the door. Then he shuddered and, staggering back, leaned against the wall. His legs were trembling under him, while in the darkness of the staircase he brandished his stick as if it had been a saber.

What was to be done? After his first moment of passion there had come thoughts of the poor old lady below. And these made him hesitate. It was all over with the captain now; when a man sank as low as that he was hardly worth the few shovelfuls of earth that are thrown over carrion to prevent them from polluting the atmosphere. Whatever might be said of Burle, however much one might try to shame him, he would assuredly begin the next day. Ah, heavens, to think of it! The money! The honor of the army! The name of Burle, that respected name, dragged through the mire! By all that was holy this could and should not be!

Presently the major softened. If he had only possessed five hundred and forty-five francs! But he had not got such an amount. On the previous day he had drunk too much cognac, just like a mere sub, and had lost shockingly at cards. It served him right—he ought to have known better! And if he was so lame he richly deserved it too; by rights, in fact, his leg ought to be much worse.

At last he crept downstairs and rang at the bell of Mme Burle's flat. Five minutes elapsed, and then the old lady appeared.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," she said; "I thought that dormouse Rose was still about. I must go and shake her."

But the major detained her.

"Where is Burle?" he asked.

"Oh, he has been snoring since nine o'clock. Would you like to knock at his door?"

"No, no, I only wanted to have a chat with you."

In the parlor Charles sat at his usual place, having just finished his exercises. He looked terrified, and his poor little white hands were tremulous. In point of fact, his grandmother, before sending him to bed, was wont to read some martial stories aloud so as to develop the latent family heroism in his bosom. That

night she had selected the episode of the Vengeur, the man-of-war freighted with dying heroes and sinking into the sea. The child, while listening, had become almost hysterical, and his head was racked as with some ghastly nightmare.

Mme Burle asked the major to let her finish the perusal. "Long live the republic!" She solemnly closed the volume. Charles was as white as a sheet.

"You see," said the old lady, "the duty of every French soldier is to die for his country."

"Yes, Grandmother."

Then the lad kissed her on the forehead and, shivering with fear, went to bed in his big room, where the faintest creak of the paneling threw him into a cold sweat.

The major had listened with a grave face. Yes, by heavens! Honor was honor, and he would never permit that wretched Burle to disgrace the old woman and the boy! As the lad was so devoted to the military profession, it was necessary that he should be able to enter Saint-Cyr with his head erect.

When Mme Burle took up the lamp to show the major out, she passed the door of the captain's room, and stopped short, surprised to see the key outside, which was a most unusual occurrence.

"Do go in," she said to Laguitte; "it is bad for him to sleep so much."

And before he could interpose she had opened the door and stood transfixed on finding the room empty. Laguitte turned crimson and looked so foolish that she suddenly understood everything, enlightened by the sudden recollection of several little incidents to which she had previously attached no importance.

"You knew it—you knew it!" she stammered. "Why was I not told? Oh, my God, to think of it! Ah, he has been stealing again—I feel it!"

She remained erect, white and rigid. Then she added in a harsh voice:

"Look you—I wish he were dead!"

Laguitte caught hold of both her hands, which for a moment he kept tightly clasped in his own. Then he left her hurriedly, for he felt a lump rising in his throat and tears coming to his eyes. Ah, by all the powers, this time his mind was quite made up.

CHAPTER IV INSPECTION

The regimental inspection was to take place at the end of the month. The major had ten days before him. On the very next morning, however, he crawled, limping, as far as the Café de Paris, where he ordered some beer. Melanie grew pale when she saw him enter, and it was with a lively recollection of a certain slap that Phrosine hastened to serve him. The major seemed very calm, however; he called for a second chair to rest his bad leg upon and drank his beer quietly like any other thirsty man. He had sat there for about an hour when he saw two officers crossing the Place du Palais—Morandot, who commanded one of the battalions of the regiment, and Captain Doucet. Thereupon he excitedly waved his cane and shouted: "Come in and have a glass of beer with me!"

The officers dared not refuse, but when the maid had brought the beer Morandot said to the major: "So you patronize this place now?"

"Yes—the beer is good."

Captain Doucet winked and asked archly: "Do you belong to the divan, Major?"

Laguitte chuckled but did not answer. Then the others began to chaff him about Melanie, and he took their remarks good-naturedly, simply shrugging his shoulders. The widow was undoubtedly a fine woman, however much people might talk. Some of those who disparaged her would, in reality, be only too pleased to win her good graces. Then turning to the little counter and assuming an engaging air, he shouted:

"Three more glasses, madame."

Melanie was so taken aback that she rose and brought the beer herself. The major detained her at the table and forgot himself so far as to softly pat the hand which she had carelessly placed on the back of a chair. Used as she was to alternate brutality and flattery, she immediately became confident, believing in a sudden whim of gallantry on the part of the "old wreck," as she was wont to style the major when talking with Phrosine. Doucet and Morandot looked at each other in surprise. Was the major actually stepping into Petticoat Burle's shoes? The regiment would be convulsed if that were the case. Suddenly, however, Laguitte, who kept his eye on the square, gave a start.

"Hallo, there's Burle!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is his time," explained Phrosine. "The captain passes every afternoon on his way from the office."

In spite of his lameness the major had risen to his feet, pushing aside the chairs as he called out: "Burle! I say—come along and have a glass."

The captain, quite aghast and unable to understand why Laguitte was at the widow's, advanced mechanically. He was so perplexed that he again hesitated at the door.

"Another glass of beer," ordered the major, and then turning to Burle, he added, "What's the matter with you? Come in. Are you afraid of being eaten alive?"

The captain took a seat, and an awkward pause followed. Melanie, who brought the beer with trembling hands, dreaded some scene which might result in the closing of her establishment. The major's gallantry made her uneasy, and she endeavored to slip away, but he invited her to drink with them, and before she could refuse he had ordered Phrosine to bring a liqueur glass of anisette, doing so with as much coolness as if he had been master of the house. Melanie was thus compelled to sit down between the captain and Laguitte, who exclaimed aggressively: "I WILL have ladies respected. We are French officers! Let us drink Madame's health!"

Burle, with his eyes fixed on his glass, smiled in an embarrassed way. The two officers, shocked at the proceedings, had already tried to get off. Fortunately the cafe was deserted, save that the domino players were having their afternoon game. At every fresh oath which came from the major they glanced around, scandalized by such an unusual accession of customers and ready to threaten Melanie that they would leave her for the Café de la Gare if the soldiery was going to invade her place like flies that buzzed about, attracted by the stickiness of the tables which Phrosine scoured only on Saturdays. She was now reclining behind the counter, already reading a novel again.

"How's this—you are not drinking with Madame?" roughly said the major to Burle. "Be civil at least!"

Then as Doucet and Morandot were again preparing to leave, he stopped them.

"Why can't you wait? We'll go together. It is only this brute who never knows how to behave himself."

The two officers looked surprised at the major's sudden bad temper. Melanie attempted to restore peace and with a light laugh placed her hands on the arms of both men. However, Laguitte disengaged himself.

"No," he roared, "leave me alone. Why does he refuse to chink glasses with you? I shall not allow you to be insulted—do you hear? I am quite sick of him."

Burle, paling under the insult, turned slightly and said to Morandot, "What does this mean? He calls me in here to insult me. Is he drunk?"

With a wild oath the major rose on his trembling legs and struck the captain's cheek with his open hand. Melanie dived and thus escaped one half of the smack. An appalling uproar ensued. Phrosine screamed behind the counter as if she herself had received the blow; the domino players also entrenched themselves behind their table in fear lest the soldiers should draw their swords and massacre them. However, Doucet and Morandot pinioned the captain to prevent him from springing at the major's throat and forcibly let him to the door. When they got him outside they succeeded in quieting him a little by repeating that Laguitte was quite in the wrong. They would lay the affair before the colonel, having witnessed it, and the colonel would give his decision. As soon as they had got Burle away they returned to the cafe where they found Laguitte in reality greatly disturbed, with tears in his eyes but affecting stolid indifference and slowly finishing his beer.

"Listen, Major," began Morandot, "that was very wrong on your part. The captain is your inferior in rank, and you know that he won't be allowed to fight you."

"That remains to be seen," answered the major.

"But how has he offended you? He never uttered a word. Two old comrades too; it is absurd."

The major made a vague gesture. "No matter. He annoyed me."

He could never be made to say anything else. Nothing more as to his motive was ever known. All the same, the scandal was a terrible one. The regiment was inclined to believe that Melanie, incensed by the captain's defection, had contrived to entrap the major, telling him some abominable stories and prevailing upon him to insult and strike Burle publicly. Who would have thought it of that old foggy Laguitte, who professed to be a woman hater? they said. So he, too, had been caught at last. Despite the general

indignation against Melanie, this adventure made her very conspicuous, and her establishment soon drove a flourishing business.

On the following day the colonel summoned the major and the captain into his presence. He censured them sternly, accusing them of disgracing their uniform by frequenting unseemly haunts. What resolution had they come to, he asked, as he could not authorize them to fight? This same question had occupied the whole regiment for the last twenty-four hours. Apologies were unacceptable on account of the blow, but as Laguitte was almost unable to stand, it was hoped that, should the colonel insist upon it, some reconciliation might be patched up.

"Come," said the colonel, "will you accept me as arbitrator?"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," interrupted the major; "I have brought you my resignation. Here it is. That settles everything. Please name the day for the duel."

Burle looked at Laguitte in amazement, and the colonel thought it his duty to protest.

"This is a most serious step, Major," he began. "Two years more and you would be entitled to your full pension."

But again did Laguitte cut him short, saying gruffly, "That is my own affair."

"Oh, certainly! Well, I will send in your resignation, and as soon as it is accepted I will fix a day for the duel."

The unexpected turn that events had taken startled the regiment. What possessed that lunatic major to persist in cutting the throat of his old comrade Burle? The officers again discussed Melanie; they even began to dream of her. There must surely be something wonderful about her since she had completely fascinated two such tough old veterans and brought them to a deadly feud. Morandot, having met Laguitte, did not disguise his concern. If he—the major—was not killed, what would he live upon? He had no fortune, and the pension to which his cross of the Legion of Honor entitled him, with the half of a full regimental pension which he would obtain on resigning, would barely find him in bread. While Morandot was thus speaking Laguitte simply stared before him with his round eyes, persevering in the dumb obstinacy born of his narrow mind; and when his companion tried to question him regarding his hatred for Burle, he simply made the same vague gesture as before and once again repeated:

"He annoyed me; so much the worse."

Every morning at mess and at the canteen the first words were: "Has the acceptance of the major's resignation arrived?" The duel was impatiently expected and ardently discussed. The majority believed that Laguitte would be run through the body in three seconds, for it was madness for a man to fight with a paralyzed leg which did not even allow him to stand upright. A few, however, shook their heads. Laguitte had never been a marvel of intellect, that was true; for the last twenty years, indeed, he had been held up as an example of stupidity, but there had been a time when he was known as the best fencer of the regiment, and although he had begun as a drummer he had won his epaulets as the commander of a battalion by the sanguine bravery of a man who is quite unconscious of danger. On the other hand, Burle fenced indifferently and passed for a poltroon. However, they would soon know what to think.

Meanwhile the excitement became more and more intense as the acceptance of Laguitte's resignation was so long in coming. The major was unmistakably the most anxious and upset of everybody. A week had passed by, and the general inspection would commence two days later. Nothing, however, had come as yet. He shuddered at the thought that he had, perhaps, struck his old friend and sent in his resignation all in vain, without delaying the exposure for a single minute. He had in reality reasoned thus: If he himself were killed he would not have the worry of witnessing the scandal, and if he killed Burle, as he expected to do, the affair would undoubtedly be hushed up. Thus he would save the honor of the army, and the little chap would be able to get in at Saint-Cyr. Ah, why wouldn't those wretched scribblers at the War Office hurry up a bit? The major could not keep still but was forever wandering about before the post office, stopping the estafettes and questioning the colonel's orderly to find out if the acceptance had arrived. He lost his sleep and, careless as to people's remarks, he leaned more and more heavily on his stick, hobbling about with no attempt to steady his gait.

On the day before that fixed for the inspection he was, as usual, on his way to the colonel's quarters when he paused, startled, to see Mme Burle (who was taking Charles to school) a few paces ahead of him. He had not met her since the scene at the Café de Paris, for she had remained in seclusion at home. Unmanned at thus meeting her, he stepped down to leave the whole sidewalk

free. Neither he nor the old lady bowed, and the little boy lifted his large inquisitive eyes in mute surprise. Mme Burle, cold and erect, brushed past the major without the least sign of emotion or recognition. When she had passed he looked after her with an expression of stupefied compassion.

"Confound it, I am no longer a man," he growled, dashing away a tear.

When he arrived at the colonel's quarters a captain in attendance greeted him with the words: "It's all right at last. The papers have come."

"Ah!" murmured Laguitte, growing very pale.

And again he beheld the old lady walking on, relentlessly rigid and holding the little boy's hand. What! He had longed so eagerly for those papers for eight days past, and now when the scraps had come he felt his brain on fire and his heart lacerated.

The duel took place on the morrow, in the barrack yard behind a low wall. The air was keen, the sun shining brightly. Laguitte had almost to be carried to the ground; one of his seconds supported him on one side, while on the other he leaned heavily, on his stick. Burle looked half asleep; his face was puffy with unhealthy fat, as if he had spent a night of debauchery. Not a word was spoken. They were all anxious to have it over.

Captain Doucet crossed the swords of the two adversaries and then drew back, saying: "Set to, gentlemen."

Burle was the first to attack; he wanted to test Laguitte's strength and ascertain what he had to expect. For the last ten days the encounter had seemed to him a ghastly nightmare which he could not fathom. At times a hideous suspicion assailed him, but he put it aside with terror, for it meant death, and he refused to believe that a friend could play him such a trick, even to set things right. Besides, Laguitte's leg reassured him; he would prick the major on the shoulder, and then all would be over.

During well-nigh a couple of minutes the swords clashed, and then the captain lunged, but the major, recovering his old suppleness of wrist, parried in a masterly style, and if he had returned the attack Burle would have been pierced through. The captain now fell back; he was livid, for he felt that he was at the mercy of the man who had just spared him. At last he understood that this was an execution.

Laguitte, squarely poised on his infirm legs and seemingly turned to stone, stood waiting. The two men looked at each other fixedly. In Burle's blurred eyes there arose a supplication—a prayer for pardon. He knew why he was going to die, and like a child he promised not to transgress again. But the major's eyes remained implacable; honor had spoken, and he silenced his emotion and his pity.

"Let it end," he muttered between his teeth.

Then it was he who attacked. Like a flash of lightning his sword flamed, flying from right to left, and then with a resistless thrust it pierced the breast of the captain, who fell like a log without even a groan.

Laguitte had released his hold upon his sword and stood gazing at that poor old rascal Burle, who was stretched upon his back with his fat stomach bulging out.

"Oh, my God! My God!" repeated the major furiously and despairingly, and then he began to swear.

They led him away, and, both his legs failing him, he had to be supported on either side, for he could not even use his stick.

Two months later the ex-major was crawling slowly along in the sunlight down a lonely street of Vauchamp, when he again found himself face to face with Mme Burle and little Charles. They were both in deep mourning. He tried to avoid them, but he now only walked with difficulty, and they advanced straight upon him without hurrying or slackening their steps. Charles still had the same gentle, girlish, frightened face, and Mme Burle retained her stern, rigid demeanor, looking even harsher than ever.

As Laguitte shrank into the corner of a doorway to leave the whole street to them, she abruptly stopped in front of him and stretched out her hand. He hesitated and then took it and pressed it, but he trembled so violently that he made the old lady's arm shake. They exchanged glances in silence.

"Charles," said the boy's grandmother at last, "shake hands with the major." The boy obeyed without understanding. The major, who was very pale, barely ventured to touch the child's frail fingers; then, feeling that he ought to speak, he stammered out: "You still intend to send him to Saint-Cyr?"

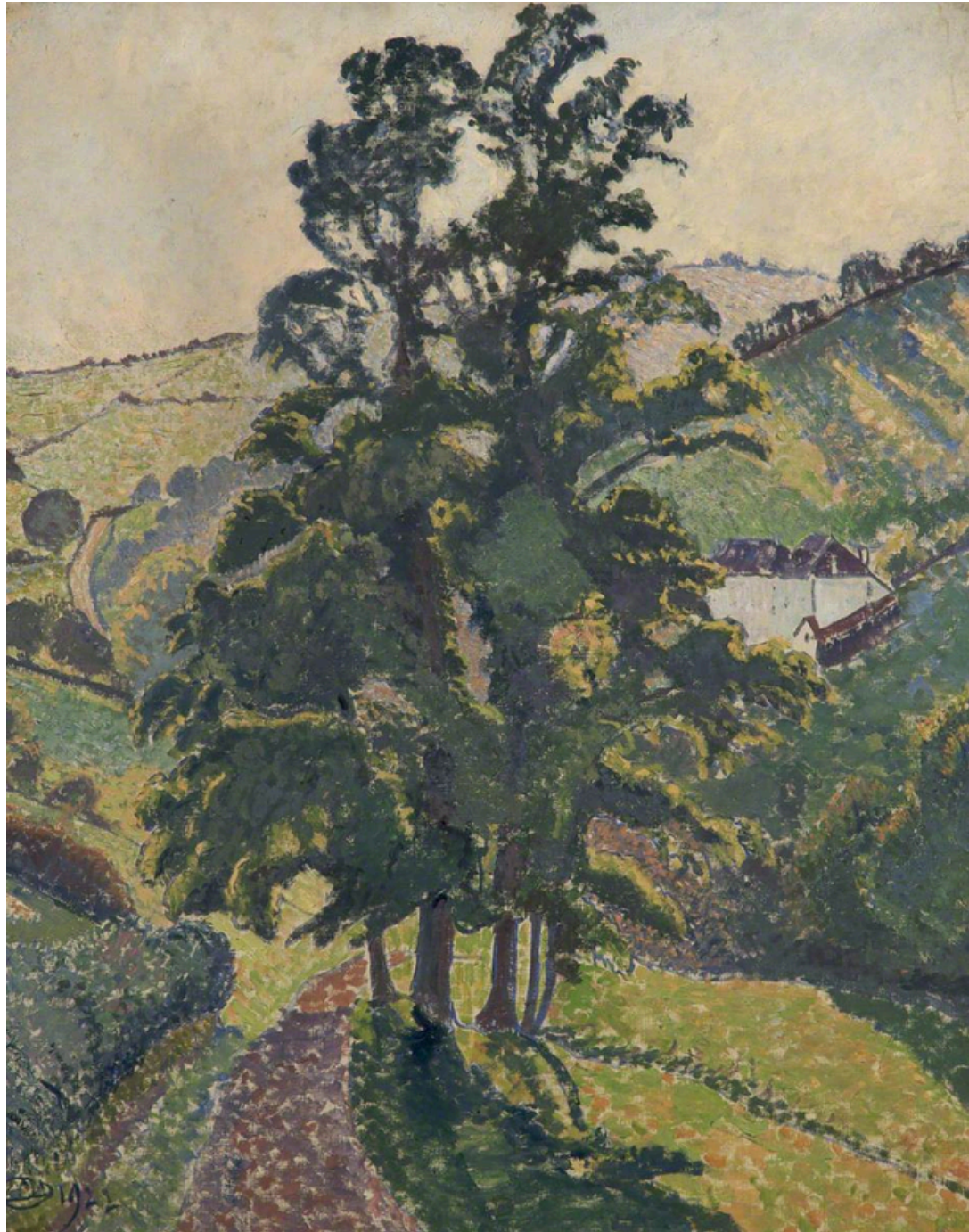
"Of course, when he is old enough," answered Mme Burle.

But during the following week Charles was carried off by typhoid fever. One evening his grandmother had again read him the story of the Vengeur to make him bold, and in the night he had become delirious. The poor little fellow died of fright.

Popular Romances of the West of England **The Saints**

By Robert Hunt F.R.S.

View in the Dart Valley, Devon
Lucien Pissarro



THE SAINTS.

"With great pretended spiritual motions,
And many fine whimsical notions,
With blind zeal and large devotions."
Samuel Butler.

LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS.

"This ilkē monk let olde thingēs pace,
And held after the newē world the trace.
He gave not of the text a pulled hen,
That saith, that hunters be not holy men,
Ne that a monk, when he is reckēless,
Is like to a fish that is waterless;
This is to say, a monk out of his cloister,
This ilkē text held he not worth an oyster,
And I say his opinion was good."
The Canterbury Tales—Chaucer.

The process through which a man, who has made himself remarkable to his ignorant fellow-men, is passed after death—first, into the hero performing fabulous exploits, and eventually into the giant—is not difficult to understand.

The remembrance of great deeds, and the memory of virtues, —even in modern days, when the exaggerations of votaries are subdued by the influence of education,—ever tends to bring them out in strong contrast with the surrounding objects. The mass of men form the background, as it were, of the picture, and the hero or the saint stands forth in all his brightness of colour in the foreground.

Amidst the uneducated Celtic population who inhabited Old Cornwall, it was the practice, as with the Celts of other countries, to exalt their benefactors with all the adornments of that hyperbole which distinguishes their songs and stories. When the first Christian missionaries dwelt amongst this people, they impressed them with the daring which they exhibited by the persecution which they uncomplainingly endured and the holy lives they led.

Those who were morally so superior to the living men, were represented as physically so to their children, and every generation adorned the relation which it had received with the ornaments derived from their own imaginations, which had been tutored amidst the severer scenes of nature; and consequently the warrior, or the holy man, was transmuted into the giant. If to this we add the desire which was constantly shewn by the earlier priesthood to persuade the people of their miraculous powers—of the direct interference of Heaven in their behalf—and of the violent conflicts which they were occasionally enduring with the enemy of the human race, there will be no difficulty in marking out the steps by which the ordinary man has become an extraordinary hero. When we hear of the saints to whose memories the parish churches are dedicated, being enabled to hurl rocks of enormous size through the air, to carry them in their pockets, and indeed to use them as playthings, we perceive that the traditions of the legitimate giants, have been transferred to, and mixed up with, the memories of a more recent people.

In addition to legends of the Titanic type, this section will include a few of the true monastic character. The only purpose I have in giving these is to preserve, as examples, some curious superstitions which have not yet entirely lost their hold on the people.

THE CROWZA STONES.

St Just, from his home in Penwith, being weary of having little to do, except offering prayers for the tanners and fishermen, went on a visit to the hospitable St Keverne, who had fixed his hermitage in a well-selected spot, not far from the Lizard headland. The holy brothers rejoiced together, and in full feeding and deep drinking they pleasantly passed the time. St Just gloried in the goodly chalice from which he drank the richest of wines, and envied St Keverne the possession of a cup of such rare value. Again and again did he pledge St Keverne; their holy bond of brotherhood was to be for ever; Heaven was to witness the purity of their friendship, and to the world they were to become patterns of ecclesiastical love.

The time came when St Just felt he must return to his flock; and repeating over again his vows, and begging St Keverne to return his visit, he departed—St Keverne sending many a blessing after his good brother.

The Saint of the west, had not left his brother of the south, many hours before the latter missed his cup. Diligent search was

made in every corner of his dwelling, but no cup could be found. At length St Keverne could not but feel that he had been robbed of his treasure by his western friend. That one in whom he had placed such confidence—one to whom he had opened his heart, and to whom he had shewn the most unstinting hospitality—should have behaved so treacherously, overcame the serenity of the good man. His rage was excessive. After the first burst was over, and reason reasserted her power, St Keverne felt that his wisest course was to pursue the thief, inflict summary punishment on him, and recover his cup. The thought was followed by a firm resolve, and away St Keverne started in pursuit of St Just. Passing over Crowza Down, some of the boulders of "Ironstone" which are scattered over the surface caught his eye, and presently he whipped a few of these stone pebbles into his pockets, and hastened onward.

When he drew near Tre-men-keverne he spied St Just. St Keverne worked himself up into a boiling rage, and toiled with increased speed up the hill, hallooing to the saintly thief, who pursued his way for some time in the well-assumed quiet of conscious innocence.

Long and loud did St Keverne call on St Just to stop, but the latter was deaf to all calls of the kind—on he went, quickening, however, his pace a little.

At length St Keverne came within a stone's throw of the dissembling culprit, and calling him a thief—adding thereto some of the most choice epithets from his holy vocabulary—taking a stone from his pocket, he let it fly after St Just.

The stone falling heavily by the side of St Just convinced him that he had to deal with an awkward enemy, and that he had best make all the use he could of his legs. He quietly untied the chalice, which he had fastened to his girdle, and let it fall to the ground. Then, still as if unconscious of his follower, he set off to run as fast as his ponderous body would allow his legs to carry him. St Keverne came up to where his cup glistened in the sunshine. He had recovered his treasure, he should get no good out of the false friend, and he was sadly jaded with his long run. Therefore he took, one by one, the stones from his pockets—he hurled them, fairly aimed, after the retreating culprit, and cursed him as he went.

There the pebbles remain where they fell,—the peculiarity of the stone being in all respects unlike anything around, but being clearly the Crowza stones,—attesting the truth of the legend; and their weights, each one being several hundred pounds, proving the power of the giant saint.

Many have been the attempts made to remove these stones. They are carried away easily enough by day, but they ever return to the spot on which they now repose, at night.

THE LONGSTONE. THE GIANT'S HAT AND STAFF.

Some say it was St Roach, others refer it to St Austell; but all agree in one thing, that the Longstone was once the staff of some holy man, and that its present state is owing to the malignant persecution of the demon of darkness. It happened after this manner. The good saint who had been engaged in some mission was returning to his cell across St Austell Downs. The night had been fine, the clearness of the sky and the brightness of the stars conducted to religious thoughts, and those of the saint fled heavenwards. The devil was wandering abroad that night, and maliciously he resolved to play a trick upon his enemy. The saint was wrapt in thought. The devil was working his dire spells. The sky became black, the stars disappeared, and suddenly a terrific rush of wind seized the saint, whirled him round and round, and at last blew his hat high into the air. The hat went ricocheting over the moor and the saint after it, the devil enjoying the sport. The long stick which the saint carried impeded his progress in the storm, and he stuck it into the ground. On went the hat, speedily followed the saint over and round the moor, until thoroughly wearied out, he at length gave up the chase. He, now exposed to the beat of the tempest bareheaded, endeavoured to find his way to his cell, and thought to pick up his staff on the way. No staff could be found in the[8] darkness, and his hat was, he thought, gone irrecoverably. At length the saint reached his cell, he quieted his spirit by prayer, and sought the forgetfulness of sleep, safe under the protection of the holy cross, from all the tricks of the devil. The evil one, however, was at work on the wild moor, and by his incantations he changed the hat and the staff into two rocks. Morning came, the saint went abroad seeking for his lost covering and support. He found them both—one a huge circular boulder, and the other a long stone which remains to this day.

The Saint's, or, as it was often called, the Giant's Hat was

removed in 1798 by a regiment of soldiers who were encamped near it. They felt satisfied that this mysterious stone was the cause of the wet season which rendered their camp unpleasant, and consequently they resolved to remove the evil spell by destroying it.

ST SENNEN AND ST JUST.

These saints held rule over adjoining parishes; but, like neighbours, not unfrequently, they quarrelled. We know not the cause which made their angry passions rise; but no doubt the saints were occasionally exposed to the influences of the evil principle, which appears to be one of the ruling powers of the world. It is not often that we have instances of excess of passion in man or woman without some evidence of the evil resulting from it. Every tempest in the physical world leaves its mark on the face of the earth. Every tempest in the moral world, in a similar manner, leaves some scar to tell of its ravages on the soul. A most enduring monument in granite tells us of the rage to which those two holy men were the victims. As we have said, there is no record of the origin of the duel which was fought between St Just and St Sennen; but, in the fury of their rage, they tore each a rock from the granite mass, and hurled it onwards to destroy his brother. They were so well aimed that both saints must have perished had the rocks been allowed to travel as intended. A merciful hand guided them, though in opposite directions, in precisely the same path. The huge rocks came together; so severe was the blow of impact that they became one mass, and fell to the ground, to remain a monument of the impotent rage of two giants.

LEGENDS OF ST LEVEN.

I.—THE SAINT AND JOHANA.

The walls of what are supposed to be the hut of St Leven are still to be seen at Bodellen. If you walk from Bodellen to St Leven Church, on passing near the stile in Rospletha you will see a three-cornered garden. This belonged to a woman who is only known to us as Johana. Johana's Garden is still the name of the place. One Sunday morning St Leven was passing over the stile to go as usual to his fishing-place below the church, to catch his dinner. Johana was in the garden picking pot-herbs at the time, and she lectured the holy man for fishing on a Sunday. They came to high words, and St Leven told Johana that there was no more sin in taking his dinner from the sea than she herself committed in taking hers from the garden. The saint called her foolish Johana, and said if another of her name was christened in his well she should be a bigger fool than Johana herself. From that day to this no child called Johana has been christened in St Leven. All parents who desire to give that name to their daughters, dreading St Leven's curse, take the children to Sennen.

II.—THE SAINT'S PATH.

The path along which St Leven was accustomed to walk from Bodellen, by Rospletha, on to St Leven's Rocks, as they are still called, may be yet seen; the grass grows greener wherever the good priest trod than in any other part of the fields through which the footpath passes.

III.—THE ST LEVEN STONE.

On the south side of the church, to the east of the porch, is a rock known by the above name. It is broken in two, and the fissure is filled in with ferns and wild flowers, while the grass grows rank around it. On this rock St Leven often sat to rest after the fatigue of fishing; and desiring to leave some enduring memento of himself in connexion with this his rude but favourite seat, he one day gave it a blow with his fist and cracked it through. He prayed over the rock, and uttered the following prophecy:—

"When, with panniers astride,
A packhorse one can ride
Through St Leven's Stone,
The world will be done."

This stone must have been venerated for the saint's sake when the church was built, or it would certainly have been employed for the building. It is more than fifty years since I first made acquaintance, as a child, with the St Leven Stone, and it may be a satisfaction to many to know that the progress of separation is an exceedingly slow one. I cannot detect the slightest difference in the width of the fissure now and then. At the present slow rate of opening, the packhorse and panniers will not be able to pass through the rock for many thousands of years to come. We

need not, therefore, place much reliance on those prophecies which give but a limited duration to this planet.

IV.—THE TWO BREAMS.

Although in common with many of the churches in the remote districts of Cornwall, "decay's effacing fingers" have been allowed to do their work in St Leven Church, yet there still remains some of the ornamental work which once adorned it. Much of the carving is irremediably gone; but still the inquirer will find that it once told the story of important events in the life of the good St Leven. Two fishes on the same hook form the device, which appears at one time to have prevailed in this church. These are to commemorate a remarkable incident in St Leven's life. One lovely evening about sunset, St Leven was on his rocks fishing. There was a heavy pull upon his line, and drawing it in, he found two brems on the same hook. The good saint, anxious to serve both alike, to avoid, indeed, even the appearance of partiality, took both the fishes off the hook, and cast them back into the sea. Again they came to the hook, and again were they returned to their native elements. The line was no sooner cast a third time than the same two fishes hooked themselves once more. St Leven thought there must be some reason unknown to him for this strange occurrence, so he took both the fishes home with him. When the saint reached Bodellen, he found his sister, St Breage, had come to visit him with two children. Then he thought he saw the hand of Providence at work in guiding the fish to his hook.

Even saints are blind when they attempt to fathom the ways of the Unseen. The fish were, of course, cooked for supper; and the saint having asked a blessing upon their savoury meal, all sat down to partake of it. The children had walked far, and they were ravenously hungry. They ate their suppers with rapidity, and not taking time to pick out the bones of the fish, they were both choked. The apparent blessing was thus transformed into a curse, and the bream has from that day forward ever gone by the name, amongst fishermen, of "choke children."

There are many disputes as to the fish concerned in this legend. Some of the fishermen of St Leven parish have insisted upon their being "chad," (the shad, *clupeida alosa*;) while others, with the strong evidence afforded by the bony structure of the fish, will have it to have been the bream, (*cyprinus brama*.) My young readers warned by the name, should be equally careful in eating either of those fish.

SAINT KEYNE.

Braghan, or Brechan, was a king in Wales, and the builder of the town of Brecknock. This worthy old king and saint was the happy father of twenty-six children, or, as some say, twenty-four. Of these, fourteen or fifteen were sainted for their holiness, and their portraits are preserved within a fold of the kingly robe of the saint, their father, in the window at St Neot's Church, bearing the inscription, "Sante Brechane, cum omnibus sanctis, ora pro nobis," and known as the young women's window.

Of the holy children settled in Cornwall, we learn that the following gave their names to Cornish churches:—

1. John, giving name to the Church of St Ive.
2. Endellient, " " Endellion.
3. Menfre, " " St Minver.
4. Tethe, " " St Teath.
5. Mabena, " " St Mabyn.
6. Merewenna, " " Marham.
7. Wenna, " " St Wenn.
8. Keyne, " " St Keyne.
9. Yse, " " St Issey.
10. Morwenna, " " Morwinstow.
11. Cleder, " " St Clether.
12. Keri, " " Egloskerry.
13. Helie, " " Egloshayle.
14. Adwent, " " Advent.
15. Lanent, " " Lelant.

Of this remarkable family St Keyne stands out as the brightest star. Lovely beyond measure, she wandered over the country safe, even in lawless times, from insult, by "the strength of her purity."

We find this virtuous woman performing miracles wherever she went. The district now known by the name of Keynsham, in Somersetshire, was in those days infested with serpents. St Keyne, rivaling St Hilda of the Northern Isle, changed them all into coils of stone, and there they are in the quarries at the present time to attest the truth of the legend. Geologists, with more learning than poetry, term them Ammonites, deriving their name from the

horn of Jupiter Ammon, as if the Egyptian Jupiter was likely to have charmed serpents in England. We are satisfied to leave the question for the consideration of our readers. After a life spent in the conversion of sinners, the building of churches, and the performance of miracles, this good woman retired into Cornwall, and in one of its most picturesque valleys, she sought and found that quiet which was conducive to a happy termination of a well-spent life. She desired, above all things, "peace on earth;" and she hoped to benefit the world, by giving to woman a chance of being equal to her lord and master. A beautiful well of water was near the home of the saint, and she planted, with her blessing, four trees around it—the withy, the oak, the elm, and the ash. When the hour of her death was drawing near, St Keyne caused herself to be borne on a litter to the shade which she had formed, and soothed by the influence of the murmur of the flowing fountain, she blessed the waters, and gave them their wondrous power, thus quaintly described by Carew:—"Next, I will relate to you, another of the Cornish natural wonders—viz., St Keyne's Well; but lest you make wonder, first at the sainte, before you notice the well, you must understand that this was not Kayne the Manqueller, but one of a gentler spirit and milder sex—to wit, a woman. He who caused the spring to be pictured, added this rhyme for an explanation:—

'In name, in shape, in quality,
This well is very quaint;
The name to lot of Kayne befell,
No over-holy saint.
The shape, four trees of divers kind,
Withy, oak, elm, and ash,
Make with their roots an arched roof,
Whose floor this spring does wash.
The quality, that man or wife,
Whose chance or choice attains,
First of this sacred stream to drink,
Thereby the mastery gains."

ST DENNIS'S BLOOD.

The patron saint of the parish church of St Dennis was born in the city of Athens, in the reign of Tiberius. His name and fame have full record in the "History of the Saints of the Church of Rome." How his name was connected with this remote parish is not clearly made out. We learn, however, that the good man was beheaded at Montmartre, and that he walked after his execution, with his head under his arm, to the place in Paris which still bears his name. At the very time when the decapitation took place in Paris, blood fell on the stones of this churchyard in Cornwall. Previously to the breaking out of the plague in London, the stains of the blood of St Dennis were again seen; and during our wars with the Dutch, the defeat of the English fleet was foretold by the rain of gore in this remote and sequestered place. Hals, the Cornish historian, with much gravity, informs us that he had seen some of the stones with blood upon them. Whenever this phenomenon occurs again we may expect some sad calamity to be near.

Some years since a Cornish gentleman was cruelly murdered, and his body thrown into a brook. I have been very lately shewn stones taken from this brook with bright red spots of some vegetable growth on them. It is said that ever since the murder the stones in this brook are spotted with gore, whereas they never were so previously to this dreadful deed.

ST KEA'S BOAT.

St Kea, a young Irish saint, stood on the southern shores of Ireland and saw the Christian missionaries departing to carry the blessed Word to the heathens of Western England. He watched their barks fade beneath the horizon, and he felt that he was left to a solitude which was not fitted to one in the full energy of young life, and burning with zeal.

The saint knelt on a boulder of granite lying on the shore, and he prayed with fervour that Heaven would order it so that he might diffuse his religious fervour amongst the barbarians of Cornwall. He prayed on for some time, not observing the rising of the tide. When he had poured out his full soul, he awoke to the fact, not only that the waves were washing around the stone on which he knelt, but that the stone was actually floating on the water. Impressed with the miracle, St Kea sprang to his feet, and looking towards the setting sun, with his cross uplifted, he exclaimed, "To Thee, and only to Thee, my God, do I trust my soul!"

Onward floated the granite, rendered buoyant by supernatural

power. Floated hither and thither by the tides, it swam on; blown sometimes in one direction, and sometimes in another, by the varying winds, days and nights were spent upon the waters. The faith of St Kea failed not; three times a day he knelt in prayer to God. At all other times he stood gazing on the heavens. At length the faith of the saint being fairly tried, the moorstone boat floated steadily up the river, and landed at St Kea, which place he soon Christianised, and there stands to this day this monument of St Kea's sincere belief.

ST GERMAN'S WELL.

The good St German was, it would appear, sent into Cornwall in the reign of the Emperor Valentinian, mainly to suppress the Pelagian heresy. The inhabitants of the shores of the Tamar had long been schooled into the belief in original sin, and they would not endure its denial from the lips of a stranger. In this they were supported by the monks, who had already a firm footing in the land, and who taught the people implicit obedience to their religious instructors, faith in election, and that all human efforts were unavailing, unless supported by priestly aid. St German was a man with vast powers of endurance. He preached his doctrines of freewill, and of the value of good works, notwithstanding the outcry raised against him. His miracles were of the most remarkable character, and sufficiently impressive to convince a large body of the Cornish people that he was an inspired priest. St German raised a beautiful church, and built a monastic house for the relief of poor people. Yet notwithstanding the example of the pure life of the saint, and his unceasing study to do good, a large section of the priests and the people never ceased to persecute him. To all human endurance there is a limit, and even that of the saint weakened eventually, before the never-ceasing annoyances by which he was hemmed in.

One Sabbath morning the priest attended as usual to his Christian duties, when he was interrupted by a brawl amongst the outrageous people, who had come in from all parts of the country with a determination to drive him from the place of his adoption. The holy man prayed for his persecutors, and he entreated them to calm their angry passions and listen[18] to his healing words. But no words could convey any healing balm to their stormy hearts. At length his brethren, fearing that his life was in danger, begged him to fly, and eventually he left the church by a small door near the altar, while some of the monks endeavoured to tranquillise the people. St German went, a sad man, to the cliffs at the Rame head, and there alone he wept in agony at the failure of his labours. So intense was the soul-suffering of this holy man, that the rocks felt the power of spirit-struggling, and wept with him. The eyes of man, a spiritual creation, dry after the outburst of sorrow, but when the gross forms of matter are compelled to sympathise with spiritual sorrow, they remain for ever under the influence; and from that day the tears of the cliffs have continued to fall, and the Well of St German attests to this day of the saint's agony. The saint was not allowed to remain in concealment long. The crowd of opposing priests and the peasantry were on his track. Hundreds were on the hill, and arming themselves with stones, they descended with shouts, determined to destroy him. St German prayed to God for deliverance, and immediately a rush, as of thunder, was heard upon the hills—a chariot surrounded by flames, and flashing light in all directions, was seen rapidly approaching. The crowd paused, fell back, and the flaming car passed on to where St German knelt. There were two bright angels in the chariot; they lifted the persecuted saint from the ground, and placing him between them, ascended into the air.

"Curse your persecutors," said the angels. The saint cursed them; and from that time all holiness left the church he had built. The saint was borne to other lands, and lived to effect great good. On the rocks the burnt tracks of the chariot wheels were long to be seen, and the Well of Tears still flows.

HOW ST PIRAN REACHED CORNWALL.

Good men are frequently persecuted by those whom they have benefited the most. The righteous Piran had, by virtue of his sanctity, been enabled to feed ten Irish kings and their armies for ten days together with three cows. He brought to life by his prayers the dogs which had been killed while hunting the elk and the boar, and even restored to existence many of the warriors who had fallen on the battlefield. Notwithstanding this, and his incomparable goodness, some of these kings condemned him to be cast off a precipice into the sea, with a millstone around his neck.

On a boisterous day, a crowd of the lawless Irish assembled on

the brow of a beetling cliff, with Piran in chains. By great labour they had rolled a huge millstone to the top of the hill, and Piran was chained to it. At a signal from one of the kings, the stone and the saint were rolled to the edge of, and suddenly over, the cliff into the Atlantic. The winds were blowing tempestuously, the heavens were dark with clouds, and the waves white with crested foam. No sooner was Piran and the millstone launched into space, than the sun shone out brightly, casting the full lustre of its beams on the holy man, who sat tranquilly on the descending stone. The winds died away, and the waves became smooth as a mirror. The moment the millstone touched the water, hundreds were converted to Christianity who saw this miracle. St Piran floated on safely to Cornwall; he landed on the 5th of March on the sands which bear his name. He lived amongst the Cornish men until he attained the age of 206 years.

ST PERRAN, THE MINERS' SAINT.

St Piran, or St Perran, has sometimes gained the credit of discovering tin in Cornwall; yet Usher places the date of his birth about the year 352; and the merchants of Tyre are said to have traded with Cornwall for tin as early as the days of King Solomon.

There are three places in Cornwall to which the name of Perran is given:—

Perran-Aworthall—i.e., Perran on the noted River.

Perran-Uthno—i.e., Perran the Little.

Perran-Zabuloe—i.e., Perran in the Sands.

This sufficiently proves that the saint, or some one bearing that name, was eminently popular amongst the people; and in St Perran we have an example—of which several instances are given—of the manner in which a very ancient event is shifted forward, as it were, for the purpose of investing some popular hero with additional reasons for securing the devotion of the people, and of drawing them to his shrine.

Picrous, or Picras, is another name which has been floated by tradition, down the stream of time, in connexion with the discovery of tin; and in the eastern portion of Cornwall, Picrousdag, the second Thursday before Christmas-day, is kept as the tanners' holiday.

The popular story of the discovery of tin is, however, given, with all its anachronisms.

THE DISCOVERY OF TIN.

St Piran, or St Perran, leading his lonely life on the plains which now bear his name, devoted himself to the study of the objects which presented themselves to his notice. The good saint decorated the altar in his church with the choicest flowers, and his cell was adorned with the crystals which he could collect from the neighbouring rocks. In his wanderings on the sea-shore, St Perran could not but observe the numerous mineral veins running through the slate rocks forming the beautiful cliffs on this coast. Examples of every kind he collected; and on one occasion, when preparing his humble meal, a heavy black stone was employed to form a part of the fireplace. The fire was more intense than usual, and a stream of beautiful white metal flowed out of the fire. Great was the joy of the saint; he perceived that God, in His goodness, had discovered to him something which would be useful to man. St Perran communicated his discovery to St Chiwidden. They examined the shores together, and Chiwidden, who was learned in the learning of the East, soon devised a process for producing this metal in large quantities. The two saints called the Cornish men together. They told them of their treasures, and they taught them how to dig the ore from the earth, and how, by the agency of fire, to obtain the metal. Great was the joy in Cornwall, and many days of feasting followed the announcement. Mead and metheglin, with other drinks, flowed in abundance; and vile rumour says the saints and their people were rendered equally unstable thereby. "Drunk as a Perraner," has certainly passed into a proverb from that day.

The riot of joy at length came to an end, and steadily, seriously, the tribes of Perran and St Agnes set to work. They soon accumulated a vast quantity of this precious metal; and when they carried it to the southern coasts, the merchants from Gaul eagerly purchased it of them. The noise of the discovery, even in those days, rapidly extended itself; and even the cities of Tyre learned that a metal precious to them, was to be obtained in a country far to the west. The Phœnician navigators were not long in finding out the Tin Islands; and great was the alarm amidst the Cornish Britons lest the source of their treasure should be discovered. Then it was they intrenched the whole of St Agnes beacon; then it was they built the numerous hill castles,

which have puzzled the antiquarian; then it was that they constructed the Rounds,—amongst which the Perran Round remains as a remarkable example,—all of them to protect their tin ground. So resolved were the whole of the population of the district to preserve the tin workings, that they prevented any foreigner from landing on the mainland, and they established tin markets on the islands on the coast. On these islands were hoisted the standard of Cornwall, a white cross on a black ground, which was the device of St Perran and St Chiwidden, symbolising the black tin ore and the white metal.

ST NEOT, THE PIGMY.

Whence came the saint, or hermit, who has given his name to two churches in England, is not known.

Tradition, however, informs us that he was remarkably small in stature, though exquisitely formed. He could not, according to all accounts, have been more than fifteen inches high. Yet, though so diminutive a man, he possessed a soul which was giant-like in the power of his faith. The Church of St Neot, which has been built on the ancient site of the hermit's cell, is situated in a secluded valley, watered by a branch of the river Fowey. The surrounding country is, even now, but very partially cultivated, and it must have been, a few centuries since, a desert waste; but the valley is, and no doubt ever has been, beautifully wooded. Not far from the church is the holy well, in which the pious anchorite would stand immersed to his neck, whilst he repeated the whole Book of Psalms. Great was the reward for such an exercise of devotion and faith. Out of numerous miracles we select only a few, which have some especial character about them.

ST NEOT AND THE FOX.

One day the holy hermit was standing in his bath chanting the Psalms, when he heard the sound of huntsmen approaching. Whether the saint feared ridicule or ill-treatment, we know not; but certainly he left some psalms unsung that day, and hastily gathering up his clothes, he fled to his cell.

In his haste the goodman lost his shoe, and a hungry fox having escaped the hunters, came to the spring to drink. Having quenched the fever of thirst, and being hungry, he spied the saint's shoe, and presently ate it. The hermit despatched his servant to look for his shoe; and, lo, he found the fox cast into a deep sleep, and the thongs of the shoe hanging out of his vile mouth. Of course the shoe was pulled out of his stomach, and restored to the saint.

ST NEOT AND THE DOE.

Again, on another day, when the hermit was in his fountain, a lovely doe, flying from the huntsmen, fell down on the edge of the well, imploring, with tearful eyes and anxious pantings, the aid of St Neot. The dogs followed in full chase, ready to pounce on the trembling doe, and eager to tear her in pieces. They saw the saint, and one look from his holy eyes sent them flying back into the woods, more speedily, if possible, than they rushed out of it.

The huntsman too came on, ready to discharge his arrow into the heart of the doe; but, impressed with the sight he saw, he fell on his knees, cast away his quiver, and became from that day a follower of the saint's, giving him his horn to hang, as a memorial, in the church, where it was long to be seen. The huntsman became eventually one of the monks of the neighbouring house of St Petroch.

ST NEOT AND THE THIEVES.

When St Neot was abbot, some thieves came by night and stole the oxen belonging to the farm of the monastery. The weather was most uncertain,—the seed-time was passing away,—and a fine morning rendered it imperative that the ploughs should be quickly employed. There were no oxen. Great was the difficulty, and earnest were the abbot's prayers. In answer to them, the wild stags came in from the forests, and tamely offered their necks to the yoke. When unyoked in the evening, they resorted to their favourite pastures, but voluntarily returned each morning to their work. The report of this event reached the ears of the thieves. They became penitent, and restored the oxen to the monastery. Not only so, but they consecrated their days to devotional exercises. The oxen being restored, the stags were dismissed; but they bore for ever a white ring, like a yoke, about their necks, and they held a charmed life, safe from the shafts of the hunters.

ST NEOT AND THE FISHES.

On one occasion, when the saint was at his devotions, an angel

appeared unto him, and shewing him three fishes in the well, he said, "These are for thee; take one each day for thy daily food, and the number shall never grow less: the choice of one of three fishes shall be thine all the days of thy life." Long time passed by, and daily a fish was taken from the well, and three awaited his coming every morning. At length the saint, who shared in human suffering notwithstanding his piety, fell ill; and being confined to his bed, St Neot sent his servant Barius to fetch him a fish for his dinner. Barius being desirous of pleasing, if possible, the sick man's taste, went to the well and caught two fishes. One of these he broiled, and the other he boiled. Nicely cooked, Barius took them on a dish to his master's bedside, who started up alarmed for the consequences of the act of his servant, in disobedience to the injunctions of the angel. So good a man could not allow wrath to get the mastery of him; so he sat up in his bed, and, instead of eating, he prayed with great earnestness over the cooked fish. At last the spirit of holiness exerted its full power. St Neot commanded Barius to return at once and cast the fish into the well. Barius went and did as his master had told him to do; and, lo, the moment the fishes fell into the water they recovered life, and swam away with the third fish, as if nothing had happened to them.

All these things and more are recorded in the windows of St Neot's Church.

ST NECTAN'S KIEVE AND THE LONELY SISTERS.

Far up the deep and rocky vale of Trevillet, in the parish of Tintagel, stands on a pile of rocks the little chapel of the good St Nectan. No holy man ever selected a more secluded, or a more lovely spot in which to pass a religious life. From the chapel rock you look over the deep valley full of trees. You see here and there the lovely trout-stream, running rapidly towards the sea; and, opening in the distance, there rolls the mighty ocean itself. Although this oratory is shut in amongst the woods, so as to be invisible to any one approaching it by land, until they are close upon it, it is plainly seen by the fishermen or by the sailor far off at sea; and in olden time the prayers of St Nectan were sought by all whose business was in the "deep waters."

The river runs steadily along within a short distance of St Nectan's Chapel, and then it suddenly leaps over the rock—a beautiful fall of water—into St Nectan's Kieve. This deep rock-basin, brimming with the clearest water, overflows, and another waterfall carries the river to the lower level of the valley. Standing here within a circular wall of rocks, you see how the falling fluid has worked back the softer slate-rock until it has reached the harder masses, which are beautifully polished by the same agent. Mosses, ferns, and grasses decorate the fall, fringing every rock with a native drapery of the most exquisite beauty. Here is one of the wildest, one of the most untrained, and, at the same time, one of the most beautiful spots in Cornwall, full of poetry, and coloured by legend. Yet here comes prosaic man, and by one stroke of his everyday genius, he adds, indeed, a colour to the violet. You walk along the valley, through paths trodden out of the undergrowth, deviously wandering up hill, or down hill, as rock or tree has interposed. Many a spot of quiet beauty solicits you to loiter, and loitering, you feel that there are places from which the winds appear to gather poetry. You break the spell, or the ear, catching the murmur of the waters, dispels the illusions which have been created by the eye, and you wander forward anxious to reach the holy "Kieve,"—to visit the saint's hermitage. Here, say you, is the place to hold "commune with Nature's works, and view her charms unrolled," when, lo, a well-made door painted lead colour, with a real substantial lock, bars your way, and Fancy, with everything that is holy, flies away before the terrible words which inform you that trespassers will be punished, and that the key can be obtained at ——. Well was it that Mr Wilkie Collins gave "up the attempt to discover Nighton's Kieve;" for had he, when he had found it, discovered this evidence of man's greedy soul, it would have convinced him that the "evil genius of fairy mythology," who so cautiously hid "the nymph of the waterfall," was no other than the farmer, who, as he told me, "owns the fee," and one who is resolved also, to pocket the fee, before any pilgrim can see the oratory and the waterfall of St Nectan. Of course this would have turned the placid current of the thoughts of "the Rambler beyond Railways," which now flow so pleasantly, into a troubled stream of biliary bitterness. St Nectan placed in the little bell-tower of his secluded chapel a silver bell, the notes of which were so clear and penetrating that they could be heard far off at sea. When the notes came through the air, and fell on the ears of the seamen, they knew that St Nectan was about to pray for them, and they prostrated

themselves before Heaven for a few minutes, and thus endeavoured to win the blessing.

St Nectan was on the bed of death. There was strife in the land. A severe struggle was going on between the Churchmen, and endeavours were being made to introduce a new faith.

The sunset of life gave to the saint the spirit of prophecy, and he told his weeping followers that the light of their religion would grow dim in the land; but that a spark would for ever live amidst the ashes, and that in due time it would kindle into a flame, and burn more brightly than ever. His silver bell, he said, should never ring for others than the true believer. He would enclose it in the rock of the Kieve; but when again the true faith revived, it should be recovered, and rung, to cheer once more the land. One lovely summer evening, while the sun was slowly sinking towards the golden sea, St Nectan desired his attendants to carry him to the bank which overhung the "Kieve," and requested them to take the bell from the tower and bring it to him.

There he lay for some time in silent prayer, waiting as if for a sign, then slowly raising himself from the bed on which he had been placed, he grasped the silver bell. He rang it sharply and clearly three times, and then he dropped it into the transparent waters of the Kieve. He watched it disappear, and then he closed his eyes in death. On receiving the bell the waters were troubled, but they soon became clear as before, and the bell was nowhere to be seen. St Nectan died, and two strange ladies from a foreign land came and took possession of his oratory, and all that belonged unto the holy man. They placed—acting, as it was believed, on the wishes of the saint himself—his body, all the sacramental plate, and other sacred treasures, in a large oak chest. They turned the waters of the fall aside, and dug a grave in the river bed, below the Kieve, in which they placed this precious chest. The waters were then returned to their natural course, and they murmur ever above the grave of him who loved them. The silver bell was concealed in the Kieve, and the saint with all that belonged to his holy office rested beneath the river bed. The oratory was dismantled, and the two ladies, women evidently of high birth, chose it for their dwelling. Their seclusion was perfect. "Both appeared to be about the same age, and both were inflexibly taciturn. One was never seen without the other. If they ever left the house, they only left it to walk in the more unfrequented parts of the wood; they kept no servant; they never had a visitor; no living soul but themselves ever crossed the door of their cottage." The berries of the wood, a few roots which they cultivated, with snails gathered from the rocks[31] and walls, and fish caught in the stream, served them for food. Curiosity was excited, the mystery which hung around this solitary pair became deepened by the obstinate silence which they observed in everything relating to themselves. The result of all this was an anxious endeavour, on the part of the superstitious and ignorant peasantry, to learn their secret. All was now conjecture, and the imagination commonly enough filled in a wild picture: devils or angels, as the case might be, were seen ministering to the solitary ones. Prying eyes were upon them, but the spies could glean no knowledge. Week, month, year passed by, and ungratified curiosity was dying through want of food, when it was discovered that one of the ladies had died. The peasantry went in a body to the chapel; no one forbade their entering it now. There sat a silent mourner leaning over the placid face of her dead sister. Hers was, indeed, a silent sorrow—no tear was in her eye, no sigh hove her chest, but the face told all that a remediless woe had fallen on her heart. The dead body was eventually removed, the living sister making no sign, and they left her in her solitude alone. Days passed on; no one heard of, no one probably inquired after, the lonely one. At last a wandering child, curious as children are, clambered to the window of the cell and looked in. There sat the lady; her handkerchief was on the floor, and one hand hung strangely, as if endeavouring to pick it up, but powerless to do so. The child told its story—the people again flocked to the chapel, and they found one sister had followed the other. The people buried the last beside the first, and they left no mark to tell us where, unless the large flat stone which lies in the valley, a short distance from the foot of the fall, and beneath which, I was told, "some great person was buried," may be the covering of their tomb. No traces of the history of these solitary women have ever been discovered.

Centuries have passed away, and still the legends of the buried bell and treasure are preserved. Some long time since a party of men resolved to blast the "Kieve," and examine it for the silver bell. They were miners, and their engineering knowledge, though rude, was sufficient to enable them to divert the course of the river above the falls, and thus to leave the "Kieve" dry for them to

work on when they had emptied it, which was an easy task. The “borer” now rung upon the rock, holes were pierced, and, being charged, they were blasted. The result was, however, anything but satisfactory, for the rock remained intact. Still they persevered, until at length a voice was heard amidst the ring of the iron tools in the holes of the rock. Every hand was stayed, every face was aghast, as they heard distinctly the ring of the silver bell, followed by a clear solemn voice proclaiming, “The child is not yet born who shall recover this treasure.”

The work was stopped, and the river restored to its old channel, over which it will run undisturbed until the day of which St Nectan prophesied shall arrive.

When, in the autumn of 1863, I visited this lovely spot, my guide, the proprietor, informed me that very recently a gentleman residing, I believe, in London, dreamed that an angel stood on a little bank of pebbles, forming a petty island, at the foot of a waterfall, and, pointing to a certain spot, told him to search there and he would find gold and a mummy. This gentleman told his dream to a friend, who at once declared the place indicated to be St Nectan’s waterfall. Upon this, the dreamer visited the West, and, upon being led by the owner of the property to the fall, he at once recognised the spot on which the angel stood.

A plan was then and there arranged by which a search might be again commenced, it being thought that, as an angel had indicated the spot, the time for the recovery of the treasure had arrived.

Let us hope that the search may be deferred, lest the natural beauties of the spot should be destroyed by the meddling of men, who can threaten trespassers,—fearing to lose a sixpence,—and who have already endeavoured to improve on nature, by cutting down some of the rock and planting rhododendrons. The Rev. R. S. Hawker, of Morwenstow, has published in his “Echoes of Old Cornwall” a poem on this tradition, which, as it is but little known, and as it has the true poetic ring, I transcribe to adorn the pages of my Appendix.

THEODORE, KING OF CORNWALL.

Riviere, near Hayle, now called Rovier, was the palace of Theodore, the king, to whom Cornwall appears to have been indebted for many of its saints. This Christian king, when the pagan people sought to destroy the first missionaries, gave the saints shelter in his palace. St Breca, St Iva, St Burianna, and many others, are said to have made Riviere their residence. It is not a little curious to find traditions existing, as it were, in a state of suspension between opinions. I have heard it said that there was a church at Rovier—that there was once a great palace there; and again, that Castle Cayle was one vast fortified place, and Rovier another. Mr Davies Gilbert quotes Whitaker on this point:

“Mr Whitaker, who captivates every reader by the brilliancy of his style, and astonishes by the extent of his multifarious reading, draws, however, without reserve, on his fertile imagination, for whatever facts may be requisite to construct the fabric of a theory. He has made Riviere the palace and residence of Theodore, a sovereign prince of Cornwall, and conducts St Breca, St Iva, with several companions, not only into Hayle and to this palace, after their voyage from Ireland, but fixes the time of their arrival so exactly, as to make it take place in the night. In recent times the name of Riviere, which had been lost in the common pronunciation, Rovier, has revived in a very excellent house built by Mr Edwards on the farm, which he completed in 1791.”

The Poet’s Proem

Excerpt From The Brus

By John Barbour 1375

Transcribed by Ramsay in 1489

Storyß to rede ar delitabill,
suppoß þat þai be nocht bot fabill,
þan suld storyß þat suthfast wer,
And þai war said on gud maner,
Hawe doubill plesance in heryng.
þe fyrst plesance is þe carpyng,
And þe toþir þe suthfastnes,
þat schawys þe thing rycht as it wes;
And suth thyngis þat ar likand
Tyll mannys heryng ar plesand.
þarfor I wald fayne set my will,
Giff my wyt mycht suffice þartill,
To put in wryt a suthfast story,
þat it lest ay furth in memory,
Swa þat na length of tyme it let,
na ger it haly be forȝet.
For auld storys þat men redys,
Representis to þaim þe dedys
Of stalwart folk þat lywynt ar,
Rycht as þai þan in presence war.
And, certis, þai suld weill hawe pryß
þat in þar tyme war wycht and wyß,
And led thar lyff in gret trawail,
And oft in hard stour off bataill
Wan [richt] gret price off chewalry,
And war woydit off cowardy.
As wes king Robert off Scotland,
þat hardy wes off hart and hand;
And gud Schyr Iames off Douglas,
þat in his tyme sa worthy was,
þat off hys price & hys bounte
In fer landis renoenynt wes he.
Off þaim I thynk þis buk to ma;
Now god gyff grace þat I may swa
Tret it, and bryng it till endyng,
þat I say nocht bot suthfast thing!

The Brus, also known as The Bruce, is a long narrative poem, in Early Scots, of just under 14,000 octosyllabic lines composed by John Barbour which gives a historic and chivalric account of the actions of Robert the Bruce and Sir James Douglas in the Scottish Wars of Independence during a period from the circumstances leading up to the English invasion of 1296 through to Scotland’s restored position in the years between the Treaty of 1328 and the death of Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, in 1332. From Wikipedia.



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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris