

Romance of the Rabbit eBook

Romance of the Rabbit by Francis Jammes

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Page 1

INTRODUCTION

The simple and bucolic art of Francis Jammes has grown to maturity in the solitude of the little town of Orthez at the foot of the Pyrenees, far from the clamor and complexities of literary Paris. In the preface to an early work of his he has given the key of his artistic faith: "My God, You have called me among men. Behold I am here. I suffer and I love. I have spoken with the voice which you have given me. I have written with the words which You have taught my mother and my father and which they transmitted to me. I am passing along the road like a laden ass of which the children make mock and which lowers the head. I shall go where You wish, when You wish."

And this is the way he has gone without faltering or ever turning aside to become identified with this school or that. It is this simple faith which has given to Francis Jammes his distinction and uniqueness among the poets of contemporary France, and won for him the admiration of all classes. There is probably no other French poet who can evoke so perfectly the spirit of the landscape of rural France. He delights to commune with the wild flowers, the crystal spring, and the friendly fire. Through his eyes we see the country of the singing harvest where the poplars sway beside the ditches and the fall of the looms of the weavers fills the silence. The poet apprehends in things a soul which others cannot perceive.

His gift of sympathy with the poor and the simple is infinite. He is full of pity and tenderness and enfolds in his heart and in his poetry, saint and sinner, man and beast, all that which is animate and inanimate. He is passionately religious with a profound and humble faith, but it has nothing in common with the sumptuous and decorative neo-catholicism of men like Huysmans or Paul Claudel. Rather one must seek his origins in the child-like faith of Saint Francis of Assisi and the lyrical metaphysics of Pascal.

Those of a higher sophistication and a greater worldliness may smile at the artlessness, and, if one will, naivete of a man like Jammes. It is true that his art is limited, and that if one reads too much at one time there is a note of monotony and a certain paucity of phrase, but who is the writer of whom this is not equally true? The quality of beauty, sincerity, and a large serenity are in his work, and how grateful are these permanencies amid the shrilling noises of the countless conflicting creeds and dogmas, and amid the poses and vanities which so fill the world of contemporary literature and art!

As far as the record goes the outward life of Francis Jammes has been uneventful. In a remarkable poem, "A Francis Jammes," his friend and fellow-poet, Charles Guerin, has drawn an unforgettable picture of this Christian Virgil in his village home. The ivy clings about his house like a beard, and before it is a shadowy fire, ever young and fresh, like the poet's heart, in spite of wind and winters and sorrows. The low walls of the court are gilded with moss. From the window one sees the cottages and fields, the horizon and the snows.

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Jammes was born at Tournay in the department of Hautes Pyrenees on December 2, 1863, and spent most of his life in this region. He was educated at Pau and Bordeaux, and later spent a short time in a law office. Early in the nineties he wrote his first volumes, slender *plaquettes* with the brief title “Vers.” It is interesting that one of these was dedicated to that strange English genius, Hubert Crackanthorpe, the author of “Wreckage” and “Sentimental Studies.” This dedication, and the curious orthography (the book was set up in a provincial printery) led a reviewer in the *Mercure de France* into an amusing error, in that he suggested that the book had been written by an Englishman whose name, correctly spelled, should perhaps be Francis James.

Since then his life has been wholly devoted to literature and he has published a considerable number of volumes of poetry and prose which by their very titles give a clue to the spirit pervading the author’s work. Among the more important of these are: *De l’Angelus de l’Aube a l’Angelus du Soir*, *Le Deuil des Primeveres*, *Pomme d’Anis ou l’Histoire d’une Jeune Fille Infirme*, *Clairieres dans le Ciel*, a number of series of *Georgiques Chretienne*, etc.

The present volume consists of a translation of *Le Roman du Lievre*, one of the most delightful of Francis Jammes’ earlier books. In it he tells of Rabbit’s joys and fears, of his life on this earth, of the pilgrimage to paradise with St. Francis and his animal companions, and of his death. This book was published in 1903, and has run through many editions in France. A number of characteristic short tales and impressions of Jammes’ same creative period have been added.

To turn a work so delicate and full of elusiveness as Jammes’ from one language into another is not an easy task, but it has been a labor of love. The translator hopes that she has accomplished this without too great a loss to the spirit of the original.

G.E.

ROMANCE OF THE RABBIT

BOOK I

Amid the thyme and dew of Jean de la Fontaine Rabbit heard the hunt and clambered up the path of soft clay. He was afraid of his shadow, and the heather fled behind his swift course. Blue steeples rose from valley to valley as he descended and mounted again. His bounds curved the grass where hung the drops of dew, and he became brother to the larks in this swift flight. He flew over the county roads, and hesitated at a sign-board before he followed the country-road, which led from the blinding sunlight and the noise of the cross-roads and then lost itself in the dark, silent moss.



That day he had almost run into the twelfth milestone between Castetis and Balansun, because his eyes in which fear dwells are set on the side of his head. Abruptly he stopped. His cleft upper lip trembled imperceptibly, and disclosed his long incisor teeth. Then his stubble-colored legs which were his traveling boots with their worn and broken claws extended. And he bounded over the hedge, rolled up like a ball, with his ears flat on his back.

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And again he climbed uphill for a considerable time, while the dogs, having lost his scent, were filled with disappointment, and then, he again ran downhill until he reached the road to Sauvejunte, where he saw a horse and a covered cart approaching. In the distance, on this road, there were clouds of dust as in Blue Beard when Sister Anne is asked: "Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anything coming?" This pale dryness, how magnificent it was, and how filled it was with the bitter fragrance of mint! It was not long before the horse stood in front of Rabbit.

It was a sorry nag and dragged a two wheeled cart and was unable to move except in a jerky sort of gallop. Every leap made its disjointed skeleton quiver and jolted its harness and made its earth-colored mane fly in the air, shiny and greenish, like the beard of an ancient mariner. Warily as though they were paving-stones the animal lifted its hoofs which were swollen like tumors. Rabbit was frightened by this great animated machine which moved with so loud a noise. He bounded away and continued his flight over the meadows, with his nose toward the Pyrenees, his tail toward the lowlands, his right eye toward the rising sun, his left toward the village of Mesplede.

Finally he crouched down in the stubble, quite near a quail which was sleeping in the manner of chickens half-buried in the dust, and overcome by the heat was sweating off its fat through its feathers.

The morning was sparkling in the south. The blue sky grew pale under the heat, and became pearl-gray. A hawk in seemingly effortless flight was soaring, and describing larger and larger circles as it rose. At a distance of several hundred yards lay the peacock-blue, shimmering surface of a river, and lazily carried onward the mirrored reflection of the alders; from their viscous leaves exuded a bitter perfume, and their intense blackness cut sharply the pale luminousness of the water. Near the dam fish glided past in swarms. An angelus beat against the torrid whiteness of a church-steeple with its blue wing, and Rabbit's noonday rest began.

* * * * *

He stayed in this stubble until evening, motionless, only troubled somewhat by a cloud of mosquitoes quivering like a road in the sun. Then at dusk he made two bounds forward softly and two more to the left and to the right.

It was the beginning of the night. He went forward toward the river where on the spindles of the reeds hung in the moonlight a weave of silver mists.

Rabbit sat down in the midst of the blossoming grass. He was happy that at that hour all sounds were harmonious, and that one hardly knew whether the calls were those of quails or of crystal springs.



Were all human beings dead? There was one watching at some distance; he was making movements above the water, and noiselessly withdrawing his dripping and shimmering net. But only the heart of the waters was troubled, Rabbit's remained calm.



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And, lo, between the angelicas something that looked like a ball bit by bit came into view. It was his best-beloved approaching. Rabbit ran toward her until they met deep in the blue aftercrop of grass. Their little noses touched. And for a moment in the midst of the wild sorrel, they exchanged kisses. They played. Then slowly, side by side, guided by hunger, they set out for a small farm lying low in the shadow. In the poor vegetable garden into which they penetrated there were crisp cabbages and spicy thyme. Nearby the stable was breathing; the pig protruded its mobile snout, sniffing, under the door of its sty.

Thus the night passed in eating and amatory sport. Little by little the darkness stirred beneath the dawn. Shining spots appeared in the distance. Everything began to quiver. An absurd cock, perched on the chicken-house, rent the silence. He crowed as if possessed, and clapped applause for himself with the stumps of his wings.

Rabbit and his wife went their separate ways at the threshold of the hedge of thorns and roses. Crystal-like, as it were, a village emerged from the mist, and in a field dogs with their tails as stiff as cables were busy trying to disentangle the loops so skillfully described by the charming couple amid the mint and blades of grass.

* * * * *

Rabbit took refuge in a marl-pit over which mulberries arched, and there he stayed crouching with his eyes wide-open until evening. Here he sat like a king beneath the ogive of the branches; a shower of rain had adorned them with pale-blue pearls. There he finally fell asleep. But his dream was unquiet, not like that which should come from the calm sleep of the sultry summer's afternoon. His was not the profound sleep of the lizard which hardly stirs when dreaming the dream of ancient walls; his was not the comfortable noonday sleep of the badger who sits in his dark earthen burrow and enjoys the coolness.

The slightest sound spoke to him of danger, the danger that lies in all things whether they move or fall or strike. A shadow moved unexpectedly. Was it an enemy approaching? He knew that happiness can be found in a place of refuge only when everything remains exactly the same this moment, as it was the moment before. Hence came his love of order, that is to say his immobility.

Why should a leaf stir on the eglantine in the blue calm of an idle day? When the shadows of a copse move so slowly, that it seems they are trying to stop the passage of the hours, why should they suddenly stir? Why was there this crowd of men who, not far from his retreat, were gathering the ears of maize in which the sun threaded pale beads of light? His eyelids had no lashes, and so could not bear the palpitating and dazzling light of noondays. And this alone was sufficient reason why he knew that danger lurked if he should approach those who unblinded could look into the white flames of husbandry.



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There was nothing outside to lure him before the time came when he would go out of his own accord. His wisdom was in harmony with things. His life was a work of music to him, and each discordant note warned him to be cautious. He did not confuse the voice of the pack of hounds with the distant sound of bells, or the gesture of a man with that of a waving tree, or the detonation of a gun with a clap of thunder, or the latter with the rumbling of carts, or the cry of the hawk with the steam-whistle of threshing-machines. Thus there was an entire language, whose words he knew to be his enemies.

Who can say from what source Rabbit obtained this prudence and this wisdom? No one can explain these things, or tell whence or how they have come to him. Their origin is lost in the night of time where everything is all confused and one.

Did he, perhaps, come out of Noah's ark on Mount Ararat at the time when the dove, which retains the sound of great waters in its cooing, brought the olive-branch, the sign that the great wave was subsiding? Or had he been created, such as he is, with his short tail, his stubbly hide, his cleft lip, his floppy ear, and his trodden-down heel? Did God, the Eternal, set him all ready-made beneath the laurels of Paradise?

Lying crouched beneath a rosebush he had, perhaps, seen Eve, and watched her when she had wandered amid the irises, displaying the grace of her brown legs like a prancing young horse, and extending her golden breasts before the mystic pomegranates. Or was he at first nothing but an incandescent mist? Had he already lived in the heart of the porphyries? Had he, incombustible, escaped from their boiling lava, in order to inhabit each in turn the cell of granite and of the alga before he dared show his nose to the world? Did he owe his pitch-black eyes to the molten jet, his fur to the clayey ooze, his soft ears to the sea-wrack, his ardent blood to the liquid fire?

...His origins mattered little to him at this moment; he was resting peacefully in his marl-pit. It was in a sultry August toward the end of a heavy afternoon. The sky was of the deep-blue color of a plum, puffed out here and there, as if ready to burst upon the plain.

Soon the rain began to patter on the leaves of the brake. Faster and faster came the drumming of the long rods of rain. But Rabbit was not afraid, because the rain fell in accordance with a rhythm which was very familiar to him. And besides the rain did not strike him for it had not yet been able to pierce the thick vault of green above him. A single drop only fell to the bottom of the marl-pit, and splashed and always fell again at the same place.

So there was nothing in this concert to trouble the heart of Rabbit. He was quite familiar with the song in which the tears of the rain form the strophes, and he knew that neither dog, nor man, nor fox, nor hawk had any part in it. The sky was like a harp on which the silver strings of the streaming rain were strung from above down to the earth. And down here below every single thing made this harp resound in its own peculiar fashion, and in

turn it again took up its own melody. Under the green fingers of the leaves the crystal strings sounded faint and hollow. It was as though it were the voice of the soul of the mists.

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The clay under their touch sobbed like an adolescent girl into whom the south wind has long blown inquietude. There where the clay was thirstiest and driest was heard a continual sound as of drinking, the panting of burning lips which yielded to the fullness of the storm.

The night which followed the storm was serene. The downfall of rain had almost evaporated. On the green meadow where Rabbit was in the habit of meeting his beloved, nothing was left of the storm, except ball-like masses of mist. It looked as though they were paradisiacal cotton-plants whose downy whiteness was bursting beneath the flood of moonlight. Along the steep banks of the river the thickets, heavy with rain, stood in rows like pilgrims bowed down under the weight of their wallets and leather-bottles. Peace reigned. It was as though an angel had rested his forehead in a hand. Dawn shivering with cold was awaiting her sister the day, and the bowed-down leaves of grass prayed to the dawn.

And suddenly Rabbit crouching in the midst of his meadow saw a man approaching, and he wasn't in the least afraid of him. For the first time since the beginning of things, since man had set traps and snares the instinct of flight became extinguished in the timid soul of Rabbit.

The man, who approached, was dressed like the trunk of a tree in winter when it is clothed in the rough fustian of moss. He wore a cowl on his head and sandals on his feet. He carried no stick. His hands were clasped inside the sleeves of his robe, and a cord served as girdle. He kept his bony face turned toward the moon, and the moon was less pale than it. One could clearly distinguish his eagle's nose and his deep eyes, which were like those of asses, and his black beard on which tufts of lamb's wool had been left by the thickets.

Two doves accompanied him. They flitted from branch to branch in the sweetness of the night. The tender beat of their wings was like the fallen petals of a flower, and as if these were striving to re-unite again and expand once more into a blossom.

Three poor dogs that wore spiked collars and wagged their tails preceded the man, and an ancient wolf was licking the hem of his garment. A ewe and her lamb, bleating, uncertain, and enraptured, pressed forward amid the crocuses and trod upon their emerald, while three hawks began to play with the two doves. A timid night-bird whistled with joy amid the acorns. Then it spread its wings and overtook the hawks and the doves, the lamb and the ewe, the dogs, the wolf, and the man.

And the man approached Rabbit and said to him:

"I am Francis. I love thee and I greet thee, Oh thou, my brother. I greet thee in the name of the sky which mirrors the waters and the sparkling stones, in the name of the wild sorrel, the bark of the trees and the seeds which are thy sustenance. Come with



these sinless ones who accompany me and cling to my foot-steps with the faith of the ivy which clasps the tree without considering that soon, perhaps, the woodcutter will come. Oh Rabbit, I bring to thee the Faith which we share one in another, the Faith which is life itself, all that of which we are ignorant, but in which we nevertheless believe. Oh dear and kindly Rabbit, thou gentle wanderer, wilt thou follow our Faith?"

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And while Francis was speaking the beasts remained quite silent; they lay flat on the ground or perched in the twigs, and had complete faith in these words which they did not understand.

Rabbit alone, his eyes wide-open, now seemed uneasy because of the sound of this voice. He stood with one ear forward and the other back as if uncertain whether to take flight or whether to stay.

When Francis saw this he gathered a handful of grass from the meadow, and held it out to Rabbit, and now he followed him.

* * * * *

From that night they remained together.

No one could harm them, because their Faith protected them. Whenever Francis and his friends stopped in a village square where people were dancing to the drone of a bagpipe at the evening hour when the young elms were softly shading into the night and the girls were gaily raising their glasses to the evening wind at the dark tables before the inns, a circle formed about them. And the young men with their bows or cross-bows never dreamed of killing Rabbit. His tranquil manner so astounded them, that they would have deemed it a barbarous deed had they abused the faith of this poor creature, which he so trustfully placed beneath their very feet. They thought Francis was a man skilled in the taming of animals, and sometimes they opened their barns to him for the night, and gave him alms with which he bought food for his creatures, for each one that which it liked best.

And besides they easily found enough to live on, for the autumn through which they were wending was generous and the granaries were bulging. They were allowed to glean in the fields of maize and to have a share in the vintage and the songs which rose in the setting sun. Fair-haired girls held the grapes against their luminous breasts. Their raised elbows gleamed. Above the blue shadows of the chestnut trees shooting stars glided peacefully. The velvet of the heather was growing thicker. The sighing of dresses could be heard in the depth of the avenues.

They saw the sea before them, hung in space, and the sloping sails, and white sands flecked by the shadows of tamarisks, strawberry-trees, and pines. They passed through laughing meadows, where the mountain torrent, born of the pure whiteness of the snows, had become a brook, but still glistened, filled with memories of the shimmering antimony and glaciers.

Even when the hunting-horn sounded Rabbit remained quite without fear among his companions. They watched over him and he watched over them. One day a pack of hounds drew near to him, but fled again when they saw the wolf. Another time a cat



crept close to the doves, but took flight before the three dogs with their spiked collars, and a ferret who lay in wait for the lamb had to seek a hiding-place from the birds of prey. Rabbit, himself, frightened away the swallows who attacked the owl.

* * * * *



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Rabbit became specially attached to one of the three dogs with spiked collars. She was a spaniel, of kind disposition, and compact build. She had a stubby tail, pendant ears, and twisted paws. She was easy to get on with and polite. She had been born in a pig-pen at a cobbler's who went hunting on Sundays. When her master died, and no one wanted to give her shelter, she ran about in the fields where she met Francis.

Rabbit always walked by her side, and when she slept her muzzle lay upon him and he too fell asleep. All of them always had their noonday sleep, and under the dull fire of the sun it was filled with dreams.

Then Francis saw again the Paradise from which he had come. It seemed to him as if he were passing through the great open gate into the wonderful street on which stood the houses of the Elect. They were low huts, each like the other, in a luminous shadow which caused tears of joy to rise in the eyes. From the interior of these huts might be caught the gleam of a carpenter's plane, a hammer, or a file. The work that is sublime continues here; for, when God asked those who had come to him what reward they desired for their work on earth, they always wished to go on with that which had helped them to gain Heaven. And then suddenly their humble crafts became filled with a sort of mystery. Artisans appeared at their thresholds where tables were set for the evening meal. One heard the cheery burble of celestial wells. And in the open squares angels that had a semblance to fishing-boats, bowed down in the blessedness of the twilight.

But the animals in their dreams saw neither the earth nor Paradise as we know them and see them. They dreamed of endless plains where their senses became confused. It was like a dense fog in them. To Rabbit the baying of the hounds became all blended into one thing with the heat of the sun, sharp detonations, the feeling of wet paws, the vertigo of flight, with fright, with the smell of the clay, and the sparkle of the brook, with the waving to and fro of wild carrots and the crackling of maize, with the moonshine and the joyous emotion of seeing his mate appearing amid the fragrant meadow-sweet.

Behind their closed eyelids they all saw moving like mirrored reflections the courses of their lives. The doves, however, protected their nimble and restless, little heads from the sun; they sought for their Paradise beneath the shadow of their wings.

BOOK II

When winter came Francis said to his friends:

"Blessings upon you for you are of God. But in my heart I am uneasy for the cry of the geese that are flying southward tells that a famine is near at hand, and that it is not in the purposes of Heaven to make the earth kind for you. Praised be the hidden designs of the Lord!"



The country around them, in fact, became a barren waste. The sky let drip a yellow light from its sack-like clouds bulging with snow. All the fruits of the hedges had withered, and all those of the orchards were dead. And the seeds had left their husks to enter into the bosom of the earth.

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..."Praised be the hidden designs of the Lord," said Francis. "Perhaps it is His wish that you leave me, and each of you go your own way in quest of nourishment. Therefore separate from me since I cannot go with each one of you, if your instincts lead you to different lands. For you are living and have need of nourishment, while I am risen from the dead and am here by the grace of God, free from all corporeal needs, a spirit as it were who had the privilege of guiding you to this day. But whatever knowledge I have is growing less, and I no longer know how to provide for you. If you wish to leave me, let the tongue of each be loosed, and freely let each speak."

The first to speak was the Wolf.

He raised his muzzle toward Francis. His shaggy tail was swept by the wind. He coughed. Misery had long been his garb. His wretched fur made him seem like a dethroned king. He hesitated, and cast his eye upon each one of his companions in turn. At last his voice came from his throat, hoarse like that of the eternal snow. And when he opened his jaws one could measure his endless privations by the length of his teeth. And his expression was so wild that one could not tell whether he was about to bite his master or to caress him.

He said:

"Oh honey without sting! Oh brother of the poor! Oh Son of God! How could even I leave you? My life was evil, and you have filled it with joy. During the nights it was my fate to lie in wait listening to the breath of the dogs, the herdsmen, and the fires, until the right moment came to bury my fangs in the throat of sleeping lambs. You taught me, Oh Blessed One, the sweetness of orchards. And even at this moment when my belly was hollow with hunger for flesh, it was your love for me that nourished me. Often, indeed, my hunger has been a joy to me when I could place my head on your sandal for I suffer this hunger that I may follow you, and gladly I would die for your love."

And the doves cooed.

They stopped in their shivering flight together among the branches of a barren tree. They could not make up their minds to speak. Each moment it seemed as though they were about to begin, when in sudden fright they again filled the listening forest with their sobbing white caresses. They trembled like young girls who mingle their tears and their arms. They spoke together as if they had but a single voice:

"Oh Francis, you are more lovely than the light of the glow-worm gleaming in the moss, gentler than the brook which sings to us while we hang our warm nest in the fragrant shade of the young poplars. What matter that the hoarfrost and famine would banish us from your side and drive us far away to more fruitful lands? For your sake we will love hoarfrost and famine. For the sake of your love we will give up the things we crave. And if we must die of the cold, Oh our Master, it will be with heart against heart."

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And one of the dogs with the spiked collars advanced. It was the spaniel, Rabbit's friend. Like the wolf she had already suffered bitterly with hunger and her teeth chattered. Her ears were wrinkled even when she raised them, and her straggly tail which looked like tufts of cotton she held out rigid and motionless. Her eyes of the color of yellow raspberries were fixed on Francis with the ardor of absolute Faith. And her two companions, who trustfully were getting ready to listen to her, lowered their heads in sign of their ignorance and goodwill. They were shepherd dogs, who had never heard anything but the sob of the sheep-bells, the bleating of the flocks and the lash-like crack of the lightning on the summits, and, proud and happy, they waited while the little spaniel bore witness.

She took a step forward. But not a sound came from her throat. She licked the hand of Francis, and then lay down at his feet.

And the ewe bleated.

Her bleats were so full of sadness that it seemed as if she were already exhaling her soul toward death at the very thought of leaving Francis. As she stood there in silence, her lamb, seized by some strange melancholy, was suddenly heard, crying like a child.

And the ewe spoke:

"Neither the placidity of grassy meadows toned down by the mists of the dawn, nor the sweet woods of the mountains dotted by the fog with the pearls of its silvery sweat, nor the beds of straw of the smoke-filled cabins, are in any way comparable to the pasture-grounds of your heart. Rather than leave you we should prefer the bloody and loathful slaughter-house, and the rocking of the cart on which we are carried thither with our legs tied and our flanks and cheeks on the boards. Oh Francis, it would be like unto death to us to lose you, for we love you."

And while the sheep spoke the owl and the hawks, perched near one another, remained motionless, their eyes full of anguish and their wings pressed close to their sides lest they fly away.

The last one to speak was Rabbit.

Clothed in his fur of the color of stubble and earth he seemed like a god of the fields. In the midst of the wintry waste he was like a clod of earth of the summer time. He made one think of a road-mender or a rural postman. Tucked up in the windings of his flapping ears he carried with himself the agitation of all sounds. One of the ears, extended toward the ground, listened to the crackling of the frost, while the other, open to the distance, gathered in the blows of an axe with which the dead forest resounded.



“Surely, Oh Francis,” he said, “I can be satisfied with the mossgrown bark which has grown tender beneath the caress of the snows and which wintry dawns have made fragrant. More than once have I satisfied my hunger with it during these disastrous days when the briars have turned into rose-colored crystals, and when the agile wagtail utters its shrill cry toward the larvae which its beak can no longer reach beneath the ice along the banks. I shall continue to gnaw these barks. For, Oh Francis, I do not wish to die with these gentle friends who are in their agony, but rather I wish to live beside you and obtain my sustenance from the bitter fiber of the trees.”



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Therefore because the country of each of them was a different land where each could dwell only by himself, Rabbit's companions chose not to separate, but to die together in this land harrowed by winter.

One evening the doves which had become like dead leaves fell from the branch on which they were perched, and the wolf closed his eyes on life, his muzzle resting on the sandal of Francis. For two days his neck had been so weak that it could no longer support his head, and his spine had become like the branch of a bramble bespattered with mud, shivering in the wind. His master kissed him on the forehead.

Then the lamb, the sheep-dogs, the hawks, the owl, and the ewe gave up their souls, and finally also the little spaniel whom Rabbit in vain had sought to keep warm. She passed away wagging her tail, and it grieved stubble-colored Rabbit so much that it took until the following day before he could touch the bark of the oaks again.

* * * * *

And in the midst of the world's desolation Francis prayed, his forehead on his clenched hand, just as in an excess of sorrow a poet feels his soul escaping him once more.

Then he addressed him of the cleft lip.

"Oh Rabbit, I hear a voice which tells me that you must lead these (and he pointed to the bodies of the animals) to Eternal Blessedness. Oh Rabbit, there is a Paradise for beasts, but I know it not. No man will ever enter it. Oh Rabbit, you must guide thither these friends, whom God has given me and whom he has taken away. You are wise among all, and to your prudence I commit these friends."

The words of Francis rose toward the brightening sky. The hard azure of winter gradually became limpid. And under this returning gladness, it seemed as if the graceful spaniel were about to raise her supple, silken ears again. "Oh my friends who are dead," said Francis, "are you really dead, since I alone am conscious of your death? What proof can you give to sleep that you are not merely slumbering? Is the fruit of the clematis asleep or is it dead when the wind no longer ruffles the lightness of its tendrils? Perhaps, Oh wolf, it is merely that there is no longer sufficient breath from on high for you to raise your flanks; and for you, doves, to make you expand like a sigh; and for you, sheep, to cause your lamentations by their sweetness to augment even the sweetness of flooded pastures; and for you, owl, to reawaken your sobbing, the plaint of the amorous night itself; and for you, hawks, to rise soaring from the earth; and for you, sheep-dogs, to have your barking mingle once more with the sound of the sluices; and for you, spaniel, to have exquisite understanding born again, that you may play with Rabbit again?"



* * * * *

Suddenly Rabbit made a leap into the azure from the molehill where he had lain down, and did not drop back. And lightly as if he were passing over a meadow of blue clover he made a second bound into space, into the realm of the angels.



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He had hardly completed this second leap when he saw the little spaniel by his side, and joyously he asked her:

“Aren’t you really dead, then?”

And skipping toward him she replied:

“I do not understand what you are saying to me. My noonday sleep to-day was peaceful and bright.”

Then Rabbit saw that the other animals were following him into the void, while Francis was journeying along another heavenly pathway, indicating to the wolf by means of signs with his hand to put his trust in Rabbit. And the wolf with docility and peace in his heart felt Faith come over him again. He continued on his way with his friends, after a long look toward his master, and knowing that for those who are chosen there is something divine even in the final adieu.

* * * * *

They left winter behind them. They were astonished at passing through these meadows which formerly were so inaccessible and so far above their heads. But the need of gaining Paradise gave them a firm footing in the sky.

By the paths of the seraphim, along the trellises of light, over the milky ways where the comet is like a sheaf of grain, Rabbit guided his companions. Francis had entrusted them to him, and had given him to them as guide because he knew Rabbit’s prudence. And had he not on many occasions given his master proofs of this quality of discretion which is the beginning of wisdom? When Francis met him and begged him to follow, had he not waited until Francis held out a handful of flowering grass and let him nibble at it? And when all his companions let themselves die of hunger for love of one another, had not he with his down-trodden heels continued to gnaw the bitter bark of the trees?

Therefore it seemed that this prudence would not fail him even in heaven. If they lost their way he would find the right road again. He would know how not to get lost, and how not to collide with either the sun or the moon. He would have the skill to avoid the shooting-stars which are as dangerous as stones thrown from a sling. He would find the way by the heavenly sign-posts on which were marked the number of miles that had been left behind, as well as the names of the celestial hamlets.

The regions traversed by Rabbit and his companions were ravishing and filled them with ecstasy. This was all the more the case because contrary to man, they had never suspected the beauties of the sky; they had been able to look only sidewise and not upward, this being the exclusive right of the king of animals.



So it came that Short-tail, the Wolf, the Ewe, the Lamb, the Birds, the Sheep-Dogs, the Spaniel, discovered that the sky was as beautiful as the earth. And all except Rabbit, who was sometimes troubled by the problems of direction, enjoyed an unalloyed pleasure in this pilgrimage toward God. In place of the heavenly fields, which only a short while ago seemed inaccessible above their heads, the earth now became in its turn slowly inaccessible beneath their feet. And as they moved further and further away from it, this earth became a new heavenly canopy for them. The blue of the oceans formed their clouds of foam, and the candles of the shops sprinkled like stars the expanse of the night.



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Gradually they approached the regions which Francis had promised them. Already the rose-red clovers of the setting suns and the luminous fruits of the darkness which were their food grew larger and fuller and melted in their souls into the sweets of paradise.

The leaves and ardent pulp of the fruits filled their blood with some strange summer-like power, a palpitating joy which made their hearts beat faster as they came nearer and nearer the marvels that were to be theirs.

* * * * *

At last they came to the abode of the beasts, who had attained eternal bliss. It was the first Paradise, that of the dogs.

For some time already they had heard barking. Bending down toward the trunk of a decayed oak they saw a mastiff sitting in a hollow as in a niche. His disdainful and yet placid glance told them that his mind was disordered. It was the dog of Diogenes, to whom God had accorded solitude in this tub, hollowed out of a very tree itself. With indifference he watched the dogs with the spiked collars pass by. Then to their great astonishment he left his moss-grown kennel for a moment, and, since his leash had become undone, tied himself fast again using his mouth as aid. He reentered his den of wood, and said:

"Here each one takes his pleasure where he finds it."

And, in fact, Rabbit and his companions saw dogs in quest of imaginary travelers who had lost their way. They dared descent into deep abysses to find those who had met with accident, bearing to them the bouillon, meat, and brandy contained in the small casks hanging from their collars.

Others flung themselves into icy waters, always hoping, but always in vain, that they might rescue a shipwrecked sailor. When they regained the shore they were shivering, stunned, yet happy in their futile devotion, and ready to fling themselves in again.

Others persistently begged for a couple of old bones at the thresholds of deserted cottages along the road, waiting for kicks, and their eyes were filled with an inexpressible melancholy.

There was also a scissors-grinder's dog, who with tongue hanging out, was joyfully turning the wheel-work which made the stone revolve, even though no knife was held against it in the process of sharpening. But his eyes shone with the unquestioning faith in a duty fulfilled; he ceased not to labor except to catch his breath, and then he labored again.



Then there was a sheep-dog, who, ever faithful, sought to bring back to a fold ewes that were evermore straying. He was pursuing them on the bank of a brook which gleamed on the edge of a grassy hill.

From this green hill and from out of the under-woods a pack of hounds broke forth. They had hunted the hinds and gazelles of their dreams all the day long. Their baying which lingered about the ancient scents sounded like the happy bells on a flowery Easter morning.



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Not far from here the sheep-dogs and the little spaniel established their home. But when the latter wished to bid Rabbit a tender farewell she saw that Long-Ear had slipped away on hearing the dogs of the chase.

And it was without him that the hawks, the owl, the doves, the wolf, and the ewes had to continue their flight or their progress. They understood very well that he, a rabbit of little faith, would not know how to die like them. Instead of being saved by God, he preferred to save himself.

* * * * *

The second Paradise was that of the birds. It lay in a fresh grove, and their songs flooded the leaves of the alders and made them tremble. And from the alders the songs flowed onward into the river which became so imbued with music that it played on the rushes.

At a distance a hill stretched out; it was all covered with springtime and shade. Its sides were of incomparable softness. It was fragrant with solitude. The odor of nocturnal lilacs mingled with that which came from the heart of dark roses whence the hot white sun quenches its thirst.

Now, suddenly, at intervals, the song of the nightingale was heard expanding; it was as if stars of crystal had fallen upon the waves and broken there. There was no other sound but the song of the nightingale. Over the whole expanse of the silent hill nothing was heard but the song of the nightingale. Night was merely the sobbing of the nightingale.

Then in the groves dawn appeared, all rose-red because it was naked amid the choirs of birds who still sang from a full throat for their wings were heavy with love and morning dew. The quails in the grain were not yet calling. The tom-tits with their black heads made a noise in the thicket of fig-trees like the sound of pebbles moved by water. A wood-pecker rent the azure with its cry, and then flew toward the old, white-flowered apple-trees. It had almost the appearance of a handful of grass torn from the golden meadows with a clover-flower as its head.

The three hawks and the owl entered into these places abounding in flowers, and not a single redbreast and not a single gold-finch and not a single linnet was frightened by them. The birds of prey sat on their perches with an arrogant and sad air, and kept their eyes fixed on the sun; now and then they beat their steely wings against their mottled, keel-like breasts.

The owl sought out the shadows of the hill, so that hidden in some solitary cavern and happy in its darkness and wisdom, it might listen to the plaint of the nightingale.



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But the most wonderful shelter of all was that chosen by the doves. They sat among the olive-trees, that were stirred by the evening breeze. In this garden young girls dwelled, who were permitted to enter here because of their animal-like grace. They included all the young girls who sighed and were like to honey-suckle; all the young girls who languish with all the doves that weep. And all the doves were included here, those from Venice, whose wings were like cooling fans to the boredom of the wives of the doges, as well as those of Iberia whose lips had the orange and tobacco-yellow color of fisherwomen and their provocative allurements. Here were all the doves of dreams, and all the dreaming doves: the dove that drew Beatrice heavenward and to which Dante gave a grain of corn; and the one which the disenchanted Quitteria heard in the night. Here was the dove which sobbed on Virginia's shoulder, when during the night she sought in vain to calm the fires of her love in the spring underneath a cocoanut-palm. And here too was the dove to which the heavy-hearted maiden at the waning of summer, in the orchard among the ripening peaches, confides passionate messages that it may bear them along in its flight into the unknown.

And there were the doves of old parsonages shrouded in roses, and those which Jocelyn with his incense-fragrant hand fed as he dreamed of Laurence. And there was the dove which is given to the dying little girl, and that which in certain regions is placed upon the burning brow of the sick, and the blinded dove whose voice is so filled with pain that it lures the flight of its passing sisters toward the huntsman's ambush, and the dove, the gentlest of all, who brings comfort to the forgotten old poet in his garret.

* * * * *

The third paradise was that of the sheep.

It lay in the heart of an emerald valley watered by streams, and beneath their sun-bathed crystal the grass was of a marvelous green. And nearby was a lake, iridescent like mother-of-pearl and the feathers of a peacock; it was azure and glistened like mica, and seemed to be the breast of humming-birds and the wing of butterflies. Here after they had licked the pure white salt from the golden-grained granite, the sheep dreamed their long dream, and their tufts of thick wool overlapped like the leaves of great branches covered with snow.

This landscape was so pure and of such dreamlike clarity that it had whitened the eyelashes of the lambs, and had entered into their eyes of gold. And the atmosphere was so transparent that it seemed one could see in the depth of the water clearly revealed the outlines of the yellow-striped summits of limestone. Flowers of frost, of sky, and of blood were woven into the carpets of the forests of beech and fir. After having passed over them the breeze went forth again even more softly, more fragrant, more ice-like in its purity.



Like a blue flood the marvelous cone-like trees, interwoven with silvery lichens, stretched upward. Waterfalls as if suspended from the rocky crags, scattered in a smoke-like spray. And suddenly the heavenly flocks sent forth their bleating toward God, and the ecstatic bells wept for the shadow of the ferns. And the dark water of the grottoes broke in the light.

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Lying amid the wild laurel the lamb of the Gospel became visible again. Its paw rested under its nose, and was still bleeding. The roads over which it had passed had been hard, but soon it would be fully restored by the slightly acid sweetness of the myrtles. Even now it was quivering as it listened to its scattered companions.

On entering this Paradise to dwell therein the sheep of Francis saw the lamb of Jean de la Fontaine amid the forget-me-nots which were of the mirror-like color of the waves. It no longer disputed with the wolf of the fable. It drank, and the water did not become turbid thereat. The untamed spring over which the two hundred year old ivy seemed to have thrown a shadow of bitterness, streamed on amid the grass with its broken waves in which were mirrored the snowy tremblings of the lamb.

And high on the slopes of the *happy valleys* they saw the sheep of those heroes that Cervantes tells about, all of whom were sick at heart for the love of one and the same girl and left their city to lead the life of shepherds in a far-away country. These sheep had the gentlest of voices, like hearts that secretly love their own sufferings. They drank from the wild thyme the always new, burning tears which their bucolic poets had let fall like dew from the cups of their eyes.

At the horizon of this Paradise there rose a confused murmur like that of the Ocean. It consisted of the broken sobbing of flutes or clarinets, of cries reechoed from the abysses, of the baying of restless dogs, and of the fall of a moss-covered stone into the void. It was the tumult of the waterfalls high above the noise of the torrents. It was like the voice of a people on the march toward the promised land, toward the grapes without name, toward the fiery spikes of grain; and mingled with this sound was the braying of pregnant she-asses, that were laden with heavy containers of milk and the mantles of the herdsmen and salt and cheeses which were brittle like chalk.

* * * * *

The fourth Paradise in its almost indescribable barrenness was that of the wolves.

At the summit of a treeless mountain, in the desolation of the wind, beneath a penetrating fog, they felt the voluptuous joy of martyrdom. They sustained themselves with their hunger. They experienced a bitter joy in feeling that they were abandoned, that never for more than an instant—and then only under the greatest suffering—had they been able to renounce their lust for blood. They were the disinherited, possessed of the dream that could never be realized. For a long time they had not been able to approach the heavenly lambs whose white eyelashes winked in the green light. And as none of these animals ever died, they could no longer lie in wait for the body which the shepherd threw to the eternal laughter of the torrent.

And the wolves were resigned. Their fur, bald as the rock, was pitiable. A sort of miserable grandeur reigned in this strange abode. One felt that this destitution was so

tragic and so inexorable that one would have tenderly kissed the forehead of these poor flesh-eating beasts even had one surprised them in slaying the lambs. The beauty of this Paradise in which the friend of Francis now found his home was that of desolation and hopeless despair.



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And beyond this region the heaven of the beasts stretched on to infinity.

BOOK III

As for Rabbit, he had prudently taken flight at sight of the heavenly pack of hounds. While Francis had remained near him he had trusted in Francis. But now, even though he was in the abode of the Blessed, his distrust which was as natural to him as to the suspicious peasant gained the upper hand again. And since he did not yet feel himself entirely at home in this Paradise, tasting neither perfect security, nor the thrill of familiar danger against which he could battle, Long-Ear became bewildered.

Accordingly he strayed hither and thither, ill at ease, not knowing where he was, nor finding his way. He sought in vain for that from which he fled and that which fled from him. But what was the reason for this? Was not Heaven happiness? Was there any stillness that could be more still? In what other resting-place could Cleft-Lip have dreamed a sleep more undisturbed than on these beds of wool that the breeze spread beneath the flower-covered bushes of the stars?

But he did not sleep here, because he missed his constant uneasiness and other things. Crouching in the ditches of Heaven he no longer had the feeling beneath the whiteness of his short tail of the chilly dampness penetrating through and through him. The mosquitoes, who had withdrawn to their own Paradise of shallow pools, no longer filled his always open eyelids with the sharp burning sensation of summer. He longed regretfully for this fever. His heart no longer beat as powerfully as it had beaten when on knolls in the flame-colored heath a shot scattered the earth like rain about him. Under the smooth caress of the lawn-like grass hair grew again on the callous parts of his paws where it had been so sparse. And he began to deplore the over-abundance of heaven. He was like the gardener who, having become king, was forced to put on sandals of purple, and longed regretfully for his wooden shoes heavy with clay and with poverty.

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And Francis in his Paradise heard of Rabbit's troubles and of his bewilderment. And the heart of Francis was grieved that one of his old companions was not happy. From that moment the streets of the celestial hamlet where he dwelled seemed less peaceful to him, the shadows of the evening less soft, less white the breath of the lilies, less hallowed the gleams of the carpenter's plane within the sheds, less bright the singing pitchers whose water radiated like fresh sheaves and fell cooling upon the flesh of the angels seated on the curb-stones of the wells.

Therefore Francis set out on his way to find God, and He received him in His Garden at the close of day. This garden of God was the most humble but also the most beautiful.

No one knew whence came the miracle of its beauty. Perhaps because there was nothing in it but love. Over the walls which the ages had filled with chinks dark lilacs spread. The stones were joyous to support the smiling mosses whose golden mouths were drinking at the shadowy heart of the violets.



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In a diffused light which was neither like that of the dawn nor like that of the twilight, for it was softer than either of these, a blue-flowered leek blossomed in the center of a garden-bed. A sort of mystery enveloped the blue globe of its inflorescence which remained motionless and closed on its tall stalk. One felt that this plant was dreaming. Of what? Perhaps of its soul's labor which sings on winter evenings in the pot where boils the soup of the poor. Oh divine destiny! Not far from the hedges of boxwood the lips of the lettuce radiated mute words while a low light clung about the shadow of the sleeping watering-pots. Their task was over.

And full of trust and serenity, without pride or humility, a sage-plant let its insignificant odor rise toward God.

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Francis sat down beside God on a bench sheltered by an oak round which an ivy twined. And God said unto Francis:

"I know what brings thee hither. It shall never be said that there was any one, whether maggot or rabbit, who was unable to find his Paradise here. Go therefore to thy fleet-footed friend, and ask him what it is that he desires. And as soon as he has told thee, I shall grant him his wish. If he did not understand how to die and to renounce the world like the others, it was surely because his heart clove too much to my Earth which, indeed, I love well. Because, Oh Francis, like this creature of the long ears I love the earth with a profound love. I love the earth of men, of beasts, of plants, and of stones. Oh Francis, go and find Rabbit, and tell him that I am his friend."

* * * * *

And Francis set out toward the Paradise of beasts where none of the children of man except young girls had ever set their foot. There he met Rabbit who was disconsolately wandering about. But when Rabbit saw his old master approaching he experienced such joy that he crouched down with more fright in his eye than ever and with his nostrils quivering almost imperceptibly.

"Greeting, my brother," said Francis, "I heard the sufferings of your heart, and I have come here to learn the reason for your sadness. Have you eaten too many bitter kernels of grain? Why have you not found the peace of the doves, and of the lambs which are also white...? Oh harvester of the second crop, for what do you search so restlessly here where there is no more restlessness, and where never more will you feel the hunting-dogs' breath on your poor skin?"

"Oh my friend," answered he, "what am I seeking? I am seeking my God. As long as you were my God on earth I felt at peace. But in this Paradise where I have lost my



way, because your presence is no longer with me, Oh divine brother of the beast, my soul feels suffocated for I do not find my God.”

“Do you think, then,” said Francis, “that God abandons rabbits, and that they alone of the whole world have no title to Paradise?”



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“No,” Rabbit replied, “I have given no thought to such things. I would have followed you because I came to know you as intimately as the earthly hedge on which the lambs hung the warm flakes of snow with which I used to line and keep warm my nest. Vainly I have sought throughout these heavenly meadows this God of whom you are speaking. But while my companions discovered Him at once and found their Paradise, I lost my way. From the day when you left us and from the instant that I gained Heaven, my childish and untamed heart has beaten with homesickness for the earth.

“Oh Francis, Oh my friend, Oh you in whom alone I have faith, give back to me my earth. I feel that I am not at home here. Give back to me my furrows full of mud, give back to me my clayey paths. Give back to me my native valley where the horns of the hunters make the mists stir. Give back to me the wagon-track on the roadway from which I heard sound the packs of hounds with their hanging ears, like an angelus. Give back to me my timidity. Give back to me my fright. Give back to me the agitation that I felt when suddenly a shot swept the fragrant mint beneath my bounds, or when amid the bushes of wild quince my nose touched the cold copper of a snare. Give back to me the dawn upon the waters from which the skillful fisherman withdraws his lines heavy with eels. Give back to me the blue gleaning under the moon, and my timid and clandestine loves amid the wild sorrel, where I could no longer distinguish the rosy tongue of my beloved from the dew-laden petal of the eglantine which had fallen upon the grass. Give back to me my weakness, oh thou, my dear heart. And go, and say unto God, that I can no longer live with Him.”

“Oh Rabbit,” Francis answered, “my friend, gentle and suspicious like a peasant, Oh Rabbit of little faith, you blaspheme. If you have not known how to find your God it is because in order to find this God, you would have had to die like your companions.”

“But if I die, what will become of me?” cried he with the hide of the color of stubble.

And Francis said:

“If you die you will become your Paradise.”

* * * * *

Thus talking they reached the edge of the Paradise of beasts. There the Paradise of men began. Rabbit turned his head, and read at the top of a sign-post on a plate of blue cast-iron where an arrow indicated the direction

Castetis to Balansun—5 M.

The day was so hot that the letters of the inscription seemed to quiver in the dull light of summer. In the distance, on the road, there were clouds of dust, as in Blue Beard when Sister Anne is asked: “Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anything coming?” This



pale dryness, how magnificent it was, and how filled it was with the bitter fragrance of mint.

And Rabbit saw a horse and a covered cart approaching.

It was a sorry nag and dragged a two-wheeled cart and was unable to move except in a jerky sort of gallop. Every leap made its disjointed skeleton quiver and jolted its harness and made its earth-colored mane fly in the air, shiny and greenish, like the beard of an ancient mariner. Wearily as though they were paving-stones the animal lifted its hoofs which were swollen like tumors....



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Then a doubt, stronger than all the doubts which hitherto had assailed the soul of Rabbit, pierced him.

* * * * *

This doubt was a leaden grain of shot which had just passed through the nape of his neck behind his long ears into his brain. A veil of blood more beautiful than the glowing autumn floated before his eyes in which the shadows of eternity rose. He cried out. The fingers of a huntsman pinioned his throat, strangled him, suffocated him. His heart-beat grew weaker and weaker; this heart which used to flutter like the pale wild rose in the wind dissolving at the morning hour when the hedge softly caresses the lambs. An instant he remained motionless, hollow-flanked and drawn-out like Death itself in the grasp of his murderer. Then poor old Rabbit leaped up. He clawed in vain for the ground which he could no longer reach because the man did not let go of him. Rabbit passed away drop by drop.

Suddenly his hair stood erect, and he became like unto the stubble of summer where he formerly dwelled beside his sister, the quail, and the poppy, his brother; and like unto the clayey earth which had wetted his beggar's paws; and like unto the gray-brown color with which September days clothe the hill whose shape he had assumed; like unto the rough cloth of Francis; like unto the wagon-track on the roadway from which he heard the packs of hounds with hanging ears, singing like the angelus; like unto the barren rock which the wild thyme loves. In his look where now floated a mist of bluish night there was something like unto the blessed meadow where the heart of his beloved awaited him at the heart of the wild sorrel. The tears which he shed were like unto the fountain of the seraphs at which sat the old fisher of eels repairing his lines. He was like unto life, like unto death, like unto himself, like unto his Paradise.

END OF THE ROMANCE OF THE RABBIT

TALES

PARADISE

The poet looked at his friends, his relatives, the priest, the doctor, and the little dog, who were in the room. Then he died. Some one wrote his name and age on a piece of paper. He was twenty-eight years.

As they kissed his forehead his friends and relatives found that he was cold, but he could not feel their lips because he was in heaven. And he did not ask as he had done when he was on earth, whether heaven was like this or like that. Since he was there, he had no need of anything else.



His mother and father, whether or not they had died before him, came to meet him. They did not weep any more than he, for the three had really never been separated.

His mother said to him:

“Put out the wine to cool, we are about to dine with the *Bon Dieu* under the green arbor of the Garden of Paradise.”

His father said to him:

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“Go down and cull of the fruits. There is none that is poisonous. The trees will offer them to you of their own accord, without sufferance either to their leaves or their branches, for they are inexhaustible.”

The poet was filled with joy in being able to obey his parents. When he had returned from the orchard and submerged the bottles of wine in the water, he saw his old dog. It too had died before him, and it came gently running toward him, wagging its tail. It licked his hands, and he patted it. Beside it were all the animals he had loved best while on earth: a little red cat, two little gray cats, two little white cats, a bullfinch, and two goldfish.

Then he saw that the table was set and about it were seated the *Bon Dieu*, his father and mother, and a lovely young girl whom he had loved here-below on earth. She had followed him to heaven even though she was not dead.

He saw that the Garden of Paradise was none other than that of his own birthplace here on earth, in the high reaches of the Pyrenees, all filled with lilies and pomegranates and cabbages.

The *Bon Dieu* had laid his hat and stick on the ground. He was garbed like the poor on the great highways, those who have only a morsel of bread in their wallet, and whom the magistrates arrest at the town gates, and throw into prison, since they know not how to write their name. His beard and hair were white like the great light of day, and his eyes profound and black like the night. He spoke, and his voice was very soft:

“Let the angels come and minister unto us, for to serve is their happiness.”

Then from all corners of the heavenly orchard legions were seen to hasten. They were the faithful servitors who here on earth had loved the poet and his family. Old Jean was there, he who was drowned while saving a little boy, old Marie who had fallen dead under a sunstroke, and lame Pierre was there and Jeanne and still another Jeanne.

Then the poet rose to do them honor, and said unto them:

“Sit down in my place, it is meet that you should be near God.”

And God smiled because he knew in advance what their answer would be.

“Our happiness is service. This puts us close to God. Do you not serve your father and mother? Do they not serve Him who serves us?”

And suddenly he saw that the table had grown larger and that new guests were seated about it. They were the father and mother of his mother and father, and the generations that had gone before them.



Evening fell. The older of the people slumbered. Love held the poet and his sweetheart. But God to whom they had done honor, took up his way again like the poor on the great highways, those who have only a morsel of bread in their wallet, and whom the magistrates arrest at the town gates, and throw into prison, since they know not how to write their name.

CHARITY CHILDREN

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One day the souls of the charity children cried out to God. It was on a stormy evening when their fevers and wounds made them suffer more than ever. They lay white with grief in their rows of beds, above which ignoble science had hung the placards of their maladies.

They were sad, very sad, for it was a day of festival. Their tiny arms were stretched out on the coverlets, and with their transparent hands they touched the meager toys that pious grand ladies had brought them. They did not even know what to do with these playthings. A President of the Republic had visited them, but they had not understood what it meant.

Their souls cried out toward God. They said:

“We are the daughters of misery, of scrofula, and of syphilis. We are the daughters of daughters of shame.”

“I,” said one, “was dragged out of a cesspool where in her distraction my mother, the servant of an inn, had thrown me.” Another said: “I was born of a child with an enormous head that had a red gap in the forehead. My father killed my mother, and he killed himself.”

Still others said:

“We are the survivors of abortions and infanticides. Our mothers are on the lists. Our fathers, cigar in mouth, saunter smiling amid the tumult of business and the markets. We are born like kings with a crown on our heads, a crown of red rash.”

And God, hearing their cry, came down toward these souls. He entered the hospital of more than human sorrows. At his approach the fumes rose from the medicaments which the good sisters had prepared, as though from censers by the side of the child martyrs, who sat up in their narrow cots like white, weary flowers.

The sovereign Master said to them:

“Here I am. I heard your call, and am waiting to condemn those that caused you to be born. What torment do you implore for them?”

Then the souls of the children sang like the bindweed of the hedges.

They sang:

“Glory to God! Glory to God! Pardon those who gave us birth. Lead us some day to Heaven by their side.”



THE PIPE

Once upon a time there was a young man who had a new pipe. He was smoking peacefully in the shade of an arbor hung with blue grapes. His wife was young and pretty; she had rolled up her sleeves as far as her elbows and was drawing water from the well. The wooden bucket bounded against the edge, and shed tears like a rainbow. The young man was happy smoking his pipe, because he saw the birds flying hither and thither, because his dear old mother was still among the living, because his old father was hale, and because he loved with all his heart his young wife, and was proud of her lithesomeness and her firm and smooth breasts that were like two ripe apples.

The young man, as I have said, was smoking a new pipe.

His mother fell very ill. They had to operate, and it made her cry out aloud, until after thirty-four days of horrible suffering she died. His father, who was always so hale, was talking one day with a workman at the door of the little village church, which was undergoing repair, when a stone became detached from the arch and crushed his head. The devoted son wept for these, his best and oldest friends, and, at night, he sobbed in the arms of his pretty wife.



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The young man, as I have said, was smoking a new pipe.

But I have forgotten to say that he had an old spaniel of whom he was very fond and whose name was Thomas.

A very great illness had fallen on Thomas, since the good mother's and the good father's deaths. When he was called he could barely drag himself along by the paws of his fore-legs.

One day a man of the world took residence in the little village where the young man was smoking a new pipe. He wore decorations and was distinguished and spoke with an agreeable accent. They became acquainted, and once, when the young man still smoking his new pipe entered his house unexpectedly, he found this fine fellow abed with his pretty wife whose firm and smooth breasts were like two ripe apples.

The young man said nothing. He placed a poor old collar around the neck of Thomas, and with a line which his mother had once used to hang clothes upon, he dragged him along to a huge town, where the two dwelled together in sorrow and want.

The young man had now become an old man, but he was still smoking his new pipe which too had become old.

One evening Thomas died. People came from the police department, and carried off his carcass somewhere.

The old man was now all alone with his old pipe. A great cold fell upon him and a terrible trembling. And he knew that his time had come, and that he never would be able to smoke again. So from the wretched bag which he once had brought with him from his home, he took a sad old hat, and in this he wrapped his pipe.

Then he threw a cape, greenish with age, about his feverish shoulders, and dragged himself painfully to a little square near by, taking care that no policeman should see him. He knelt down, and dug in the earth with his finger nails, and devoutly buried his old pipe underneath a tuft of flowers. Then he returned to his dwelling-place and died.

MAL DE VIVRE

A poet, Laurent Laurini by name, was sick unto death with the illness, called weariness of life. It is a terrible malady, and those who have fallen prey to it are unable to look upon men, animals, and things without frightful suffering. Great scruples poison his heart.

The poet went away from the town where he dwelled. He sought out the fields to gaze at the trees and the corn and the waters, to listen to the quails that sing like fountains



and to the falling of the weavers' looms and the hum of the telegraph wires. These things and these sounds saddened him.

The gentlest thoughts were bitterness to him. And when he picked a little flower in order to escape his terrible malady, he wept because he had plucked it.

He entered a village on an evening sweet with the perfume of pears. It was a beautiful village like those he had often described in his books. There was a town square, a church, a cemetery, gardens, a smithy, and a dark inn. Blue smoke rose from it, and within was the sheen of glasses. There was also a stream which wound in and out under the wild nut-trees.



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The poet with his sick heart sat down mournfully on a stone. He was thinking of the torment he was enduring, of his old mother crying because of his absence, of the women who had deceived him, and he had homesickness for the time of his first communion.

“My heart,” he thought, “my sad heart cannot change.”

Suddenly he saw a young peasant-girl near by gathering her geese under the stars. She said to him:

“Why do you weep?”

He answered:

“My soul was hurt in falling upon the earth. I cannot be cured because my heart is too heavy.”

“Will you have mine?” she said. “It is light. I will take yours and carry it easily. Am I not accustomed to burdens?”

He gave her his heart and took hers. Immediately they smiled at each other and hand in hand they followed the pathway.

The geese went in front of them like bits of the moon.

* * * * *

She said to him:

“I know that you are wise, and that I cannot know what you know. But I know that I love you. You are from elsewhere, and you must have been born in a wonderful cradle like that I once saw in a cart. It belonged to rich people. Your mother must speak beautifully. I love you. You must have loved women with very white faces, and I must seem ugly and black to you. I was not born in a wonderful cradle. I was born in the wheat of the fields at harvest time. They have told me this, and also that my mother and I and a little lamb to which a ewe had given birth on that same day were carried home on an ass. Rich people have horses.”

He said to her:

“I know that you are simple, and that I cannot be like you. But I know that I love you. You are from here, and you must have been rocked in a basket placed on a black chair like that which I have seen in a picture. I love you. Your mother must spin linen. You must have danced under the trees with strong handsome laughing boys. I must seem sick and sad to you. I was not born in the fields at harvest time. We were born in a



beautiful room, I and a little twin sister who died at birth. My mother was sick. Poor people are strong.”

Then they embraced more closely on the bed where they lay together.

She said to him:

“I have your heart.”

He said to her:

“I have your heart.”

* * * * *

They had a sweet little boy.

And the poet, feeling that the illness which had so weighed upon him had fled, said to his wife:

“My mother does not know what has become of me. My heart is wrung with that thought. Let me go to the town, my beloved, and tell her that I am happy and that I have a son.”

She smiled at him, knowing that his heart was hers, and said:

“Go.”

And he went back by the way he had come.



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He was soon at the gates of the town in front of a magnificent residence. There was laughter and chatter within for they were giving a feast, one to which the poor were not invited. The poet recognized the house, as that of an old friend of his, a rich and celebrated artist. He stopped to listen to the conversation before the latticed gate of the park through which fountains and statues could be seen. He recognized the voice of a woman. She was beautiful, and once had broken his boyish heart. She was saying:

“Do you remember the great poet, Laurent Laurini?...They say he has made a mesalliance, and has married a cowherd....”

* * * * *

Tears rose to his eyes, and he continued his way through the streets of the town until he came to the house where he was born. The paving-stones replied softly to the words of his tired steps. He pushed open his door and entered. And his old dog, faithful and gentle as ever, ran limpingly to meet him; it barked with joy, and licked his hand. He saw that since his departure the poor beast had had some sort of stroke or paralysis, for time and trouble afflict the bodies of animals as well.

Laurent Laurini mounted the stairs, keeping close to the bannisters, and he was deeply moved, when he saw the old cat turn around, arch her back, raise her tail, and rub against the steps. On the landing the clock struck, as if in gratitude.

He entered her room gently. He saw his mother on her knees praying. She was saying:

“Dear God, I pray unto Thee, that my son may still be among the living. Oh my God, he has suffered much...Where is he? Forgive me for this that I have given him birth. Forgive him for this that he is causing me to die.”

Then he knelt down beside her, laying his young lips on her poor gray hair, and said:

“Come with me. I am healed. I know a land where there are trees and corn and waters, where quails sing, where the looms of the weavers fall, where the telegraph wires hum, where a poor woman dwells who holds my heart, and where your grandson is playing.”

THE TRAMWAY

Once upon a time there was a very industrious workman who had a good wife and a charming little daughter. They lived in a great city.

It was the father's birthday and to celebrate it they bought beautiful white salad and a chicken made for roasting. Every one was happy that Sunday morning, even the little cat that looked slyly at the fowl, saying to herself: “I shall have good bones to pick.”



After they had eaten breakfast, the father said:

“We are going to be extravagant for once, and ride in a tram to the suburbs.”

They went out.

They had many times seen well-dressed men and beautiful ladies give a signal to the driver of the tram, who immediately stopped his horses to permit them to get on.



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The honest workman was carrying his little girl. His wife and he stopped at a street-corner.

A tram, shiny with paint, came toward them, almost empty. And they felt a great joy when they thought of how they were going to enter it for four sous apiece. And the honest workman signaled to the conductor to stop the horses. But he seeing they were poor simple people looked at them disdainfully, and would not halt his vehicle.

ABSENCE

At eighteen Pierre left the home in the country where he had been born.

At the very moment when he left, his old mother was ill in bed in the blue room, where there were the daguerreotype of his father and peacock-feathers in a vase and a clock representing Paul and Virginia. Its hands pointed to the hour of three.

In the courtyard under the fig-tree his grandfather was resting.

In the garden his fiancee stood among roses and gleaming pear-trees.

* * * * *

Pierre went to earn his living in a country where there were negroes and parrots and india-rubber trees and molasses and fevers and snakes.

He dwelled there thirty years.

* * * * *

At the very moment when he returned to the home in the country where he had been born, the blue room had faded to white, his mother was reposing in the bosom of heaven, the picture of his father was no longer there, the peacock-feathers and the vase had disappeared. Some sort of object stood in the clock's place.

In the courtyard under the fig-tree where his grandfather, who had long since died, had been accustomed to rest, there were broken plates and a poor sick chicken.

In the garden of roses and gleaming pear-trees where his fiancee had stood, there was an old woman.

The story does not tell who she was.



THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE

One day a poet sat down at a table to write a story. Not a single idea would come to him, but nevertheless he was happy, because the sun shone on a geranium on the window-sill, and because a gnat flew about in the blue of the open window.

Suddenly his life appeared before him like a great white road. It began in a dark grove where there were laughing waters, and ended at a quiet grave overgrown with brambles, nettles, and soapwort.

In the dark grove he found the guardian-angel of his childhood. He had the golden wings of a wasp, fair hair, and a face as calm as the water of a well on a summer's day.

The guardian-angel said to the poet:

“Do you remember when you were a child? You came here with your father and mother who were going fishing. The field near by was warm and covered with flowers and grasshoppers. The grasshoppers looked like broken blades of moving grass. Do you wish to see this place again, my friend?”



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The poet answered: "Yes."

So they went together as far as the blue river over which there were the blue sky and the dark nut-trees.

"Behold your childhood," said the angel.

The poet looked at the water and wept and said:

"I no longer see the reflection of the beloved faces of my mother and father. They used to sit on the bank. They were calm, good, and happy. I had on a white pinafore which was always getting dirty, and mamma cleaned it with her handkerchief. Dear angel, tell me what has become of the reflections of their beloved faces? I no longer see them. I no longer see them."

At that moment a cluster of wild nuts dropped from a hazel-tree and floated down the stream of water.

And the angel said to the poet:

"The reflection of your father and mother went on with the stream of water like those nuts. For everything obeys the current, substance as well as shadow. The image of your beloved parents is merged in the water and what remains is called memory. Recollect and pray. And you will find the dearly loved images again."

And as an azure kingfisher darted above the reeds, the poet cried:

"Dear angel! Do I not see the color of my mother's eyes in the wings of that bird?"

And the divine spirit answered:

"It is as you have said. But look again."

From the top of a tree where a turtle-dove had built her nest a downy white feather fell soaring and eddying to the water.

And the poet cried:

"Dear angel! Is not this white down, my mother's gentle purity?"

And the divine spirit answered:

"It is as you have said."

A light breeze ruffled the water and made the leaves rustle.



The poet asked:

“Is not that the grave sweet voice of my father?”

And the spirit answered:

“It is as you have said.”

Then they walked along the road which left the grove and followed the river. And soon under the glare of the sun the road became white, very white. It was like the linen at Holy Communion. To the right and left hidden springs tinkled like pious bells. And the angel said:

“Do you recognize this part of your life?”

“This is the day of my first communion,” answered the poet. “I remember the church and the happy faces of my mother and grandmother. I was happy and sad at the same time. With what fervor I knelt! Thrills ran through my hair. That evening at family supper they kissed me and said: ‘He was the most beautiful.’”

And in recalling this the poet burst into sobs. And as he wept he became as beautiful as on the day of the blessed ceremony. His tears flowed through his hands like holy water.

And they went on along the road.

The day waned a little. The supple poplars swayed gently along the ditches. At a distance one of them in the center of a field looked like a tall young girl. The sky tinted it so delicately that it was pale and blue like the temple of a virgin.



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And the poet dreamed of the first woman he had loved.

And his guardian-angel said to him:

“This love was so pure and so sad that it did not offend me.”

And as they walked along, the shade was sweet. Lambs passed by. And seeing the sadness of the poet the divine spirit had on his lips a smile, grave and gentle like that of a dying mother. And the trembling of his golden wings pursued the whispers of the evening.

* * * * *

Soon the stars were lighted in the silence.

And the sky resembled a father’s bed surrounded by wax tapers and dumb sorrows. And the night seemed like a great widow kneeling upon the earth.

“Do you recognize this?” asked the angel.

The poet made no answer but knelt down.

* * * * *

Finally they reached the end of the road near the small quiet grave overgrown with brambles, nettles, and soapwort.

And the angel said to the poet:

“I wished to show you your way. Here you will sleep, not far from the waters. Every day they will bring you the image of your memories: the azure of the kingfisher like your mother’s eyes, the down of the turtle-dove like her sweetness, the echo of the leaves like the grave calm voice of your father, the reflected brightness of the road white as your first communion, and the form of your beloved supple as a poplar.

“At last the waters will bring you the great luminous Night.”

INTELLIGENCE

One day the books which contained the wisdom of men disappeared by enchantment.

Then the great scholars assembled: those who were engaged in mathematics, in physics, in chemistry, in astronomy, in poetry, in history, and in other arts and letters.

They held counsel and said:



“We are the custodians of human genius. We will recall the noblest inventions of the wisest of men and the greatest of poets and have them graven in immortal marble. They will represent only the supreme summits of achievement since the beginning of the world. Pascal shall be entitled to but one thought, Newton to but one star, Darwin to but one insect, Galileo to but one grain of dust, Tolstoi to but one charity, Heinrich Heine to but one verse, Shakespeare to but one cry, Wagner to but one note....”

Then as the scholars summoned their thoughts to recall the masterpieces indispensable to the salvation of man, they realized with terror that their brains were void.

THE TWO GREAT ACTRESSES

I wish I could find new words to depict the gentleness of a little prostitute whom we met one evening in the center of a large, almost deserted square. The little prostitute was wearing wretched boots that were too large and soaked up the water. She had a parasol covered like an umbrella, and a little straw hat, the lining of which surely bore the words: *Derniere mode*.



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She had a weak little voice, and she was intelligent. She was recovering, as the expression goes, from pleurisy. Moreover, she had the air of being as frail morally as physically.

I encountered her many times, after ten o'clock, when she was weary with seeking, often in vain, for any first-comer who would go with her.

She sat down on a bench in the shadows, beside me, and rested her poor pale head against me.

I knew that when she did this it was somewhat with the feeling of slight consolation, like that of a poor animal when it no longer feels itself abused. I was held by an infinite pity for this friend. I knew that she looked at her trade as an important task, however ungrateful it was. For a long time she waited thus for the train to the suburb where she lived.

One evening she asked if she might go with me to the end of the street.

We came to a great lighted square where there was a large theater. On one of the pillars of this edifice was a brilliant, gilded poster. It represented Sarah Bernhardt in the costume of Tosca, I believe. She wore a stiff rich robe and held a palm in her hand. And I called to mind the things I had been told of this famous woman: her caprices that were immediately obeyed, her extravagances, her coffin, her pride.

I felt the poor little sufferer trembling at my side. She saw this barbarous idol rise up and throw unconsciously upon her the splattering flood of her golden ornaments.

And I had a desire to cry out with grief at this meeting face to face of the two. And I said to myself:

"They are both born of woman. One holds a palm, and the other an old umbrella so shabby that she does not dare to open it before me.

"The one trails an admiring throng at her feet, and the other tatters of leather. The one sells her sorrow for the weight of gold and not a sob comes from her mouth that does not have the clinking sound of gold. Not a single sob of the other is heard."

And something cried aloud within me:

"The one is a human actress. She is applauded because she is of the same clay as those who listen to her. And they have need of the lie on which the most beautiful roles are builded.

"But the other, she is an actress of God. She plays a part so great and so sorrowful that she has not found one man who understands her and who is rich enough to pay her.



“And the great actress has never attained, even in her most beautiful roles, the true genius of sorrow which makes the little prostitute rest her forehead upon me.”

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

She was a dainty and delicate little creature who worked in a shop. She was, perhaps, not very intelligent, but she had soft, black eyes. They looked at you a little sadly, and then drooped. You felt that she was affectionate and commonplace with that tender commonplaceness, which real poets understand, and which is the absence of hate.



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You knew that she was as simple as the modest room in which she lived alone with her little cat that some one had given her. Every morning before she went to the shop, she left for her a little bit of milk in a bowl.

And like her gentle mistress the little cat had sad, kind eyes. She warmed herself on the window-sill in the sun beside a pot of basil. Sometimes she licked her little paw, and used it as a brush on the short fur of her head. Sometimes she played with a mouse.

One day the cat and the mistress both found themselves pregnant, the one by a handsome fellow who deserted her, and the other by a beautiful tom-cat who also went his way.

But there was this difference. The poor girl became ill, very ill, and passed her days sobbing. The little cat made for herself a kind of joyous cradling-place in the sun where it shone upon her white, drolly inflated abdomen.

The cat's lover had come later than the girl's. So things happened that they were both confined at the same time.

One day the little working-girl received a letter from the handsome fellow who had deserted her. He sent her twenty-five francs, and spoke of his generosity to her. She bought charcoal, a burner, and a sou's worth of matches. Then she killed herself.

When she had entered heaven, which a young priest had at first tried to prevent, the dainty and delicate creature trembled because that she was pregnant and that the *Bon Dieu* would condemn her.

But the *Bon Dieu* said to her:

"My dear young friend, I have made ready for you a charming room. Go there for your confinement. Everything ends happily in heaven and you will not die. I love little children and suffer them to come unto me."

And when she entered the little room which had been made ready for her in the great Hospital of Divine Mercy, she saw that God had arranged a surprise for her. There in a box lay the cat she loved, and there was also a pot of basil on the window-sill. She lay down.

She had a pretty, little, golden-haired daughter, and the cat had four sweet, delightfully black kittens.



THE LITTLE NEGRESS

Sometimes my imagination is fascinated by the yellowing of old ocean charts, and in my feverish brain I hear the roaring of monsoons. What then? Must I, in order to have an interest in this present life, exhume that which, perhaps, I led before my birth, between two black suns?

It was a vague region, abounding in stars and in the diffused sobbing of an ocean. There was a scratching at my door, and I said, "Come in."

A young negress in a loose blue loincloth, reaching halfway down her thighs, entered. She crouched down on the ground, and held out her thin clasped hands toward me. And I saw that her bare arms were covered with the blows of a lash.

"Who did this to you, Assumption?" I asked.



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She did not answer, but all her limbs trembled, for she did not understand, and wondered, perhaps, whether I too was about to inflict some brutality upon her.

Gently I removed her garment, and saw that her back also was wounded. I washed it. But she, frightened by such kindness, fled for refuge under the table of my cabin. My eyes filled with tears. I tried to call her back. But her glance, like that of a beaten dog, shrank from me. I had a few potatoes, and a little butter. I mashed them to a pulp with a wooden spoon, and placed it in a bowl at some distance from the crouching Assumption. Then I lighted my pipe.

At the end of an hour the poor creature began to move. She put one arm forward, then the other, and then a knee. I thought she was directing her attention toward the food in order to eat. But to my astonishment, I saw her crawl on hands and knees toward a corner of the room, where I had left a few flowers lying. She rose up quickly, and with a sudden movement seized them.

* * * * *

It was perhaps a hundred and fifty years after this adventure occurred, that I met Assumption again. At least I was convinced that it was she. It was in Bordeaux at the *Restaurant du Perou*. She was drying the glass of a gloomy student who had not found it clean enough.

THE PARADISE OF BEASTS

Once on a rainy midnight a poor old horse, harnessed to a cab, was drowsing in front of a dingy restaurant from whence came the laughter of women and young people.

And the poor spiritless animal with drooping head and shaking limbs made a sorry spectacle, as he stood there waiting the pleasure of the roisterers, that would at last permit him to go home to his reeking stable.

Half asleep, the horse heard the coarse jokes of these men and women. He had long since grown painfully accustomed to it. His poor brain understood that there was no difference between the monotonous unchanging screech of a turning wheel and the shrill voice of a prostitute.

And this evening he dreamed vaguely of the time when he had been a little colt that had gamboled on a smooth field, quite pink amid the green grass, and how his mother had given him to suck.

Suddenly he fell stone dead on the slippery pavement.



He reached the gate of heaven. A great scholar, who was waiting for St. Peter to come and open the gate, said to the horse:

“What are you doing here? You have no right to enter heaven. I have the right because I was born of a woman.”

And the poor horse answered:

“My mother was a gentle mare. She died in her old age with her blood sucked out by leeches. I have come to ask the *Bon Dieu* if she is here.”

Then the gate of Heaven was opened to the two who knocked upon it, and the Paradise of animals appeared.



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And the old horse recognized his mother, and she recognized him.

She greeted him by neighing. And when they were both in the great heavenly meadow the horse was filled with joy in finding again his old companions in misery and in seeing them happy forever.

There were some who had drawn stones along the slippery pavements of cities, and they had been beaten with whips, and had finally fallen under the weight of the wagons. There were some who with bandaged eyes had turned the merry-go-rounds ten hours a day. There were mares killed in bullfights before the eyes of young girls, who, rosy with joy, watched the intestines of these unhappy beasts sweep the hot sand of the arena. There were many more, and then still more.

And they all grazed eternally in the great plain of divine tranquillity.

Moreover, the other animals were happy here also.

The cats, mysterious and delicate, did not even obey the *Bon Dieu* who smiled upon them. They played with the end of a string patting it lightly with an important air, out of which they made a sort of mystery.

The good mother-dogs spent their time nursing their little ones. The fish swam about without fear of the fisherman. The birds flew without dread of the hunter. And everything was like this.

There were no men in this Paradise.

OF CHARITY TOWARD BEASTS

There is in the look of beasts a profound light and gentle sorrow, which fills me with such understanding that my soul opens like a hospice to all the sorrows of animals.

They are forever in my heart, as when I see a tired horse, his nose drooping to the ground, asleep in the nocturnal rain, before a cafe; or the agony of a cat crushed beneath a carriage; or a wounded sparrow who has found refuge in a hole in a wall. Were it not for the feeling that it is undignified for a man, I would kneel before such patience and such torments, for I seem to see a halo around the heads of these mournful creatures, a real halo, as large as the universe, placed there by God Himself.

Yesterday I was at a fair, and watched the merry-go-round. There was an ass among the wooden animals. The sight of it almost made me weep, because I was reminded of those living martyrs, its brothers.



I wanted to pray, and to say to it: “Little ass, you are my brother. They say that you are stupid, because you are incapable of doing evil. You go your slow pace, and seem to think as you walk: ‘See! I cannot go any faster...The poor make use of me, because they need not give me much to eat.’ Little ass, the goad pricks you. Then you go a little faster, but not a great deal. You cannot go very fast...Sometimes you fall. Then they beat you, and pull at the rein fastened to the bit in your mouth. They pull so hard that your lips are drawn back showing your poor, yellow teeth which browse on miseries.”



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* * * * *

At the same fair I heard the shrilling of a bagpipe. F. asked me: "Doesn't it remind you of African music?"—"Yes," I answered, "at Touggart the bagpipes have the same nasal note. It must be an Arab who is playing."—"Let us go into the booth," he said...Dromedaries were on exhibition there.

A dozen little camels, crowded like sardines in a can, were stupidly going round and round in a sort of trench. These creatures which I have seen in the Sahara undulant like waves with only God and Death surrounding them, I now saw here, Oh sorrow of my heart! They went round and round again in that narrow space. The anguish which passed from them to me filled me as with nausea toward man. They went on and on, always on, proud as poor swans, hallowed as it were by their desolation. They were covered with grotesque trappings, and the butt of dancing women. They raised their poor verminous necks toward God, and toward the miraculous leaves of some imaginary oasis.

Ah! what a prostitution of God's creatures. Farther along there were rabbits in a cage. Then came goldfish, that were offered as prizes of a lottery. They swam about in blown glass bowls, the necks of which were so narrow that F. said to me: "How did they get in?"—"By squeezing them a little," I answered. Still farther on were living chickens, also lottery prizes, spun around in a whirligig. In the center a Tittle milk-fed pig, mad with fear, was crouching flat on his stomach.

Hens and pullets, overcome by vertigo, squawked and pecked frantically at one another. My companion called my attention to dead, plucked chickens hanging beside their living sisters.

My heart swells at these memories. An infinite pity overcomes me.

Oh poet, receive these poor suffering beasts into your soul. Let them warm themselves, and live there in eternal joy.

Preach the simple word which bestows kindness on the ignorant.

OF THINGS*

Some of the instances here are purely imaginary. I invented them so that I might more deeply penetrate into the heart of these things.

I enter a great square of stirring shadow. Here close beside a red and black candle a man is driving nails into a shoe. Two children stretch their hands toward the hearth. A blackbird sleeps in its wicker cage. Water is boiling in the smoky earthenware pot from



which rises a disagreeable soupy smell which mingles with that of tanner's bark and leather. A crouching dog gazes fixedly into the coals.

There is such an air of gentle peace about these souls and these obscure things that I do not ask whether they have any reason for being other than this very peace, nor whether I read a special charm into their humility.

The God of the poor watches over them, the simple God in whom I believe. It is He who makes an ear of grain grow from a seed; it is He who separates water from earth, earth from air, air from fire, fire from night; it is He who blows the breath of life into the body; it is He who fashions the leaves one by one. We do not know how this is done, but we have faith in it as in the work of a perfect workman.

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I contemplate without desiring to understand, and thus God reveals Himself to me. In the house of this cobbler my eyes open as simply as those of his dog. Then / see, I see in truth that which few can see—the essence of things, as, for example, the devotion of the smoky flame without which the hammer of the workman could not be a bread-winner.

Most of the time we regard things in a heedless fashion. But they are like us, sorrowful or happy. When I notice a diseased ear of wheat among healthy ears, and see the livid stain on its grains I have a quick intuitive understanding of the suffering of this particular thing. Within myself I feel the pain of those plant-cells; I realize their agony in growing in this infected spot without crushing one another. I am filled with a desire to tear up my handkerchief, and bandage this ear of wheat. But I feel that there is no remedy for a single ear of wheat, and that humanly it would be an act of folly to attempt this cure. Such things are not done, yet no one pays any special attention if I take care of a bird or a grasshopper. Nevertheless I am certain that these grains suffer, because I feel their suffering.

A beautiful rose on the other hand imparts to me its joy in life. One feels that it is perfectly happy swaying on its stem, for does not everybody say simply, “It is a pity to cut it,” and thus affirm and preserve the happiness of this flower?

* * * * *

I recall very distinctly the time when it was first revealed to me that things suffered. It happened when I was three years old. In my native hamlet a little boy, while playing, fell on a piece of broken glass, and died of the wound.

A few days later I went to the child’s home. His mother was crying in the kitchen. On the mantelpiece stood a poor little toy. I recall perfectly that it was a small tin or leaden horse, attached to a little tin barrel on wheels.

His mother said to me: “That is my poor little Louis’s wagon. He is dead. Would you like to have it?”

Then a flood of tenderness filled my heart. I felt that this *thing* had lost its friend, its master, and that it was suffering. I accepted the plaything, and overcome with pity I sobbed as I carried it home. I recall very well that I was too young to realize either the death of the little boy or the sorrow of his mother. I pitied only that leaden animal which seemed heart-broken to me as it stood on the mantelpiece forever idle and bereaved of the master it loved. I remember all this as if it had happened yesterday, and I am sure that I had no desire to possess this toy for my own amusement. This is absolutely true, for when I came home, with my eyes full of tears, I confided the little horse and barrel to my mother. She has forgotten the whole incident.

The belief that things are endowed with life exists among children, animals, and simple people.



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I have seen children attribute the characteristics of a living being to a piece of rough wood or to a stone. They brought it handfuls of grass, and were absolutely sure that the wood or stone had eaten it when, as a matter of fact, I had carried it off without their noticing it.

Animals do not differentiate the quality of an action. I have seen cats scratch at something too hot for them for a long time. In this act on the part of the animal there is an idea of fighting something which can yield or perhaps die.

I think it is only an education, born of false vanity, that has robbed man of such beliefs. I myself see no essential difference between the thought of a child who gives food to a piece of wood and the meaning of some of the libations in primitive religions. Do we not attribute to trees an attachment to us stronger than life itself when we believe that one planted on the birthday of a child that sickens and dies will wither and dry up at the same time?

I have known things in pain. I have known some which are dead. The sad clothes of our departed wear out quickly. They are often impregnated with the same disease as those who wore them. They are one with them.

I have often considered objects which were wasting away. Their disintegration is identical with our own. They have their decay, their ruptures, their tumors, their madnesses. A piece of furniture gnawed by worms, a gun with a broken trigger, a warped drawer, or the soul of a violin suddenly out of tune, such are the ills which move me.

When we become attached to things why do we believe that love is in us alone, and afterwards regard it as something external to us? Who can prove that things are incapable of affection, or who can demonstrate their unconsciousness? Was not that sculptor right who was buried holding in his hand a lump of the same clay that had obeyed his dream? Did it not have the devotion of a faithful servant; did it not have a quality which we should admire all the more, because it had the virtue of devoting itself in silence, without selfish interest, and with the passiveness of faith?

Is there not something sublime and radiant in the thing that acts toward man, even as man acts toward God? Does the poet know any more what impulse he obeys, than does the clay? From the moment when they have both proved their inspiration, I believe equally in their consciousness, and I love both with the same love.

The sadness which disengages from things that have fallen into disuse is infinite. In the attic of this house whose inhabitants I did not know, a little girl's dress and her doll lie desolate. And here is an iron-pointed staff which once bit into the earth of the green hills, and a sunbonnet now barely visible in the dim light from the garret-window. They

have been abandoned since many years, and I am wholly certain that they would be happy again to enjoy, the one the freshness of the moss, and the other the summer sky.



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Things tenderly cared for show their gratitude to us, and are ever ready to offer us their soul when once we have refreshed it. They are like those roses of the desert which expand infinitely when a little water brings back to their memory the azure of lost wells.

In my modest drawing-room there is a child's chair. My father played with it during his passage from Guadeloupe to France when he was *seven* years old. He remembered distinctly that he sat on it in the ship's saloon, and looked at pictures which the captain lent him. The island wood of which it was made must have been stout for it withstood the games of a little boy. The piece of furniture had drifted into my home, and slept there almost forgotten. Its soul too had been asleep for many long years, because the child who had cherished it was no more, and no other children had come to perch upon it like birds.

But recently the house was made merry by my little niece who was just *seven*. On my work-table she had found an old book with plates of flowers. When I entered the room I found her sitting on the little chair in the lamplight, looking at the charming pictures, just as once a long time ago her grandfather had done. And I was deeply touched. And I said to myself that this little girl alone had been able to make live again the soul of the chair, and that the gentle soul of the chair had bewitched the candor of the child. There was between her and this object a mysterious affinity. The one could not help but go to the other, and it could be awakened by her alone.

Things are gentle. They never do harm voluntarily. They are the sisters of the spirits. They protect us, and we let our thoughts rest upon them. Our thoughts need them for resting-places as perfumes need the flowers.

The prisoner, whom no human soul can any longer console, must feel tenderly toward his pallet and his earthen jug. When everything has been refused him by his fellows his obscure bed gives him sleep and his jug quenches his thirst. And even if it separates him from all the world without, the very barrenness of his walls stands between him and his executioners. The child who has been punished loves the pillow on which he cries; for when every one of an evening has hurt and scolded him, he finds consolation in the soul of the silent down. It is like a friend who remains silent in order to calm a friend.

But it is not only out of the silence of things that is born their sympathy for us. They have secret harmonies. Sometimes they weep in the forest which Rene fills with his tempestuous soul; and sometimes they sing on the lake where another poet dreams.

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There are hours and seasons when certain of these accords are most to the fore, when one hears best the thousand voices of things. Two or three times in my life I have been present at the awakening of this mysterious world. At the end of August toward midnight, when the day has been hot, an indistinct murmur rises about the kneeling villages. It is neither the sound of rivers, nor of springs, nor of the wind, nor of animals cropping the grass, nor of cattle rubbing their chains against the cribs, nor of uneasy watchdogs, nor of birds, nor of the falling of the looms of the weavers. The chords are as sweet to the ear, as the glow of dawn is sweet to the eye. There is stirring a boundless and peaceful world in which the blades of grass lean toward one another till morning, and the dew rustles imperceptibly, and the seeds at each moment's beat raise the whole surface of the plain. It is the soul alone which can apprehend these other souls, this flower-dust joy of the corollas, these calls, and these silences that create the divine Unknown. It is as if one were suddenly transported to a strange country where one is enchanted by langorous words, even though one does not understand very clearly their meaning.

Nevertheless I penetrate more deeply into the meaning whispered by these things than into that hidden in an idiom with which I am unfamiliar. I feel that I understand and that it would not require a very great effort to translate the thought of these obscure souls, and to note in a concrete fashion some of their manifestations. Perhaps poetry sometimes actually does this. It has happened that mentally I have answered this indistinct murmur, just as I have succeeded by my silence in answering distinctly a sweetheart's questions.

But this language of things is not wholly auditory. It is made up of other symbols also, which are faintly traced on our souls. The impression is still too faint, but, perhaps, it will be stronger when we are better prepared to receive God.

It is objects which have been my consolation in the grievous events of my life. At such moments some thing will catch my eye particularly. I who know not how to make my soul bow before men have prostrated it before things. A radiance emanates from them which may be outside the memories that I attach to them, and it is like a thrill of love. I have felt them. I feel them now living around me. They are part of my obscure realm. I feel a responsibility toward them like that of an elder brother. At this instant while I am writing I feel the souls of these divine sisters leaning upon me with love and trust. This chair, this chest of drawers, this pen *exist* as I do. They touch me, and I feel prostrated before them. I have their faith ... I have their faith, which is beyond all systems, beyond all explanations, beyond all intelligence. They give me a conviction such as no genius could give me. Every system is vain, every explanation erroneous, the moment I feel living in my heart the knowledge of these souls.



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When I entered this cobbler's home I knew at once that I was welcome. Without a word I sat down before the hearth near the children and the dog and I opened my soul to the thousand shadowy voices of things.

In this communion the falling of a half charred twig, the grating of the poker with which the fire was stirred, the blow of the hammer, the flickering of the candle, the creak of the dog's collar, the round bulging spot of blackness which was the sleeping blackbird, the singing of the cover of the pot, all combined to form a sacred language easier for me to understand than the speech of most men. These noises and these colors are only the gestures and expressions of objects, just as the voice or the glance are among our means of expression and gesture.

I felt that a brotherhood united me to these humble things, and I knew it was childish to classify the kingdoms of nature when there is but one kingdom of God.

* * * * *

Can we say that things never exhibit to us manifestations of their sympathy? The tool grows rusty when it no longer serves the hand of the workman, even as the workman when he abandons the tool.

I knew an old smith. He was gay in the time of his strength, and the sky entered his dark smithy through the radiant noondays. The joyous anvil answered the hammer. And the hammer was the heart of the anvil beating with the heart of the craftsman. When night fell the smithy was lighted by its single light, the glance of the eyes of the burning coal which flamed under the leather bellows. A divine love united the soul of this man to the soul of these things. And when on the Lord's days the smith retired into pious contemplation, the forge which had been cleaned the night before prayed also in silence.

The smith was my friend. At his dim threshold I often questioned him, and the whole smithy always answered me. The sparks laughed in the coal, and syllables of metal fashioned a mysterious and profound language which moved me like the words of duty. And I experienced there almost the same feelings as in the home of the humble cobbler.

One day the smith fell ill. His breath grew short, and I noticed that now when he pulled the chain of the bellows, formerly so powerful, it also gasped and gradually caught the sickness of its master. The man's heart beat with sudden jumps, and I heard plainly that the hammer struck the iron irregularly as he brandished it above the anvil. And in the same degree as the light in the eyes of the man faded, the flame of the hearth grew dim. In the evenings it wavered more and more, and there were long intervals when the light vanished on the walls and ceiling.



One day while at work the man felt his extremities turn to ice. In the evening he died. I entered the smithy. It was cold as a body deprived of life. One small ember glowed alone under the chimney, humble and watching, like the praying women that I found later beside the death-bed.



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Three months later I went into the abandoned workshop to help evaluate his small amount of property. Everything was damp and black as in a vault. The leather of the bellows was filled with holes where it had rotted. When we tried to pull the chain it came loose from the wood. And the simple people who were making the appraisal with me declared:

“This forge and these hammers are worn out. They ended their life with the master.”

Then I was *moved*, because I *understood* the mysterious meaning of these words.

TO STONES

Brilliant sisters of the torrents that I find on the shore of the Alpine lake: you are the stones loved by the rainbow and the azure cold, on you falls the white salt which is licked up by the lambs, you are mirrors whose light is iridescent as the pigeon's breast, you have more eyes than the peacock, you are crystallized by fire and your veins of snow have become eternal, you have been the companions of primordial cataclysms, you were washed by the sea and then rocked by it until the dove from the ark cooed with love at sight of you....

The gleaming grain of your flesh at times has the blue-veined whiteness of a child's wrist, at times it has the golden coppery hue of the thigh of a heavy and beautiful woman, sometimes it is silvered with mica like a cheek in the sunlight, sometimes it is brown like the complexion of those in whom the dead blondness of tobacco is blended with the gold of the mandarin orange.

You are stones that have been broken by the heart of the torrent, you have been dashed against each other and have been tossed about amid the daphnes of the ravine, you have been whipped by hailstorms and tempest, buried under the avalanche, uncovered by the sun, loosened by the feet of the chamois, you are cold and beautiful but above all else you are pure.

I know little of your sisters of the Indies: either of her whose transparency rivals water gushing from marble, or of her who makes me dream of the clear meadows of my native valley, or of her who is a drop of frozen blood, or of her who resembles the solid sun.

I prefer you to them, even though you are less precious. Sometimes you support the beams of thatched roofs while you gaze at the star-dotted sky, sometimes it is on you that the sheep-dog stretches himself as he mournfully guards his flock.

At the heart of the ether where you rest upon the summits may you continue to receive the nourishment with which your peaceful kingdom is endowed, may the light bathe your cells which are still unrecognized, may buoyant flakes and curves steep them, may they



resound to the vibration of the winds, may they receive at last that harmonious manna which stilled the hunger of Mary Magdalene in the grotto.

Around you will bloom your sweethearts, the purest flowers of the world, but they are already less chaste than you for they have a perfume of snow.



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Poor gray sisters of the brook that I find on the plain, you are tarnished stones, on you falls the shower of rain that the sparrow may drink, you are struck by the foot of the she-ass, you are the guardians that form the inclosures of miserable gardens, it is you who are the concave threshold and the stone at the edge of the well worn smooth by the chain of the bucket, you are servants, poor things become shiny like the blades of implements of husbandry, you are heated in the hearth of the poor to warm the feet of old women, you are hollowed out for mean needs and become the humble table for the dog and the sow, you are pierced so that the singing harvest may be ground beneath the millstone, you are cut, you are taken, you are tossed aside, on you the wanderer will sleep, Oh, you under whom I shall sleep....

You have not guarded your independence like your alpine companions. But, Oh my friends, I do not despise you for that. You are beautiful like the things which are in the shadow.

NOTES

Then, behold me on my return to this old parlor where I look upon the least object with tenderness. This shawl belonged to my paternal grandmother whom I never knew and who rests amid flowers in a humble cemetery of the Antilles. May the humming-birds glitter and cry above her deserted grave, and the tobacco-plants with their rosy bells delight her memory ... I have never seen the portrait which represents her. But I know she had a reputation for goodness and beauty. I have read admirable letters that she wrote from there to my father when he was a child. He had been brought back to France to be educated here, and had remained here.

How often have I dreamed of reviving this past. How beautiful it would be if God gave us, once a year, the festival of seeing our dear departed return. I love to imagine it as occurring on Twelfth Night during a season of snow. The modest dining-room would be opened at the stroke of eight, and seated about the enlarged table, adorned with Christmas roses, I would find all those for whom my soul mourns beneath the cheery light of the lamps.

It seems to me that this meeting would be entirely natural with little of the uncanny, and not at all like a fairy tale. My paternal grandfather, the doctor of medicine who died at Guadeloupe, would occupy the place of honor, and about his shoulders would be a little traveling cloak on which grains of frost were shining. His steely blue eyes behind the enormous gold-rimmed spectacles, which he wore and which my mother uses to-day, would make him appear as he was, at the same time severe and good. In a grave and melodious voice he would speak of the Great Crossing, of the wind of the Eternal



Ocean, of earthquakes in unexplored countries, of shipwrecked men whom he had saved.

And all would listen; and, death being eternal, it would be wonderful to see each one again at the particular age which we with singular obstinacy always attribute to our dear departed.



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The cousins from Saint-Pierre-de-la-Martinique, there were four of them I believe, would not be more than eighteen years old, and would be dressed in white muslin gowns. They would laugh at some cake that had not come out right. And my great aunts who were Huguenots, rigid but happy, with long chains of gold about their necks, would interpret the revelations of the Prophets to one another. And five and seventy years would quaver in each of their cracked voices. And my maternal grandsire at nineteen, with the green coat of a romantic student, all....

But the dream fades and the wind weeps.

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In moss full of sunshine and transparent as an alga or an emerald, I have covered the roots of these first daisies of January. They and the rare periwinkles and the furze are the only flowers of this season. It is too much love doubtless which fills them. They must be born in spite of the ice. The white little bands of their flower-heads are tinged with violet at the ends, and surround the flowers which are greenish yellow like the under side of an old mushroom. The muddy roots feel the plowed fields. I have been so cruel as to pluck these flowers and now they are wretched; they are as wounded as animals could be; and see how, slowly as if they were moved by a terrible fear, the petals of the flowers curve in to cover and protect the sheathes of the minute corollas that I can no longer see. Tenderly I try to raise these petals, but they resist me and I only succeed in murdering the plant. Fool! Why could I not let these flowers live on the edge of their ditch? There they would have felt the fresh shrivelling of drinking in the sun, a bird would have touched them lightly, the proboscis of the mosquitoes would have sucked up their pollen, and they would have died gently by the side of their friends.

* * * * *

The stars of winter are beautiful when they are dusted on the slate-colored sky, and when in the hazy blue depth they light up the shreds of clouds. I passed through the little town at six o'clock, when the candles behind the window-panes make square shadows move within the shops and shine upon the reddish mud of the pavements. A dog trots by sniffing under the doorways. A wagon whose oxen have slipped makes a grating noise. A lantern flickers, a voice is heard. The angles of the roofs are clear-cut. The rest is consumed by the darkness. Here and there, still, at great distances, a window of smoky rose, and I am at the top of the slope.

At the left an enormous star trembles. It seems to breathe and its rays alternately elongate and withdraw again. Its white fire appears to flow. I look upon the constellations, behind which there are other spaces of constellations, which hide still more constellations, until the glance is lost in luminous embers like those of a hearth.



I am in no wise troubled by these stars. I do not see in them worlds infinitely great or small according to the one with which we compare them. They are in my thoughts, such as I see them: the largest like hummingbirds the smallest like wasps. The space which separates them one from another does not seem any greater than the pace with which I measure the road. It is simply the sky of January above a little town.



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A peasant-woman has sold me some mushrooms. They are very rare nowadays. Their odor captures me, and I dream of the edges of the meadows, of the elves who, according to Shakespeare, make the mushrooms grow beneath the spell of the moon. They have been moistened by the melting frost, and fine and long grasses have become attached to their humidity. They bear within them the quivering mist of the nights. The first, they came forth from the earth under their umbels of ivory to find out whether the feet of the hedge were still surrounded by moss. They must have been deceived. They could not have seen the periwinkles or the violets, but only the irritating and fine gray rain in the gray sky.

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Often I have visualized Heaven for myself. That of my childhood was the hut an old man had built at the top of a climbing road. This hut was called *Paradise*. My father brought me there at the hour when the dark mist of the hills became gilded like a church. I expected, at the end of each walk, to find God seated in the sun which seemed to sleep at the summit of the stony pathway. Was I mistaken?

It is less easy for me to imagine the Catholic Paradise: the harps of azure, the rosy snow of legions in the pure rainbows. I still cling to my first vision, but since I have known love I have added to the divine kingdom a warm, sloping lawn in front of the old man's hut. On it a young girl gathers herbs.

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I have simultaneously the soul of a faun and the soul of an adolescent. And the emotion which I feel on looking upon a woman is quite contrary to that which I feel on gazing at a young girl. If one could make one's self understood by the aid of fruits and flowers, I would offer to the first burning peaches, the rosy blossoms of the belladonna, heavy roses; to the second, cherries, raspberries, the blossoms of the wild quince, eglantine, and honeysuckle. I find it difficult to have any feeling which is not accompanied by the image of a flower or a fruit. When I think of Martha, I dream of gentians. With Lucy I associate the white anemones of Japan, and with Marie the lilies of Solomon; with another a citron which should be transparent.

To the first meeting that a sweetheart has granted me, I have brought a spray of gladiolus whose throats have the rosy hue of an apricot. We placed them on the window during the night when I forgot them to remember only my love. To-day I would forget my loved one, to recall only the gladiolus.



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My memory is therefore, if I may so express it, vegetal. Trees as well as flowers and fruits symbolize for me beings and emotions. Plants as well as animals and stones filled my childhood with a mysterious *charm*. When I was four years old I remained rapt in contemplation of the broken stones of the mountain, lying in heaps along the roads. When struck they gave forth fire in the twilight. When rubbed against one another they felt the burning heat. I gathered pieces of marble from among them which seemed heavy with a water they had concealed within themselves. The mica of the granite held my curiosity in a way which nothing could satisfy. I felt that there was something that no one could tell me—the life of the stones.

At the same age I was scolded because I carried away the artificial beetles from a hat of my mother. I had the passion of collecting animals, I felt toward them so great a love that I wept if I thought them unhappy. And I still endure a deep anguish when I remember the little nightingales which some one gave me and which pined away in the dining-room. Still at the same age, in order to make me go to sleep, they had to place not far from me a bottle containing a tree-frog. I knew that here was a faithful friend who would protect me against robbers. The first time that I saw a stag-beetle, I was so overcome by the beauty of its horns that the longing to possess one became an actual torment.

The passion for plants did not develop until later, about the age of nine years, and I did not really begin to understand their life until about the age of fifteen. I remember the circumstances under which it happened. It was in summer, one Thursday, on a scorching afternoon. I was passing through the botanical garden of a great city with my mother. A white sun, dense blue shadows, and perfumes so heavy that one could almost feel them cling, made of this half desert spot a kingdom whose portal I crossed at last.

In the tepid and reddish-brown water of the ponds plants vegetated; some were leathery and gray, and others long, soft, and transparent. But from the very heart of these poor and sad algae there rose into the very blue of the sky itself, green lance-like stalks whose rose and white umbels challenged the ardent day with their grace; water-lilies slept on their leaves as in a trustful afternoon sleep.

To the plants of the water, the plants of the earth answered. I recall an alley where students, a handkerchief about the neck, were as if buried beneath the beauty of the leaves. It was the alley of the *umbelliferae*. The fennel and the ferula raised their crowns upon their stems with glistening sheaths. The perfumes spoke to each other in the silence. And one felt that a silent understanding went from plant to plant, and that over this isolated realm there hovered something like resignation.



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Since then I have understood the flowers and that their *families* belonged together and have a natural affinity, and are not merely divided into classes as an aid to our slow memories. Toward what solution do these geometries in action, which are plants, progress? I do not know. But there is a fascinating mystery in considering that even as species correspond to certain geological periods and thus group their sympathies, even so to-day they group themselves according to the seasons. What correspondence is there between the character of the shivering and snowy liliaceous plants of winter and the purple solanaceous plants of autumn? And then there are still other delightful dispositions which are due far less to the artifice of man than to the consent of certain species to regard others as their friends and not to pine away beside them. How sweet is the village garden where the gleaming lily, like those gods who often visit the humble, lives amid the cabbages, the blue leek, and the scallions, which boil in the black pot of the poor! How I love the peasant gardens at noonday when the mournful blue shadow of the vegetables sleeps in the white squares of granular earth, when the cock calls the silence, and when the buzzard, slanting and wheeling, makes the scuttling hen cluck! There are the flowers of simple loves, the flowers of the young wife who will dry the blue lavender to scent her coarse sheets. And in this garden grows also the flower of the rondel—the humble gilliflower with its simple perfume. There is also the faithful box, each leaf of which is a small mirror of azure, and the hollyhock in which the sweet and pure flame of melancholy corollas burns; they are the flowers of religion vowed to silence and austerity.

And I love also the flora of the meadows: the meadow-sweet swayed by the breezes, rocked by the murmur of the brook. Its perfumed crown is adorned like the water-beetles, more iridescent than the throats of humming-birds.

It is the beloved of the greensward, the bride of the grassy borders.

But it is in the deep recesses of old deserted parks that the plants are most mysterious. There dwell those which we call *old flowers*, such as the ground-lilac, the belladonna-amaryllis, the crown-imperial. Elsewhere they would die. Here they persist, guarded by the favor of the age-old trees, strange trees, the names of which have disappeared. And these affected and distinguished blossoms raise their swaying heads only when, murmuring across the liquidambar and the maples, the wind moans like Chateaubriand.

* * * * *

The very mournfulness of the little town is pleasing to me; I love its streets of dark shops, the worn thresholds, and the gardens. In the fine season they seem to float against a background of blue mist which is a confusion of hollyhocks, glycins, trellises; or again they seem patchy as the skin of asses, with drying rags above the hedges of battered boxwood. The tanner's brook drifts by with the pale mother-of-pearl of the sky,

and reflects sharply the rooftops amid the slimy plants; the mountain torrent, which hollows the rocks, gleams, twines and flows away.



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The little place is charming when the grasshopper shrills in the summer's elms and the autumn wind scours it, or when the rains streak it. There is a little public garden that Bernardin de Saint Pierre would have loved; in May the night there is dense, blue, and soft in the chestnut-trees.

For years I have lived here, whence my grandfather and a great uncle departed toward the flower-covered Antilles. They listened to the roaring of the sea; robes of muslin glided upon the verandas, and they died perhaps looking back with regret on these streets, these shops, these thresholds, these gardens, this brook, and this mountain torrent.

When I go to my little farm I say to myself that this is where they once were. They brought their luncheon in a little basket, and one of them carried a guitar. And young girls surely followed swiftly. Song stirred among the damp hedgerows. An unutterable love frightened the birds, the mulberries were green. They kept time as they walked. A young girl's cry stirred the air, a big hat turned the corner of the road, a clear laugh rose from the rain-torn eglantines; then hearts beat when, in the bright dog-days, the black barns softened the clucking of the hens under the scarlet sky of the south.

...This guitar or another I heard in the courtyard of my Huguenot great-aunts, one summer's evening when I was four years old. The courtyard slept in the white twilight, the roofs shed an unimaginable tenderness upon the climbing rosebushes and the bright paving-stones. Some one sitting on a beam was making merry at the expense of my childhood and my white apron. My great uncle sang some melody from the capital. I can see him again, standing upright with his head thrown back. The air trembled softly. At the end of a roulade he made an exaggerated and charming bow.

I bless you, oh humble town where I am not understood, where I shelter my pride, my suffering, and my joy, where I have hardly any other distraction than that of listening to the barking of my old dog and watching the faces of the poor. But I reach the hillside where the prickly furze is spread, and in musing upon my difficulties I am filled with a beneficent gentleness. To-day it is no longer the coarse and disdainful laugh of the public, nor the terrible doubt of everything, which disturbs me. The laugh of my detractors has grown wearied, and I have become indifferent to what I am. Yet I have become grave toward myself and others. It is with an apprehensive joy that I regard the heedlessness of the happy. I have learned what misery may spring from love, what blindness is born of a glance. And it is because of what I have suffered that I would bestow a sad and slow caress on those who have not yet known anything but happiness.

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The open door, the blue sky, the watering of the grass and the gilliflowers, and the hyacinths, and a single bird which chirps, and my dogs stretched on the ground and the



rosebushes with their thick stems, the verdure of the lilacs, and a clock that is striking, a wasp which flies straight and marks the meadow with the lines of its golden vibration, and stops, hesitates, sets off again, is silent and buzzes....



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Hearts and choirs of primroses in the moist, shadowy mosses of the woods; long threads of rose and blue dew floating and swinging and suspended—from what?—in the immaterial morning; tree-frogs with golden eye-lids and white throbbing throats; furze whose perfume of faded peach and rose follows along the roads, already torrid....

Iris, cries of jays, turtledoves, mountains of blue snow which are rocks of azure, green fields laid out in squares, brook rolling a golden pebble in the silence; first foliage of the waters, icy trembling of the body beside the springs when the sun lies burning on your hands....

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Slender alders; fiery marshes where toward noonday puffing out their throat, the hoarse gray frogs climb up on the coriaceous plants, while slowly from the deep of the shady and gilded mire rises a bubble....

Dry and twisted vines; swarms of insects from the blossoms of rosy peach-trees, in slanting flight into the azure; pear-trees and roses of Bengal....

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Setting of the cherry sun; nocturnal snow of a fruit-tree; green and transparent shadowing of the lanes; summit of little hills at seven o'clock where the trees are like sponges which little by little blend into the severity of the uniform curve which swells and rises sharply.

Starless night; violet night in which the white sandals of a beloved pagan can hardly be distinguished, and dense bristling of slender, dry trees; pallor of a limestone slope, and water in which something casts two long and deep shadows....

Night; fire; lines of shadow blended with shadows of lines; fire; humid thickness of fields; fire; crimsoning and reddening of clouds; poplars; whiteness which must be a village. Water again, water, and shadows of water....

A wagon passes. The lantern lights up only the rear of the horse, all else is night. When I was a child it was this which astonished me—this light which was quenched again. Another wagon...One sees only the rosy bust of a girl. It slips into the night....

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I return from a journey. The recollection of a maroon reflection of a boat in the canal, the color of gray fish, makes my memory quiver. I dream of white tulips.



I have returned at night. The croaking of frogs has greeted me from the depths of the damp meadow. My heart, do not burst!... Do not burst like the lilacs of the flower-garden whose fragrance I alone have touched....

Will hope be born again? I am afraid. Is this one more disillusion?

The wasp has hummed. I love none but the violet lilacs, I love none but the blue violets. It is Sunday, and I hear in the depths of my soul the droning of the harmoniums of poor churches.

My life, behold my life, ardent and sad like a flame which burns through too warm a summer night beside the open window. An imperceptible breeze has suddenly swelled out the curtain of muslin like my heart.



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In the garden the perfume of the lilacs suddenly make me feel ill because I am horribly sad.

Nevertheless, lilacs, you are dear to me since childhood. Then I thought your clusters were the beautiful polished images of a box of toys.

And you, oh lilacs, have also haunted an orchard which I knew well in my youth. In this orchard there were hedge-hogs. They glided along old beams. How innocent and gentle the hedge-hogs are in spite of their quills! I remember my emotion one winter's evening, when I found one of them at the threshold of the kitchen; it had taken flight from the snow, and was poking its little nose into the refuse left there....

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I love the creatures of the night, the screech-owls with their graceful flight, the bats, the badgers, all the timid beasts which glide through the air or in the grass and of which we know so little. What festivals do they hold amid the plants, their sisters?

At the hour when man is at rest, the rabbits, silvered by the dew, bound over the mint of the furrow and hold their conventicles; the frogs croak in the marsh and make it ripple; the glowworms filter their soft and humid yellow light; the mole bores the meadow; the nightingale sobs like a fountain; the owl utters sad laughter as if it too, however timidly, were trying to have a share in the joy of God.

How I would like to be a creature of the night, a hare trembling in a hedge of hawthorn, a badger grazed by the leaves of the juicy green corn. My only care would have been to safeguard my physical being. I would not have loved. I would not have hoped.