The Cathedral eBook

The Cathedral by Joris-Karl Huysmans

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Page 1

Title: The Cathedral

Author: Joris-Karl Huysmans

Release Date: February 15, 2005 [EBook #15067]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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Produced by Suzanne Shell, Cori Samuel and the PG Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

J.K. Huysmans

THE CATHEDRAL

Translated by Clara Bell

Publishing History First published in France in 1898 First English edition in 1898

THE CATHEDRAL.

CHAPTER I.

At Chartres, as you turn out of the little market-place, which is swept in all weathers by the surly wind from the flats, a mild air as of a cellar, made heavy by a soft, almost smothered scent of oil, puffs in your face on entering the solemn gloom of the sheltering forest.

Durtal knew it well, and the delightful moment when he could take breath, still half-stunned by the sudden change from a stinging north wind to a velvety airy caress. At five every morning he left his rooms, and to reach the covert of that strange forest he had to cross the square; the same figures were always to be seen at the turnings from the same streets; nuns with bowed heads, leaning forward, the borders of their caps blown back and flapping like wings, the wind whirling in their skirts, which they could hardly hold down; and shrunken women, in garments they hugged round them, struggling forward with bent shoulders lashed by the gusts.

Never at that hour had he seen anybody walking boldly upright, without straining her neck and bowing her head; and these scattered women gathered by degrees into two long lines, one of them turning to the left, to vanish under a lighted porch opening to a lower level than the square; the other going straight on, to be swallowed up in the darkness by an invisible wall.

Closing the procession came a few belated priests, hurrying on, with one hand gathering up the gown that ballooned behind them, and with the other clutching their hats, or snatching at the breviary that was slipping from under one arm, their faces hidden on their breast, to plough through the wind with the back of their neck; with red ears, eyes blinded with tears, clinging desperately, when it rained, to umbrellas that swayed above them, threatening to lift them from the ground and dragging them in every direction.

The passage had been more than usually stormy this morning; the squalls that tear across the district of La Beauce, where nothing can check them, had been bellowing for hours; there had been rain, and the puddles splashed under foot. It was difficult to see, and Durtal had begun to think that he should never succeed in getting past the dim mass of the wall that shut in the square, by pushing open the door behind which lay that weird forest, redolent of the night-lamp and the tomb, and protected from the gale.

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He sighed with satisfaction, and followed the wide path that led through the gloom. Though he knew his way, he walked cautiously in this alley, bordered by enormous trunks, their crowns lost in shadow. He could have fancied himself in a hothouse roofed with black glass, for there were flagstones under foot, and no sky could be seen, no breeze could stir overhead. The few stars whose glimmer twinkled from afar belonged to our firmament; they quivered almost on the ground, and were, in fact, earth-born.

In this obscurity nothing was to be heard but the fall of quiet feet, nothing to be seen but silent shades visible against the twilight like shapes of deeper darkness.

Durtal presently turned into another wide walk crossing that he had left. There he found a bench backed by the trunk of a tree, and on this he leaned, waiting till the Mother should awake, and the sweet interview interrupted yesterday by the close of the day should begin again.

He thought of the Virgin, whose watchful care had so often preserved him from unexpected risk, easy slips, or greater falls. Was not She the bottomless Well of goodness, the Bestower of the gifts of good Patience, the Opener of dry and obdurate hearts? Was She not, above all, the living and thrice Blessed Mother?

Bending for ever over the squalid bed of the soul, she washed the sores, dressed the wounds, strengthened the fainting weakness of converts. Through all the ages She was the eternal supplicant, eternally entreated; at once merciful and thankful; merciful to the woes She alleviated, and thankful to them too. She was indeed our debtor for our sins, since, but for the wickedness of man, Jesus would never have been born under the corrupt semblance of our image, and She would not have been the immaculate Mother of God. Thus our woe was the first cause of Her joy; and this supremest good resulting from the very excess of Evil, this touching though superfluous bond, linking us to Her, was indeed the most bewildering of mysteries; for Her gratitude would seem unneeded, since Her inexhaustible mercy was enough to attach Her to us for ever.

Thenceforth, in Her immense humility, She had at various times condescended to the masses; She had appeared in the most remote spots, sometimes seeming to rise from the earth, sometimes floating over the abyss, descending on solitary mountain peaks, bringing multitudes to Her feet, and working cures; then, as if weary of wandering to be adored, She wished—so it had seemed—to fix the worship in one place, and had deserted Her ancient haunts in favour of Lourdes.

That town was the second stage of Her progress through France in the nineteenth century. Her first visit was to La Salette.

This was years ago. On the 19th of September, 1846, the Virgin had appeared to two children on a hill; it was a Saturday, the day dedicated to Her, which, that year, was a fast day by reason of the Ember week. By another coincidence, this Saturday was the

eve of the Festival of Our Lady of Seven Dolours, and the first vespers were being chanted when Mary appeared as from a shell of glory just above the ground.

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And she appeared as Our Lady of Tears in that desert landscape of stubborn rocks and dismal hills. Weeping bitterly, She had uttered reproofs and threats; and a spring, which never in the memory of man had flowed excepting at the melting of the snows, had never since been dried up.

The fame of this event spread far and wide; frantic thousands scrambled up fearful paths to a spot so high that trees could not grow there. Caravans of the sick and dying were conveyed, God knows how, across ravines to drink the water; and maimed limbs recovered, and tumours melted away to the chanting of canticles.

Then, by degrees, after the sordid debates of a contemptible lawsuit, the reputation of La Salette dwindled to nothing; pilgrims were few, miracles were less often proclaimed. The Virgin, it would seem, was gone; She had ceased to care for this spring of piety and these mountains.

At the present day few persons climb to La Salette but the natives of Dauphine, tourists wandering through the Alps, or invalids following the cure at the neighbouring mineral springs of La Mothe. Conversions and spiritual graces still abound there, but bodily healing there is next to none.

“In fact,” said Durtal to himself, “the vision at La Salette became famous without its ever being known exactly why. It may be supposed to have grown up as follows: the report, confined at first to the village of Corps at the foot of the mountain, spread first throughout the department, was taken up by the adjacent provinces, filtered over all France, overflowed the frontier, trickled through Europe, and at last crossed the seas to land in the New World which, in its turn, felt the throb, and also came to this wilderness to hail the Virgin.

“And the circumstances attending these pilgrimages were such as might have daunted the determination of the most persevering. To reach the little inn, perched on high near the church, the lazy rumbling of slow trains must be endured for hours, and constant changes at stations; days must be spent in the diligence, and nights in breeding-places of fleas at country inns; and after flaying your back on the carding-combs of impossible beds, you must rise at daybreak to start on a giddy climb, on foot or riding a mule, up zig-zag bridle-paths above precipices; and at last, when you are there, there are no fir trees, no beeches, no pastures, no torrents; nothing—nothing but total solitude, and silence unbroken even by the cry of a bird, for at that height no bird is to be found.

“What a scene!” thought Durtal, calling up the memories of a journey he had made with the Abbe Gevresin and his housekeeper, since leaving La Trappe. He remembered the horrors of a spot he had passed between Saint Georges de Commiers and La Mure, and his alarm in the carriage as the train slowly travelled across the abyss. Beneath was darkness increasing in spirals down to the vasty deeps; above, as far as the eye could reach, piles of mountains invaded the sky.

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The train toiled up, snorting and turning round and round like a top; then, going into a tunnel, was swallowed by the earth; it seemed to be pushing the light of day away in front, till it suddenly came out into a clearing full of sunshine; presently, as if it were retracing its road, it rushed into another burrow, and emerged with the strident yell of a steam whistle and deafening clatter of wheels, to fly up the winding ribbon of road cut in the living rock.

Suddenly the peaks parted, a wide opening brought the train out into broad daylight; the scene lay clear before them, terrible on all sides.

“Le Drac!” exclaimed the Abbe Gevresin, pointing to a sort of liquid serpent at the bottom of the precipice, writhing and tossing between rocks in the very jaws of the pit.

For now and again the reptile flung itself up on points of stone that rent it as it passed; the waters changed as though poisoned by these fangs; they lost their steely hue, and whitened with foam like a bran bath; then the Drac hurried on faster, faster, flinging itself into the shadowy gorge; lingered again on gravelly reaches, wallowing in the sun; presently it gathered up its scattered rivulets and went on its way, scaly with scum like the iridescent dross on boiling lead, till, far away, the rippling rings spread and vanished, skinned and leaving behind them on the banks a white granulated cuticle of pebbles, a hide of dry sand.

Durtal, as he leaned out of the carriage window, looked straight down into the gulf; on this narrow way with only one line of rails, the train on one side was close to the towering hewn rock, and on the other was the void. Great God! if it should run off the rails! “What a hash!” thought he.

And what was not less overwhelming than the appalling depth of the abyss was, as he looked up, the sight of the furious, frenzied assault of the peaks. Thus, in that carriage, he was literally between the earth and sky, and the ground over which it was moving was invisible, being covered for its whole width by the body of the train.

On they went, suspended in mid-air at a giddy height, along interminable balconies without parapets; and below, the cliffs dropped avalanche-like, fell straight, bare, without a patch of vegetation or a tree. In places they looked as if they had been split down by the blows of an axe—huge growths of petrified wood; in others they seemed sawn through shaley layers of slate.

And all round lay a wide amphitheatre of endless mountains, hiding the heavens, piled one above another, barring the way to the travelling clouds, stopping the onward march of the sky.

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Some made a good show with their jagged grey crests, huge masses of oyster shells; others, with scorched summits, like burnt pyramids of coke, were green half-way up. These bristled with pine woods to the very edge of the precipices, and they were scarred too with white crosses—the high roads, dotted in places with Nuremberg dogs, red-roofed hamlets, sheepfolds that seemed on the verge of tumbling headlong, clinging on—how, it was impossible to guess, and flung here and there on patches of green carpet glued on to the steep hill-sides; while other peaks towered higher still, like vast calcined hay-cocks, with doubtfully dead craters still brooding internal fires, and trailing smoky clouds which, as they blew off, really seemed to be coming out of their summits.

The landscape was ominous; the sight of it was strangely discomfiting; perhaps because it impugned the sense of the infinite that lurks within us. The firmament was no more than a detail, cast aside like needless rubbish on the desert peaks of the hills. The abyss was the all-important fact; it made the sky look small and trivial, substituting the magnificence of its depths for the grandeur of eternal space.

The eye, in fact, turned away with disappointment from the sky, which had lost its infinitude of depth, its immeasurable breadth, for the mountains seemed to touch it, pierce it, and uphold it; they cut it up, sawing it with the jagged teeth of their pinnacles, showing mere tattered skirts of blue and rags of cloud.

The eye was involuntarily attracted to the ravines, and the head swam at the sight of those, vast pits of blackness. This immensity in the wrong place, stolen from above and cast into the depths, was horrible.

The Abbe had said that the Drac was one of the most formidable torrents in France; at the moment it was dormant, almost dry; but when the season of snows and storms comes it wakes up and flashes like a tide of silver, hisses and tosses, foams and leaps, and can in an instant swallow up villages and dams.

“It is hideous,” thought Durtal. “That bilious flood must carry fevers with it; it is accursed and rotten with its soapy foam-flakes, its metallic hues, its scrap of rainbow-colour stranded in the mud.”

Durtal now thought over all these details; as he closed his eyes he could see the Drac and La Salette.

“Ah!” thought he, “they may well be proud of the pilgrims who venture to those desolate regions to pray where the vision actually appeared, for when once they are there they are packed on a little plot of ground no bigger than the Place Saint Sulpice, hemmed in on one side by a church of rough stone daubed with cement of the colour of Valbonnais mustard, and on the other by a graveyard. The horizon is a circle of cones, of dry scoriae, like pumice, or covered with short grass; above them, the glassy slope of

perpetual ice and snow; to walk on, a scanty growth of grass moth-eaten by sand. In two words, to sum up the scene, it was nature's scab, the leprosy of the earth.

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“From the artistic point of view, on this microscopic grand parade, close to the spring whose waters are caught in pipes with taps, three bronze statues stand in different spots. One, a Virgin, in the most preposterous garments, her headgear a sort of pastry-mould, a Mohican’s bonnet, is on her knees weeping, with her face hidden in her hands. Then the same Woman, standing up, her hands ecclesiastically shrouded in her sleeves, looks at the two children to whom she is speaking; Maximin, with hair curled like a poodle, twirling a cap like a raised pie, in his hand; Melanie buried in a cap with deep frills and accompanied by a dog like a paper-weight—all in bronze. Finally the same Person, once more alone, standing on tip-toe, her eyes raised to heaven with a melodramatic expression.

“Never has the frightful appetite for the hideous that disgraces the Church in our day been so resolutely displayed as on this spot; and if the soul suffered in the presence of the obtrusive outrage of this degrading work—perpetrated by one Barreme of Angers and cast in the steam foundries of Le Creusot—the body too had something to endure on this plateau under the crushing mass of hills that shut in the view.

“And yet it was hither that thousands of sick creatures had had themselves hauled up to face the cruel climate, where in summer the sun burns you to a cinder while, two yards away, in the shade of the church, you are frozen.

“The first and greatest miracle accomplished at La Salette was that of bringing such an invasion to this precipitous spot in the Alps, for everything combines to forbid it.

“But crowds came there year after year, till Lourdes took possession of them; for it is since the apparition of the Virgin there that La Salette has fallen into disrepute.

“Twelve years after the vision at La Salette, the Virgin showed herself again, not in Dauphine this time, but in the depths of Gascony. After the Mother of Tears, Our Lady of Seven Dolours, it was Our Lady of Smiles, of the Immaculate Conception, the Sovereign Lady of Joy in Glory, who appeared; and here again it was to a shepherdess that she revealed the existence of a spring that healed diseases.

“And here it is that consternation begins. Lourdes may be described as the exact opposite to La Salette; the scenery is magnificent, the hills in the foreground are covered with verdure, the tamed mountains permit access to their heights; on all sides there are shady avenues, fine trees, living waters, gentle slopes, broad roads devoid of danger and accessible to all; instead of a wilderness, a town, where every requirement of the sick is provided for. Lourdes may be reached without adventures in warrens of vermin, without enduring nights in country inns, or days of jolting in wretched vehicles, without creeping along the face of a precipice; and the traveller is at his destination when he gets out of the train.

“This town then was so admirably chosen for the resort of crowds, that it did not seem necessary that Providence should intervene with such strong measures to attract them.

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“But God, who forced La Salette on the world without availing Himself of the means of fashionable notoriety, now changed His tactics; with Lourdes, advertisement appeared on the scene.

“This it is that confounds the mind: Jesus condescending to make use of the wretched arts of human commerce; adopting the repulsive tricks which we employ to float a manufacture or a business.

“And we wonder whether this may not be the sternest lesson in humility ever given to man, as well as the most vehement reproof hurled at the American abominations of our day—God reduced to lowering Himself once more to our level, to speaking our language, to using our own devices that He may make Himself heard and obeyed; God no longer even trying to make us understand His purpose through Himself, or to uplift us to that height.

“In point of fact, the way in which the Lord set to work to promulgate the mercies peculiar to Lourdes is astounding. To make them known He is no longer content to spread the report of its miracles by word of mouth; no, and it might be supposed that in His eyes Lourdes is harder to magnify than La Salette—He adopted strong measures from the first. He raised up a man whose book, translated into every language, carried the news of the vision to the most distant lands, and certified the truth of the cures effected at Lourdes.

“To the end that this work should stir up the masses, it was necessary that the writer destined to the task should be a clever organizer, and at the same time a man devoid of individuality of style and of any novel ideas. In a word, what was needed was a man devoid of talent; and that is quite intelligible, since from the point of view of appreciating art the Catholic public is still a hundred feet beneath the profane public. And our Lord did the thing well; he selected Henri Lasserre.

“Consequently the mine exploded as required, rending souls and bringing crowds out on to the road to Lourdes.

“Years went by. The fame of the sanctuary is an established fact. Indisputable cures are effected by supernatural means and certified by clinical authorities, whose good faith and scientific skill are above suspicion. Lourdes has its fill; and yet, little by little, in the long run, though pilgrims do not cease to flow thither, the commotion about the Grotto is diminishing. It is dying out, if not in the religious world, at any rate in the wider world of the careless or the doubting, who must be convinced. And our Lord thinks it desirable to revive attention to the benefits dispensed by His Mother.

“Lasserre was not such an instrument as could renew the half-exhausted vogue enjoyed by Lourdes. The public was soaked in his book; it had swallowed it in every vehicle and

in every form; the end was achieved; this budding-knife of miracles was a tool that might now be laid aside.

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“What was now wanted was a book entirely unlike his; a book that would influence the vaster public, whom his homely prosiness would never reach. Lourdes must make its way through denser and less malleable strata, to a public of higher class, and harder to please. It was requisite, therefore, that this new book should be written by a man of talent, whose style nevertheless should not be so transcendental as to scare folks. And it was an advantage that the writer should be very well known, so that his enormous editions might counterpoise those of Lasserre.

“Now in all the realm of literature there was but one man who could fulfil these imperative conditions: Emile Zola. In vain should we seek another. He alone with his battering push, his enormous sale, his blatant advertisement, could launch Lourdes once more.

“It mattered little that he would deny supernatural agency and endeavour to explain inexplicable cures by the meanest hypotheses; it mattered little that he mixed mortar of the medical muck of a Charcot to make his wretched theory hold together; the great thing was that noisy debates should arise about the book of which more than a hundred and fifty thousand copies proclaimed the name of Lourdes throughout the world.

“And then the very disorder of his arguments, the poor resort to a ‘breath that heals the people,’ invented in contradiction to all the data of positive science on which he prided himself, with the purpose of making these extraordinary cures intelligible—cures which he had seen, and of which he dared not deny the reality or the frequency—were admirable means of persuading unprejudiced and candid inquirers of the authenticity of the recoveries effected year after year at Lourdes.

“This avowed testimony to such amazing facts was enough to give a fresh impetus to the masses. It must be remarked, too, that the book betrays no hostility to the Virgin, of whom it speaks only in respectful terms on the whole; so is it not very credible that the scandal to which this work gave rise was profitable?

“To sum up: it may be asserted that Lasserre and Zola were both useful instruments; one devoid of talent, and for that very reason penetrating to the very lowest strata of the Catholic methodists; the other, on the contrary, making himself welcome to a more intelligent and cultivated public, by those splendid passages where the flaming multitude of processions moves on, and amid a cyclone of anguish, the triumphant faith of the white ranks is exultant.

“Oh, yes! She is fond of Her Lourdes, is Our Lady, and pets it. She seems to have centred all Her powers there, all Her favours; Her other sanctuaries are perishing that this one may live!

“Why?

“Why, above all, have created La Salette and then sacrificed it, as it were?

“That She should have appeared there is quite intelligible,” thought Durtal, answering himself. “The Virgin is more highly venerated in Dauphine than in any other province; chapels dedicated to Her worship swarm in those parts, and She meant perhaps to reward their zeal by Her gracious presence.

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“On the other hand, She appeared there with a special and very definite end in view: to preach repentance to mankind, and especially to priests. She ratified by certain miracles the evidence of this mission which She confided to Melanie, and then, that being accomplished, She could desert the spot where She had, no doubt, never intended to remain.

“And after all,” he went on, after a moment’s reflection, “may we not admit an even simpler solution, namely, this:—

“Mary vouchsafes to appear under various aspects to satisfy the tastes and cravings of each soul. At La Salette, where She descended in a distressful spot, all in tears, She revealed Herself no doubt to certain persons, more especially to the souls in love with sorrow, the mystical souls that delight in reviving the anguish of the Passion and following the Mother in Her heart-breaking way to the Cross. She would thus seem less attractive to the vulgar who do not love woe or weeping; it may be added that they still less love reproof and threats. The Virgin of La Salette could not become popular, by reason of Her aspect and address, while She of Lourdes, who appeared smiling, and prophesied no catastrophes, was easy of access to the hopes and gladness of the crowd.

“She was, in short, in that sanctuary, the Virgin of the world at large, not the Virgin of mystics and artists, the Virgin of the few, as at La Salette.

“What a mystery is this direct intervention of the Christ’s Mother on earth!” thought Durtal.

And he went on: “It is clear, on reflection, that the churches founded by Her may be classed in two very distinct groups.

“One group where She has revealed Herself to certain persons, where waters spring and bodily ills are healed: La Salette and Lourdes.

“The other, where She has never been gazed on by human beings, or where Her appearance occurred in immemorial times, in forgotten centuries, the dead ages. In those chapels prayer alone is in force, and Mary answers it without the help of any waters. Indeed, She effects more moral than physical cures. Notre Dame de Fourvieres at Lyon, Notre Dame de Sous-Terre at Chartres, Notre Dame des Victoires at Paris, to mention only three.

“Wherefore this difference? None can understand, and probably none will ever know. At most may we suppose that in compassion for the everlasting craving of our hapless souls wearied with prayer without sight, She would fain confirm our faith and help to gather in the flock by showing Herself.

“In all this obscurity,” Durtal went on, “is it at least possible to discern some dim landmarks, some vague law?

“As we gaze into the darkness, two spots of light appear,” he replied to himself.

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“In the first place, this: She appears to none but the poor and humble; She addresses the simple souls who have in a way handed down the primitive occupation, the biblical function of the Patriarchs; She unveils herself to the children of the soil, to the shepherds, to girls as they watch the flock. Both at La Salette and at Lourdes She chose little pastors for Her confidants, and this is intelligible, since, by acting thus, she confirms the known will of Her Son; the first to behold the infant Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem were in fact shepherds, and it was from among men of the lowest class that Christ chose His apostles.

“And is not the water that serves as a medium of cure prefigured in the Sacred Books—in the Old Testament by the River Jordan, which cleansed Naaman of his leprosy; and in the New by the probationary pool stirred by an angel?

“Another law seems no less probable. The Virgin is, as far as possible, considerate of the temperament and individual character of the persons She appears to. She places Herself on the level of their intellect, is incarnate in the only material form that they can conceive of. She assumes the simple aspect these poor creatures love, accepting the blue and white robes, the crown and wreaths of roses, the trinkets and garlands and frippery of a first Communion, the ugliest garb.

“There is not indeed a single case where the shepherd maids who saw Her described Her otherwise than as a ‘beautiful lady’ with the features of the Virgin of a village altar, a Madonna of the Saint-Sulpice shops, a street-corner Queen.

“These two rules are more or less universal,” said Durtal to himself. “As to the Son, it would seem that He never now will reveal Himself in human form to the masses. Since His appearance to the Blessed Mary Margaret, whom He employed as a mouthpiece to address the people, He has been silent. He keeps in the background, giving precedence to His Mother.

“He, it is true, reserves for Himself a dwelling in the secret places, the hidden regions, the strongholds of the soul, as Saint Theresa calls them; but His presence is unseen and His words spoken within us, and generally not apprehended by means of the senses.”

Durtal ceased speaking, confessing to himself how inane were these reflections, how powerless the human reason to investigate the inconceivable purposes of the Almighty; and again his thoughts turned to that journey to Dauphine which haunted his memory.

“Ah! but the chain of the High Alps and the peaks of La Salette,” said he to himself; “that huge white hotel, that church coloured with dirty yellow lime-wash, vaguely Byzantine and vaguely Romanesque in its architecture, and that little cell with the plaster Christ nailed to a flat black wooden Cross—that tiny Sanctuary plainly white-washed, and so

small that one could step across it in any direction—they were pregnant with her presence, all the same!”

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“Surely She revisited that spot, in spite of Her apparent desertion, to comfort all comers; She seemed so close at hand, so attentive and so grieving, in the evening as one sat alone by the light of a candle, that the soul seemed to burst open like a pod shedding the fruit of sin, the seeds of evil deeds; and repentance, that had been so tardily evolved, and sometimes so indefinite, became so suddenly despotic and unmistakable that the penitent dropped on his knees by the bed, and buried his head sobbing in the sheets. Ah, those were evenings of mortal dulness and yet sweetly sad! The soul was rent, its very fibres laid bare, but was not the Virgin at hand, so pitiful, so motherly, that after, the worst was over She took the bleeding soul in her arms and rocked it to sleep like a sick child.

“Then, during the day, the church afforded a refuge from the frenzy of giddiness that came over one; the eye, bewildered by the precipices on every side, distracted by the sight of the clouds that suddenly gathered below and steamed off in white fleece from the sides of the rocks, found rest under the shelter of those walls.

“And finally, to make up for the horrors of the scene and of the statues, to mitigate the grotesqueness of the inn-servants, who had beards like sappers and clothes like little boys—the caps, and holland blouses with belts, and shiny black breeches, like cast iron, of the children at the Saint Nicolas school in Paris—extraordinary characters, souls of divine simplicity expanded there.”

And Durtal recollected the admirable scene he had watched there one morning.

He was sitting on the little plateau, in the icy shade of the church, gazing before him at the graveyard and the motionless swell of mountain tops. Far away, in the very sky, a string of beads moved on, one by one, on the ribbon of path that edged the precipice. And by degrees these specks, at first merely dark, assumed the bright hues of dresses, assumed the form of coloured bells surmounted by white knobs, and at last took shape as a line of peasant women wearing white caps.

And still in single file they came down the square.

After crossing themselves as they passed the cemetery, they went each to drink a cup of water at the spring and then turned round; and Durtal, who was watching them, saw this:

At their head walked an old woman of at least a hundred, very tall and still upright, her head covered by a sort of hood from which her stiff, wavy hair escaped in tangled grey locks like iron wire. Her face was shrivelled like the peel of an onion, and so thin that, looking at her in profile, daylight could be seen through her skin.

She knelt down at the foot of the first statue, and behind her, her companions, girls of about eighteen for the most part, clasped their hands and shut their eyes; and slowly a change came over them.

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Under the breath of prayer, the soul, buried under the ashes of worldly cares, flamed up, and the air that fanned it made it glow like an inward fire, lighting up the thick cheeks, the stolid, heavy features. It smoothed out the crackled surface of wrinkles, softened in the younger women the vulgarity of chapped red lips, gave colour to the dull brown flesh, overflowed in the smile on lips half parted in silent prayer, in timid kisses offered with simple good faith, and returned no doubt in an ineffable thrill by the Holy Child they had cherished from His birth, who, since the martyrdom of Calvary, had grown to be the Spouse of Sorrows.

They felt, perhaps, something of the raptures of the Blessed Virgin who is Mother and Wife and at the same time the beatified Handmaid of God.

And in the silence a voice as from the remotest ages arose, and the ancestress said, "*Pater Noster*," and they all repeated the prayer, and then dragged themselves on their knees up the steps of the way of crosses, where the fourteen upright posts, each with its cast metal bas-relief, bordered a serpentine path, dividing the statues from the groups. Thus they went forward, stopping long enough to recite an *Ave* on each step they climbed, and then, helping themselves with their hands, they mounted to the next. And when the rosary was ended the old woman rose, and they solemnly followed her into the church, where they all prayed a long time, prostrate before the altar; and the grandmother stood up, gave each holy water at the door, led her flock to the spring where they all drank again, and then they went away, without speaking a word, one after another up the narrow path, ending as black specks just as they had come, and vanishing on the horizon.

"Those women have been two days and two nights crossing the mountains," said a priest, coming up to Durtal. "They started from the depths of Savoy, and have travelled almost without rest to spend a few minutes here; they will sleep to night in a cow-house or a cave, as chance may direct, and to-morrow by daybreak they will start again on their weariful way."

Durtal was overpowered by the radiant splendour of such faith.

It was possible, then, to find souls ever young, souls ever new, souls as of undying children, watching where absolute solitude was not, outside cloister walls, in the waste places of these peaks and gorges, and amid this race of stern and rugged peasants. Here were women who, without knowing it even, lived the contemplative life in union with God, while they dug the barren slopes of a little plot at some prodigious elevation. They were Leah and Rachel, Martha and Mary in one; and these women believed guilelessly, entirely, as man believed in the middle ages. These beings, with their rough-hewn feelings, their shapeless ideas, hardly able to express themselves, hardly knowing how to read, wept with love in the presence of the Inaccessible, whom they compelled by their humility and single-heartedness to appear, to become actual to their mind.

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“Yes, it was but just that the Virgin should cherish them and choose them above all others to be Her vessels of election.

“Yes. For they are unburdened with the dreadful weight of doubt, they are endowed with almost total ignorance of evil.

“And yet are there not some souls too experienced, alas! in the culture of wrong-doing, who nevertheless find mercy at Her feet? Has not the Virgin other sanctuaries less frequented, less well known, which yet have outlived the wear of time, the various caprice of the ages; very ancient churches where She welcomes you if you love Her in solitude and silence?”

And Durtal, coming back to Chartres once more, looked about him at the persons who were waiting in the warm shade of the indefinite forest till the Virgin should awake, to worship Her.

With dawn, now beginning to break, this forest of the church under whose shade he was sitting became absolutely unintelligible. The shapes, faintly sketched, were transformed in the gloom which blurred every outline as it slowly faded. Below, in the vanishing mist, rose the immemorial trunks of fabulous white trees, planted as it seemed in wells that held them tightly in the rigid circle of their margin; and the night, now almost diaphanous on the level of the ground, was thicker as it rose, cutting them off at the spring of the branches, which were still invisible.

Durtal, as he raised his head, gazed into deep obscurity unlighted by moon or star.

Looking up still, but straight before him, he saw in the air, through the hazy twilight, sword-blades already bright, gigantic blades without hilts or handles, thinner towards the point; and these blades, standing on end at an immense height, appeared in the gloom they cut, to be patterned with vague intaglios or in ill-defined relief.

As he peered into space to the right and left, he was aware of a gigantic panoply on each side at a vast height, resting on blocks of darkness, and consisting of a colossal shield riddled with holes, hanging above five broader swords, without hilts, but damascened on their flat blades with indefinite designs of bewildering niello.

Little by little the tentative sun of a doubtful winter’s day pierced the fog, which vanished in blueness; the shield that hung to the left of Durtal, the north, was the first to come to life; rosy fires and the lurid flames of punch gleamed in its hollows, while below, in the middle blade, there started forth in the steel-grey arch, the gigantic image of a negress robed in green with a brown mantle. Her head, wrapped in a blue kerchief, was set in a golden glory, and she stared out, hieratic and wild-looking, with white, wide-open eyes.

And this engimatical Ethiop had on her knees a black infant whose eyes, in the same way, stood out like snowballs from the dusky face.

All about her, very gradually, the other swords, still so dim, began to glow, blood rippling from their crimsoned points as if from recent slaughter; and this trickling red formed a setting for the shapes of beings come, no doubt, from the distant shores of Ganges: on one side a king playing on a golden harp; on the other a monarch wielding a sceptre ending in the turquoise-blue petals of a fabulous lily.

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Then, to the left of the royal musician there was another man, bearded, with a walnut-stained face, the eye-sockets vacant and covered by round spectacles; on his head were a diadem and a tiara, in his hands a chalice and a paten, a censer and a loaf; while to the right of the other sovereign who held the sceptre, a still more harassing shape came forth against the blue background of the sword—a sort of oriental brigand, escaped perhaps from the prison cells of Persepolis or Susa, a bandit as it seemed, wearing a little scarlet cap edged with yellow, in shape like an inverted jam-pot, and a tan-coloured gown with white stripes on the skirt; and this clumsy and ferocious personage bore a green palm and a book.

Durtal turned away to sound the depths of darkness, and before him, at a giddy height on the horizon, more sword-blades gleamed. The scrawls which might have been mistaken in the darkness for patterns embossed or incised on the surface of the steel, developed into figures draped in long, straight, pleated robes; and at the highest point of the firmament there hovered amid a sparkle of rubies and sapphires a woman crowned, pale of face, dressed like the Moorish mother of the northern side in Carmelite-brown and green; and she too held an infant, a child, like herself, of the white race, clasping a globe in one hand, and extending the other in benediction.

Last of all, the still dark side, the late side, to Durtal's right hand and further south, till now wrapped in the half-dispelled morning haze, was lighted up; the shield opposite to that on the north caught the blaze, and below it, against the polished metal of the broad blade facing that which presented the negress queen, appeared a woman of somewhat olive hue, in raiment like the others, of myrtle-green and brown, holding a sceptre, and with her, too, there was a child. And round her again emerged images of men piled up one above the other, shouldering each other in the narrow field they filled.

For a quarter of an hour nothing was clearly defined; then the real things asserted themselves. In the middle of the swords, which were in fact mosaic of glass, the figures stood out in broad daylight. In the field of each window with its pointed arch bearded faces took form, motionless in the midst of fire; and on all sides, in the thicket of flames, as it were the burning bush of Horeb where God showed His glory to Moses, the Virgin was seen in an unchangeable attitude of imperious sweetness and pensive grace, mute and still, and crowned with gold.

She was, indeed, many; She came down from the empyrean to lower levels, to be closer to Her flock, and at last found a place where they might almost kiss Her feet, at the corner of an aisle that was always in gloom; but there She wore a different aspect.

She stood forth in the middle of a window, like a tall, blue plant, and the garnet-red foliage was supported by black iron rods.

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Her colour was slightly coppery, almost Chinese, with a long nose and rather narrow eyes; on the head there was a black coif, and She looked steadily before Her, while the lower part of the face with its short chin, the mouth rather drawn by two grave lines, gave it an expression of suffering that was even a little morose. And here again, under the immemorial name of Notre Dame de la belle Verriere, she held an infant in a dress of raisin-purple, a child barely visible in the mixture of dark hues all about it.

In short, She to whom all appealed was there; everywhere under the forest roof of this cathedral the Virgin was present. She seemed to have come from all the ends of the earth, under the semblance of every race known in the Middle Ages: black as an African, tawny as a Mongolian, pale coffee colour as a half-caste, and white as an European, thus declaring that, as mediator for the whole human race, She was everything to each, everything to all; and promising by the presence of Her Son, whose features bore the character of each race, that the Messiah had come to redeem all men without distinction.

And it seemed as though the sun, as it mounted higher, followed the growth of the Virgin, taking its birth in the window where She was still a babe in that northern transept where Saint Anne, her mother, of the black face, sat between David, the king of the golden harp, and Solomon, the bearer of the blue-lilied sceptre, each against a background of purple, to prefigure the royal birth of the Son; between Melchizedec, the mitred patriarch, holding the censer, and Aaron, in the curious red cap bordered with lemon yellow, representing prophetically the Priesthood of Christ.

And at the end of the apse, quite high up, there was another Mary—triumphant, looking down the sacred grove, supported by figures from the Old Testament and by Saint Peter. It was She again who in the south transept faced Saint Anne, She, now a woman and herself a mother, amid four enormous men bearing pick-a-back on their shoulders four smaller figures; these were the four Greater Prophets who had foretold the coming of the Messiah—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, bearing the four Evangelists, and thus artlessly expressing the parallelism of the Old and New Testaments, and the support given by the Old Covenant to the New.

And then, as though Her presence were not fully ubiquitous, as though She desired that, turn where they might, Her worshippers should ever see Her, the Virgin was to be found on a smaller scale in less important positions; enthroned in the centre of the shields, in the heart of the great rose-windows, and finally, ceasing to appear as a mere picture, took shape, materialized as a statue of black wood standing on a pedestal in a full hooped skirt like a silver bell.

The sheltering forest had vanished with the darkness; the tree-trunks remained, but rose with giddy flight from the ground, unbroken pillars to the sky, meeting at a vast height under the groined vault; the forest was seen as an immense church blossoming

with roses of fire, pierced with glowing glass, crowded with Virgins and apostles, patriarchs and saints.

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The genius of the middle ages had devised the skilful and pious lighting of this edifice, and harmonized the ascending march of day to some extent with its windows. The walls and the aisles were very dark, the daylight creeping, mysteriously subdued, along the body of the church. It was lost in the stained glass, checked by dark bishops, and opaque saints completely filling the dusky-bordered windows with the dead hues of a Persian rug; the panes absorbed the sun's rays, refracting none, arrested the powdered gold of the sunbeams in the dull violet of purple egg-fruit, the tawny browns of tinder or tan, the too-blue greens, and the wine-coloured red stained with soot, like the thick juice of mulberries.

As it reached the chancel, the light came in through brighter and clearer colours, through the blue of translucent sapphires, through pale rubies, brilliant yellow, and crystalline white. The gloom was relieved beyond the transepts near the altar. Even in the centre of the cross the sun pierced clearer glass, less storied with figures, and bordered with almost colourless panes that admitted it freely.

At last, in the apse, forming the top of the cross, it poured in, symbolical of the light that flooded the world from the top of the Tree; and the pictures were diaphanous, just lightly covered with flowing lines and aerial tints, to frame in a sheaf of coloured sparks the image of a Madonna, less hieratic and barbaric than the others, and a fairer Infant, blessing the earth with uplifted hand.

By this time the Cathedral of Chartres was alive with the clatter of wooden shoes, the rustle of petticoats, and the tinkle of mass-bells.

Durtal left the corner of the transept where he had been sitting with his back to a pillar, and turned to the left, towards a bay where there was a framework ablaze with lighted tapers before the statue of the Virgin.

And schools of little girls under the guidance of Sisters, troops of peasant women and countrymen, poured out of every aisle, knelt in front of the image, and then came up to kiss the pedestal.

The appearance of these folks suggested to Durtal that their prayers were not like those that are sobbed out at evening twilight, the supplications of women worn and dismayed by the weary hours of day. These peasant souls prayed less as complaining than as loving; these people, kneeling on the flags, had come for Her sake rather than for their own. There was here and now a pause from grieving, a sort of reprieve from tears; and this attitude was in harmony with the special aspect adopted by Mary in this cathedral; She was seen there, in fact, under the form of a child and of a young mother; She was the Virgin of the Nativity, rather than our Lady of Dolour. The old artists of the Middle Ages seemed to have feared to sadden Her by reminding Her of memories too painful, to have striven to prove by this delicate reserve, their gratitude to Her who in this

sanctuary had ever shown Herself to be the Dispenser of Mercies, the Lady Bountiful of Grace.

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Durtal felt in himself an answering thrill, the echo of the prayers chanted all round him by these loving souls; and he let himself melt away in the soothing sweetness of the hymns, asking for nothing, silencing his ungratified desires, smothering his secret repining, thinking only of bidding an affectionate good-morning to the Mother to whom he had returned after such distant wanderings in the land of sin, after such a long absence.

And now that he had seen Her, that he had spoken to Her, he withdrew, making room for others who came in greater numbers as the day grew. He went home to get some food; and as he cast a last sweeping glance at the beautiful church, remembering the warlike imagery of its details, the buckler-shape of the rose-windows, the sword-blades of the lower lights, the casque and helmet forms of the ogee, the resemblance of some grisaille glass with its network of lead to a warrior's shirt of mascled mail; as, outside, he gazed at one of the two belfries carved into scales like a pine cone—like scale-armour—he said to himself that the "Builders for God" must have borrowed their ideas from the military panoply of the knights; that thus they had endeavoured to perpetuate the memory of their exploits by representing the magnified image of the armour with which the Crusaders girt themselves when they sailed to win back the Holy Sepulchre.

And the interior of the church seemed, as a whole, to impress the same idea and complete the symbolical images of the details by its vaulted nave, of which the groined roof was so like the reversed hull of a vessel, suggesting the graceful form of the ships that made sail for Palestine.

Only, in the present day, such memories of heroic times were vain. In this city of Chartres, where Saint Bernard preached the second crusade, the vessel was stranded for ever, her hull overset, her anchor out.

And looking down on the unthinking city, the Cathedral kept watch alone, beseeching pardon for the inappetency for suffering, for the inertia of faith that her sons displayed, uplifting her towers to the sky like two arms, while the spires mimicked the shape of joined hands, the ten fingers all meeting and upright one against another, in the position which the image-makers of old gave to the dead saints and warriors they carved upon tombs.

CHAPTER II.

Durtal had already been living at Chartres for three months.

On his return to Paris from La Trappe he had fallen into a fearful state of spiritual anemia. His soul kept its room, rarely rose, lounged on a couch, was torpid with the tepid langour still lulled by the sleepy mutter of mere lip-service, and prayers reeled off

as by a worn-out machine of which the spring releases itself, so that it works all alone with no result, and without a touch to start it.

Sometimes, however, in a rebellious mood he managed to check himself, to stop the ill-regulated clockwork of his prayers, and then he would try to examine himself, to get above himself, and to see in a comprehensive glance the puzzling perspective of his nature.

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And facing these chambers of the soul, dim with mist, he was struck by a strange association of the Revelations of Saint Theresa and a tale by Edgar Poe.

Those chambers of the inner man were empty and cold, and like the halls of the House of Usher, surrounded by a moat whence the fog rose, forcing its way in at last and cracking the worn shell of wall. Alone and uneasy, he prowled about the ruined cells, with closed doors that refused ever to open again; thus his walks about his own mind were very limited, and the panorama he could see was strangely narrowed, shrunk close and near to him, almost nothing. And he knew full well that the ruins surrounding the central cell, the Master's Room, were bolted and fastened with rivets that could not be unscrewed, and triple bars—inaccessible. So he restricted himself to wandering in the halls and passages.

At Notre Dame de l'Atre he had ventured further; he had gone into the enclosure round about the abode of Christ; he had seen in the distance the frontiers of Mysticism, and, too weak to go on his road, he had fallen; and now this was to be lamented, for, as Saint Theresa truly remarks, "in the spiritual life, if we do not go forward, we go back." He had, in fact, retraced his steps, and lay half paralyzed, no longer even in the vestibule of his mansion, but in the outer court.

Till this time the phenomena described by the matchless Abbess had been exactly repeated. In Durtal, the Chambers of the Soul were deserted as after a long mourning; but in the rooms that had remained open, phantoms of sins confessed, of buried evil-doing, wandered like the sister of the tormented Usher.

Durtal, like Edgar Poe's unhappy sufferer, listened with horror to the rustle of steps on the stairs, the piteous weeping behind the doors.

And yet these ghosts of departed crimes were no more than indefinite shapes; they never consolidated nor took a definite form. The most persistent miscreant of them all, which had tormented him so long, the sin of the flesh, at last was silenced, and left him in peace. La Trappe had rooted up the stock of those debaucheries. The memory of them, indeed, haunted him still, on his most distressing, most ignoble side; but he could see them pass, his heart in his mouth, wondering that he could so long have been the dupe of such foul delusions, no longer understanding the power of those mirages, the illusions of those carnal oases as he met them in the desert of a life shut up in seclusion, in solitude, and in books.

His imagination could still put him on the rack; still, without merit, without a struggle, by the help of divine grace, he had escaped a fall ever since his return from the monastery.

On the other hand, though he had, to some extent, emasculated himself, though he was exempt from his chief torment, he discerned, flourishing within him, another crop of tares, of which the spread had till now been hidden behind the sturdier growth of other

vices. In the first instance, he had believed himself to be less enslaved by sin, less utterly vile; and he was nevertheless as closely bound to evil as ever, only the nature and character of the bonds were different, and no longer the same.

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Besides that dryness of the heart which made him feel as soon as he entered a church or knelt down in his room, that a cold grip froze his prayers and chilled his soul, he detected the covert attacks, the mute assaults of ridiculous pride.

In vain did he keep watch; he was constantly taken by surprise without having time even to look round him.

It began under the most temperate guise, the most benign reflections.

Supposing, for instance, that he had done his neighbour a service at some inconvenience to himself, or that he had refrained from retaliating on anybody against whom he believed he had a grievance, or for whom he had no liking, a certain self-satisfaction stole, sneaked into his mind, a certain vain-glory, ending in the senseless conclusion that he was superior to many another man; and then, on this feeling of petty vanity, pride was engrafted—the pride of a virtue he had not even struggled to acquire, the arrogance of chastity, so insidious that most of those who indulge it do not even suspect themselves.

And he was never aware of the end of these assaults till too late, when they had become definite, and he had forgotten himself and succumbed; and he was in despair at finding that he constantly fell into the same snare, telling himself that the little good he could do must be wiped out of the balance of his life by the outrageous extravagance of this vice.

He was frenzied, he reasoned with the old mad arguments, and cried out at his wits' end,—

"La Trappe crushed me! It cured me of sensuality, but only to load me with disorders of which I knew nothing before I submitted to that treatment! It is humble itself, but it puffed up my vanity and increased my pride tenfold—then it set me free, but so weak, so wearied, that I have never since been able to conquer that inanition, never have been fit to enjoy the Mystical Nourishment which I nevertheless must have if I am not to die to God!"

And for the hundredth time he asked himself,—

"Am I happier than I was before I was converted?"

And to be truthful to himself he was bound to answer "Yes." He lived on the whole a Christian life, prayed but badly, but at any rate prayed without ceasing; only—only—-Alas! How worm-eaten, how arid were the poor recesses of his soul! He wondered, with anguish, whether they would not end like the Manor in Edgar Poe's tale, by crumbling suddenly, one fatal day, into the dark waters of the pool of sin which was undermining the walls.

Having reached this stage of his round of meditations, he was compelled to throw himself on the Abbe Gevresin, who required him, in spite of his coldness, to take the Communion. Since his return from Notre Dame de l'Atre his friendship with the Abbe had become much closer, altogether intimate.

He knew now the inner man of this priest, who, in the midst of modern surroundings, led a purely mediaeval life. Formerly, when he rang at his bell, he had paid no heed to the housekeeper, an old woman, who curtsied to him without a word when she opened the door.

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Now he was quite friendly with this singular and loving creature.

Their first conversation had arisen one day when he called to see the Abbe, who was ill. Seated by the bedside, with spectacles on the alert at the tip of her nose, she was kissing, one by one, the pious prints that illustrated a book wrapped in black cloth. She begged him to be seated, and then, closing the volume, and replacing her spectacles, she had joined in the conversation; and he had left the room quite amazed by this woman, who addressed the Abbe as “Father,” and spoke quite simply of her intercourse with Jesus and the Saints as if it were a natural thing. She seemed to live in perfect friendship with them, and spoke of them as of companions with whom she chatted without any embarrassment.

Then the countenance of this woman, whom the priest introduced to him as Madame Celeste Bavoil, was, strange to say, the least of it. She was thin and upright, but short. In profile, with her strong Roman nose and set lips, she had the fleshless mask of a dead Caesar; but, seen in front, the sternness of the features was softened into a familiar peasant’s face, and melted into the kindliness of an old nun, quite out of keeping with the solemn strength of her features.

It seemed as though with that clean-cut, imperious nose, small white teeth, and black eyes sparkling with light, busy and inquisitive as those of a mouse, under fine long lashes, the woman ought, notwithstanding her age, to have been handsome; it seemed at least as though the combination of these details would have given the face a stamp of distinction. Not so; the conclusion was false to the premises; the whole betrayed the combined effect of the details.

“This contradiction,” thought he, “evidently is the result of other peculiarities which nullify the harmony of the more important features; in the first place the thinness of the cheeks and their hue of old wood dotted here and there with freckles, calm stains of the colour of stale bran; then the flat braids of white hair drawn smooth under a frilled cap, and finally the modest dress, a black dress clumsily made, dragging across the bosom, and showing the lines of her stays stamped in relief on the back.

“And perhaps, in her, it is not so much incongruity of features, as a crying contrast between the dress and the face, the head and the body,” thought he.

Altogether, as he summed her up, she was equally suggestive of the chapel and the fields. Thus she had something of the Sister and something of the peasant.

“Yes,” he went on to himself, “that is very near the mark; but that is not all, for she is both less dignified and less common, inferior and yet more worthy. Seen from behind she is more like a woman who hires out the chairs in church than like a nun; seen in front she is conspicuously superior to the natives of the soil. Also it may be noted that when she speaks of the saints she is loftier,

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quite different; she soars up in a flame of the spirit. But all these hypotheses are in vain," he concluded, "for I cannot judge of her from one brief impression, one rapid view. What is quite certain is that, though she is not in the least like the Abbe, she too is in two halves—two persons in one. He, with the innocent gaze, the pure eyes of a girl at her first Communion, has the sometimes bitter mouth of an old man; she is proud of feature and humble of heart; they both, though by different outward signs and acts, achieve the same result, an identical semblance of paternal indulgence and mature goodness."

And Durtal had gone again and again to see them. His reception was always the same; Madame Bavoil greeted him with the invariable formula: "Here is our friend," while the priest's eyes smiled as he grasped his hand. Whenever he saw Madame Bavoil she was praying: over her stove, when she sat mending, while she was dusting the furniture, as she opened the door, she was always telling her rosary, without pause.

The chief delight of this rather silent woman consisted in talking of the Virgin to whom she had vowed worship; on the other hand she could quote by memory long passages from a mystic and somewhat eccentric writer of the end of the sixteenth century: Jeanne Chezard de Matel, the foundress of the Order of the Incarnate Word, an Institution of which the Sisters display a conspicuous costume—a white dress held round the waist by a belt of scarlet leather, a red cloak and a blood-coloured scapulary on which the name of Jesus is embroidered in blue silk, with a crown of thorns, a heart pierced with three nails, and the words *Amor Meus*.

At first Durtal thought Madame Bavoil slightly crazy, and while she poured out a passage by Jeanne de Matel on Saint Joseph, he looked at the priest—who gave no sign.

"Then Madame Bavoil is a saint?" he asked one morning when they were alone.

"My dear Madame Bavoil is a pillar of prayer," replied the Abbe gravely.

And one afternoon, when Gevresin was away in his turn, Durtal questioned the woman.

She gave him an account of her long pilgrimages across Europe, pilgrimages that she had spent years in making on foot, begging her way by the roadside.

Wherever the Virgin had a sanctuary, thither she went, a bundle of clothing in one hand, an umbrella in the other, an iron Crucifix on her breast, a rosary at her waist. By a reckoning which she had kept from day to day she had thus travelled ten thousand five hundred leagues on foot.

Then old age had come on, and she had “lost her old powers,” as she said; Heaven had formerly guided her by inward voices, fixing the dates of these expeditions; but journeying was no longer required of her. She had been sent to live with the Abbe that she might rest; but her manner of life had been laid down for her once for all: her bed a straw mattress on wooden planks; her food such rustic and monastic fare as beseemed her, milk, honey and bread, and at seasons of penance she was to substitute water for milk.

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“And you never take any other nourishment?”

“Never.” And then she would add,—

“Aha! our friend, you see I am in disgrace up there!” and she would laugh cheerfully at herself and her appearance “If you had but seen me when I came back from Spain, where I went to visit Our Lady of the Pillar at Saragoza! I was a negress. With my large Crucifix on my breast, my gown looking like a nun’s—every one asked: ’What can that woman be?’ I looked like a charcoal-burner out for a holiday; no white to be seen but my cap, collar and cuffs; all the rest—face, hands and petticoats—quite black.”

“But you must have been very dull travelling about alone?”

“Not at all, our friend, the Saints kept me company on the way; they told me at which house I should find a lodging for the night, and I was sure of being well received.”

“And you never were refused hospitality?”

“Never. To be sure I did not ask for much; when I was wandering I only begged for a piece of bread and a glass of water, and to rest on a truss of straw in the cow-house.”

“And Father Gevresin—how did you first know him?”

“That is quite a long story. Fancy! Heaven, as a punishment, deprived me of the Communion for a year and three months to a day. When I confessed to a priest, I owned to my intercourse with Our Saviour, and the Virgin and the Angels; then he at once treated me as a mad woman, unless he accused me of being possessed by the devil; to conclude, he refused me absolution, and I thought myself happy if he did not slam the little wicket of the confessional roughly in my face at my very first words.

“I believe I should have died of grief if the Lord had not at last had pity on me. One Saturday, when I was in Paris, He sent me to Notre Dame des Victoires, where the Father was in the confessional. He listened to me, he put me through long and severe tests, and then he granted me Communion. I often went to him again as a penitent, and then the niece who kept house for him retired into a convent, and I took her place; and I have been his housekeeper near on ten years now—”

She told her story with many breaks. Since she had ceased to wander about the country, she followed the pilgrimages in Paris in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and she had a list of the most popular sanctuaries: Notre-Dame des Victoires, Notre-Dame de Paris; Our Lady of Good Hope at Saint-Severin, of Ever-present Help at L’Abbaye au Bois, of Peace at the convent in the Rue Picpus, of the Sick at the church of Saint-Laurent, of Happy Deliverance—a black Virgin from the church of Saint-Etienne des Gres—in the care of the Sisters of Saint-Thomas de Villeneuve, Rue de Sevres; and outside Paris the shrines in the suburbs: Our Lady of Miracles at Saint-Maur, of the

Angels at Bondy, of the Virtues at Aubervilliers, of Good Keeping at Long Pont, and those of Notre-Dame at Spire, at Pontoise, &c.

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On another occasion, as he seemed suspicious of the severity of the rule imposed on her by Christ, she replied,—

“Remember, our friend, what happened to an illustrious handmaid of the Lord, Maria d’Agreda; being very ill, she yielded to the wishes of her daughters in the faith and sucked a mouthful of chicken, but she was forthwith reproved by Jesus, who said to her: ’I will not have my Spouses dainty.’

“Well, and I should run the risk of a similar reproof, if I attempted to touch a morsel of meat or to drink a drop of coffee or wine.”

“And yet,” said Durtal to himself as he came away, “it is quite evident that the woman is not mad. She has nothing the matter with her, either hysterical or mental: she is fragile and very thin, but she is scarcely nervous, and in spite of the laconic character of her meals she is in very good health, indeed is never ailing; nay more, she is a woman of good sense and an admirable manager. Up by daybreak, after Communion she soaps and washes all the linen herself, makes the sheets and shirts, mends the Abbe’s gowns, and lives with amazing economy, while taking care that her master wants for nothing. Such a sagacious apprehension of the conduct of life has no connection with lunacy or delirium.”

He knew too that she would never take any wages. It is true that in the sight of a world which gives its whole mind to legalized larceny this woman’s disinterestedness might be enough to prove her insanity; but Durtal, in contradiction to received ideas, did not think that a contempt for money was necessarily allied with madness, and the more he thought of it the more was he convinced that she was a saint, and not a strait-laced saint, but indulgent and cheerful.

What he could positively assert was that she was very good to him; ever since his return from La Trappe she had helped him in every way, encouraging his spirits when she saw him depressed, and going, in spite of his protesting, to look over his wardrobe when she suspected that there might be sutures to operate upon, and buttons to replace.

This intimacy had become even closer since their life in common, all three together, on the occasion of Durtal’s accompanying them, at their entreaty, to La Salette. And then suddenly their affectionate familiarity was endangered, for the Abbe Gevresin left Paris.

The Bishop of Chartres died, and his successor was one of Gevresin’s oldest friends. On the very day when the Abbe Le Tilloy des Mofflaines was promoted to the episcopal throne, he begged Gevresin to accompany him to Chartres. There was an anxious struggle in the old priest’s mind. He was ailing, weary, good for nothing, and at the bottom of his heart longed only never to move; but on the other hand he had not the courage to refuse his poor support to Monseigneur des Mofflaines. He tried to mollify the prelate by his advanced age, but the Bishop would not listen; all he would concede

was that, instead of being appointed Vicar-general, the Abbe should be no more than a Canon. Still Gevresin mildly shook his head. Finally the prelate had his way, appealing to his friend's charity, and declaring that he ought to accept the post, in the last resort as a mortification and penance.

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And when his departure was decided on, it became the Abbe's turn to circumvent Durtal and persuade him to leave Paris and come to settle near him at Chartres.

Although he was deeply grieved at this move, which he had done his utmost to hinder, Durtal was refractory, and refused to bury himself in a country town.

"But why, our friend," said Madame Bavoil, "I wonder why you are so obstinately bent on remaining here; you live in perfect solitude at home with your books. You can do the same if you come with us."

And when, his arguments exhausted, after a vehement diatribe against provincial life, Durtal ended by saying,—

"Then at Paris there are the quays, Saint Severin, Notre Dame; there are delightful convents—"

"You would find equally good things at Chartres," answered the Abbe. "You will have one of the finest cathedrals in the world, monasteries such as you love, and as for books, your library is so well furnished that I can hardly think that you can add to it by wandering along the quays. Besides, as you know even better than I, no work of the class you seek is ever to be disinterred from the boxes of second-hand books. Their titles figure only in the catalogues of sales, and there is nothing to hinder their being sent to you at Chartres."

"I do not deny it—but there are other things on the quays besides old books; there are curiosities to be seen, and the Seine—a landscape—"

"Well, if you are homesick for that particular walk, you have only to take a train, and spend a whole afternoon lounging by the parapet over the river; it is easy to get from Chartres to Paris; there are express trains morning and evening which make the journey in less than two hours."

"And besides," cried Madame Bavoil, "what does all that matter? The great thing is that you leave a town just like any other town, to inhabit the very home of the Virgin. Just think! Notre Dame de Sous-Terre is the most ancient chapel to Mary in all France; think! you will live near Her, with Her, and She will load you with mercies!"

"And after all," the Abbe went on, "this exile cannot interfere with any of your schemes in art. You talk of writing the Lives of Saints; will you not work at them far better in the silence of the country than in the uproar of Paris?"

"The country—the provinces! The mere idea overpowers me," exclaimed Durtal. "If you could but imagine the impression it suggests to me, the sort of atmosphere, the kind of smell it presents to my brain. You know the huge cupboards you find in old houses, with double doors, and lined within with blue paper that is always damp. Well, at the mere

name of the provinces I feel as if one of these were opened in my face, and I got a full blast of the stuffiness that comes out of it!—And to put the finishing touch to the vision by combining taste and smell, I have only to bite one of the biscuits they make nowadays of Lord knows what, reeking the moment you taste them, of fish glue and plaster that has been rained upon, I have only to eat that cold, insipid paste and sniff at a musty closet, and at once the lugubrious picture rises before me of some Godforsaken place!—Your Chartres will no doubt smell like that—Pah!”

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“Oh, oh!” cried Madame Bavoil. “But you cannot know much about it, since you have never been to the place.”

“Let him be!” said the Abbe, laughing. “He will get over his prejudices.” And he went on,—

“Just explain this inconsistency: here is a Parisian who likes his city so little that he seeks out the most deserted nook to live in, the quietest, the least frequented, the spot that is most like a provincial retreat. He has a horror of the Boulevards, of public promenades, and of theatres; he buries himself in a hole, and stops his ears that he may not hear the noises around him; but, when he has a chance of improving on this scheme of existence, of ripening in real silence far from the crowd, when he can invert the conditions of life, and, instead of being a provincial Parisian, can become a Parisian of the provinces, he shies and kicks!”

“It is a fact,” Durtal admitted when he was alone, “a positive fact that the capital is unprofitable to me. I never see anybody now, and shall be reduced to still more utter solitude when these friends are gone. I shall, for all purposes, be quite as well off at Chartres; I can study at my ease amid peaceful surroundings, within reach of a cathedral of far greater interest than Notre Dame de Paris. And besides—besides—-there is another question of which the Abbe Gevresin says nothing, but which disturbs me greatly. If I remain here, alone, I shall have to find a new confessor, to wander through the churches, just as I wander through work-a-day life in search of dining-places and tables d’hote. No, no; I have had enough at last of this day-by-day diet, spiritual and material! I have found a boarding-house for my soul where it is content, and it may stay there!

“And there is yet another argument. I can live more inexpensively at Chartres, and, without spending more than I spend here, I can settle myself once for all, dine with my feet on my own fender, and be waited on!”

So he had ended by deciding to follow his two friends, and had secured fairly spacious rooms facing the Cathedral; and then he, who had always lived cramped in tiny apartments, at last understood the provincial comfort of vast spaces and books ranged against the walls, with ample elbow-room.

Madame Bavoil had found him a servant, familiar and voluble indeed, but a good and pious woman. And he had begun his new existence lost in constant amazement at that wonderful Cathedral, the only one he had never before seen, probably because it was so near Paris, and, like all Parisians, he never took the trouble to set out on any but longer journeys. The town itself seemed to him devoid of interest, having but one secluded walk, a little embankment where, below the suburbs and near the old Guillaume Gate, washerwomen sang while they soaped the linen in a stream that blossomed, as they rubbed, with flecks of iridescent bubbles.

Hence he determined to walk out only very early in the morning or in the evening; then he could dream alone in the town, which by the afternoon was already half dead.

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The Abbe and his housekeeper were lodged in the episcopal palace, under the shadow of the Cathedral apse. They occupied a first floor, with nothing over it, above some empty stables; a row of cold, tiled rooms which the Bishop had had redecorated.

Some time after their arrival at Chartres the Abbe had replied to Durtal, who had remarked that he was anxious,—

“Yes, I am certainly going through a difficult time; I have had to live down certain prejudices—but indeed I was prepared for them. And that was another reason why I did not wish to leave Paris. But the Blessed Virgin is good! Everything is coming right—”

And when Durtal persisted,—

“As you may suppose,” said the priest, “the appointment of a Canon from another diocese was not looked upon with indifferent eyes by the clergy of Chartres. Such suspicions with regard to an unknown priest brought by a new Bishop are not after all unnatural; it is inevitably feared that he may play the part of a ruler without a robe; each one is on his guard, and they sift his least word and pick over his least action.”

“And then,” said Durtal, “is it not another mouth to feed out of the wretched pittance allowed by the State?”

“So far as that goes, no. I draw no stipend, and damage no man’s interest; in fact I would not accept it. The only pecuniary advantage I derive from being about the Bishop’s person is that I have no rent to pay, since I am lodged for nothing in the episcopal building.

“I could not in any case have drawn a stipend, for the allowance granted to Canons by the Government has ceased to be given, since a measure was passed, on March 22nd, 1885, decreeing the suppression of such emoluments as the incumbents died off. Hence only those who held such benefices before the passing of the law now draw on the funds devoted to the maintenance of the Church; and they are dying off one by one, so that the time is fast approaching when there will not be a single Canon left who is salaried by the State. In some dioceses these lapsed benefices are compensated for by the revenues from some religious foundation, or, as you may call it, a prebend. But there are none at Chartres. The Chapter has at the utmost the use of a varying income which it divides among those who have no benefice, giving them, good years with bad, a sum of about three hundred francs each, and that is all.”

“And the Canons have no perquisites?”

“None whatever.”

“Then I wonder how they live.”

“If they have no private fortune they live more penuriously than the poorest labourers in Chartres. Most of them simply vegetate; some perform Mass for Sisterhoods, or are convent chaplains, but that brings in very little, two hundred or two hundred and fifty francs perhaps. Another holds the post of secretary to the diocese, by which he gets rooms and as much, perhaps, as six hundred francs. Yet another conducts the services of the holy week known as the Voice of Our Lady of Chartres, and acts as precentor; and some find employment as the Bishop’s officials. Each one, in short, has a struggle to earn his food and lodging.”

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“What exactly is a Canon; what are his functions, and the origin of his office?”

“The origin? It is lost in the night of ages. It is supposed that Colleges of Canons existed in the time of Pepin le Bref; it is at any rate certain that during his reign Saint Chrodegang, Bishop of Metz, assembled the clerks of his cathedral and obliged them to live together, in a house in common, as though it were a convent, under a rule of which Charlemagne makes mention in his Capitularies.—A Canon’s functions? They consist in the solemn celebration of the Canonical services, and the direction of all processions. As a matter of conscience every Canon is required in the first place to reside in the town where the church is situated to whose service he is attached; then to be present at the Canonical hours when Mass is said; finally to sit on the meetings of the Chapter on certain fixed days. But to tell the truth, their part has almost fallen into desuetude. The Council of Trent speaks of them as the ‘*Senatus Ecclesiae*,’ the Senate of the Church, and they then formed the necessary Council of the Bishop. In these days the prelates do not even consult them.

“They only exercise a small part of their lost prerogatives when the See is vacant. At that time the Chapter acts in the place of the Bishop, and even then its rights are greatly restricted. As it has not Episcopal Orders, it can exercise none of the powers inherent in them. It cannot consequently ordain or confirm.”

“And if the See remains long vacant?”

“Then the Chapter requests the Bishop of a neighbouring diocese to ordain its seminarists, and confirm the children it presents to him. In short, as you see, a Canon is not a very important gentleman.

“I am not speaking, of course, of Honorary Canons, or Titular Canons. They have no duties to fulfil; they merely enjoy an honorary title which allows them to wear the Canon’s hood, by permission of their own Bishop when, as frequently happens, they belong to another diocese.

“The Chapter of this Cathedral of Chartres is said to have been founded in the sixth century by Saint Lubin. It then consisted of seventy-two Canons, and the number was added to, for when the Revolution broke out it amounted to seventy-six, and included seventeen dignitaries: the Dean, the sub-Dean, the Precentor, the sub-Precentor, the chief Archdeacon of Chartres, the Archdeacons of Beauce-en-Dunois, of Dreux, of Le Pincerais, of Vendome, and of Blois; the gatekeeper, the Chancellor, the Provosts of Normandy, of Mezangey, of Ingre, and of Auvers; and the Chancel Warden. These priests, most of them men of family and wealth, were a nursery ground of Bishops; they owned all the houses round the Cathedral and lived independently in their cloister, devoting themselves to history, theology, and the Canon law—they are now indeed fallen!”

The Abbe was silent, shaking his head. Then he went on,—

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“To return to my subject—I was naturally somewhat hurt by the coldness I met with on my arrival at Chartres. As I told you, I had to allay many apprehensions. But I think I have succeeded. And I thank God, too, for having given me a valuable supporter in the person of a subordinate priest of the Cathedral, who has done me invaluable service with my colleagues—the Abbe Plomb; do you know him?”

“No.”

“He is a highly intelligent priest, very learned, a passionate mystic, thoroughly acquainted with the Cathedral, of which he has examined every corner.”

“Ah ha! I am interested in that priest! Perhaps he is one of those I have already noticed. What is he like?”

“Short, young, pale, slightly marked with the small-pox, with spectacles that you may recognize by this peculiarity: the arch which rests on the nose is shaped like a loop, or, if you choose to say so, like a horseman’s legs astride in the saddle.”

“That man!”—and Durtal, left to himself, thought about the priest whom he had repeatedly seen in the church or the square.

“Certainly,” said he to himself, “there is always the risk of a mistake when we judge of people by appearances; but how startling is the truth of that commonplace remark when applied to the clergy! This Abbe Plomb looks like a scared sacristan; he goes about gaping at invisible crows, and he seems so ill at ease, so loutish, so awkward—and this is our learned man and devoted mystic, in love with his Cathedral! Certainly it is not safe to judge of an Abbe from appearances. Now that it is to be my fate to live in this clerical world, I must begin by throwing prejudice overboard, and wait till I know all the priests of the diocese, before allowing myself to form an opinion of them.”

CHAPTER III.

“In point of fact,” said Durtal to himself as he stood dreaming on the market-place, “no one exactly knows what was the origin of the Gothic forms of a cathedral. Archaeologists and architects have exhausted hypotheses and systems in vain; they seem to agree in attributing the Romanesque to Oriental parentage, and that in fact maybe proven. That the Romanesque should be an offshoot of the Latin and Byzantine styles, and be, as Quicherat defines it, ’the style which has ceased to be Roman and is not yet Gothic, though it already has something of the Gothic,’ I am ready to admit; and indeed, on examining the capitals, and studying their outline and drawing, we perceive that they are Assyrian or Persian rather than Roman or Byzantine and Gothic; but as to discovering the paternity even of the pointed and flamboyant styles, that is quite another thing. Some writers assert that the pointed arch based on an equilateral triangle existed

in Egypt, Syria, and Persia; others regard it as descended from Saracen and Arab art; nothing certainly is provable.

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“Again, it must be clearly stated that the pointed equilateral arch, which some persons still suppose to be the distinctive characteristic of an era in architecture, is not so in fact, as Quicherat has very clearly demonstrated, and, since him, Lecoy de la Marche. The study of archives has, on this point, completely overset the hobbies of architects, and demolished the twaddle of the Bonzes. Besides, there is abundant evidence of the employment of the pointed arch side by side with the round arch in a perfectly systematic design, in the construction of many Romanesque churches; in the Cathedrals of Avignon and Frejus, in Notre Dame at Aries, in Saint Front at Perigueux, at Saint Martin d’Ainay, at Lyon, in Saint Martin des Champs in Paris, in Saint Etienne at Beauvais, in the Cathedral of Le Mans; and in Burgundy, at Vezelay, at Beaune, in Saint Philibert at Dijon, at La Charite-sur-Loire, in Saint Ladre at Autun, and in most of the basilicas erected by the monastic school of Cluny.

“Still, all this throws no light on the lineage of the Gothic, which remains obscure—-possibly because it is perfectly clear; setting aside the theory which restricts itself to discerning in this question a merely material and technical problem of stability and resistance, solved by monks who discovered one fine day that the strength of their roofs would be increased by the adoption of the mitre-shaped vaulting of the pointed arch instead of the semicircular arch, would it not seem that the romantic hypothesis—-Chateaubriand’s explanation—which was so much laughed at, and which is nevertheless the simplest and the most natural, may really be the most obvious and the true one?

“To me,” thought Durtal, “it is almost certain that it was in the forest that man found the prototype of the nave and the pointed arch. The most amazing cathedral constructed by Nature herself, with lavish outlay of the pointed aisle of branches, is at Jumieges. There, close to the splendid ruins of the Abbey, where the two towers are still intact, while the roofless nave, carpeted with flowers, ends in a chancel of foliage shut in by an apse of trees, three vast aisles of centenary boles extend in parallel lines; one in the middle, very wide, the two others, one on each side, somewhat narrower; they exactly represent a church nave with its two side aisles, upheld by black columns and roofed with verdure. The ribs of the arches are accurately represented by the branches which meet above, as the columns which support them are simulated by the great shafts. It must be seen in winter, with the groining outlined and powdered with snow, and the pillars as white as the trunks of birch-trees, to understand the primitive idea, the seed of art which could give rise in the mind of an architect to the conception of similar arcades, and lead to the gradual refining of the Romanesque till the pointed arch had entirely superseded the round.

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“And there is not a park, whether older or more recent than the groves of Jumieges, which does not exhibit the same forms with equal exactitude; but what Nature could not give was the prodigious art, the deep symbolical knowledge, the over-strung but tranquil mysticism of the believers who erected cathedrals. But for them the church in its rough-hewn state, as Nature had formed it, was but a soulless thing, a sketch, rudimentary; the embryo only of a basilica, varying with the seasons and the days, at once living and inert, awaking only to the roaring organ of the wind, the swaying roof of boughs wrung with the slightest breath; it was lax and often sullen; the yielding victim of the breeze, the resigned slave of the rain; it was lighted only by the sunshine that filtered between the diamond and heart-shaped leaves, as if through the meshes of a green network. Man’s genius collected the scattered gleams, condensed them in roses and broad blades, to pour it into his avenues of white shafts; and even in the darkest weather the glass was splendid, catching the very last rays of sunset, dressing Christ and the Virgin in the most fabulous magnificence, and almost realizing on earth the only attire that beseems the glorified Body, a robe of mingled flame.

“Really, when you come to think of it, a cathedral is a superhuman thing!

“Starting in our lands from the old Roman crypt, from the vault, crushed like the soul by humility and fear, and bowed before the infinite Majesty whose praise they hardly dared to sing, the churches gradually waxed bolder; they gave an upward spring to the semicircular arch, lengthening it to an almond shape, leaping from the earth, uplifting roofs, heightening naves, breaking out into a thousand sculptured forms all round the choir, and flinging heavenward, like prayers, their rapturous piles of stones! They symbolized the loving tenderness of orisons; they became more trusting, more playful, more daring in the sight of God.

“Each and all seemed to smile, as soon as they gave up their dismal skeleton and strove upwards.

“The Romanesque, I fancy, must have been born old,” Durtal went on after a pause. “At any rate it has always remained gloomy and timid.

“Although at Jumieges, for instance, it has attained grandiose dimensions with its enormous span opening like a vast portal to the sky, it still is depressing. The semicircular arch, in fact, bends to the earth, for it has not the point, soaring upwards, of the lancet arch.

“Oh! to think of the tears, the dolorous murmurs of those thick partitions, those smoky vaults, those arches resting on squat pillars, those almost speechless blocks of stone, those sober ornaments expressing their symbolism so curtly! The Romanesque is the La Trappe of architecture; we find it sheltering the austerest Orders, the sternest Brotherhoods, kneeling in ashes, and chanting in an undertone with bowed heads none but penitential Psalms. These massive

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cellars speak of the fear of sin, but also of the dread of a God whose wrath could only be appeased by the Advent of the Son. The Romanesque seems to have preserved from its Oriental origin an element antedating the Birth of Christ; prayer seems to rise there to the implacable Adonai rather than to the pitying Infant, the gentle Mother. The Gothic, on the contrary, is less timid, more captivated by the two other Persons and the Virgin; it is the home of less rigorous and more artistic Orders. Bowed shoulders are straightened, downcast eyes are raised, sepulchral voices become seraphic. It is, in fact, the expansion of the spirit, while the Romanesque symbolizes its repression. At least, to me, that is the interpretation of these styles," Durtal repeated to himself.

"Nor is that all," he went on. "Yet another distinction may be deduced from these observations.

"The Romanesque is allegorical of the Old Testament, as the Gothic is of the New.

"The parallel, when you consider it, is exact. Is not the Bible—the inflexible Book of Jehovah, the awful Code of the Father, well expressed by the stern and penitential Romanesque; and the consoling, tender Gospel by the Gothic, full of effusiveness and invitation, full of humble hope?

"If the symbols are these, it would seem that time very often plays the part of man's purpose in evolving the completed idea and uniting the two styles, as, in Holy Scripture, the two Books are united; thus certain cathedrals present a very curious result. Some, austere at their birth, are cheerful and even smiling as they are completed. All that is left of the old Abbey church of Cluny is from this point of view a typical instance. This, next to that of Paray-le-Monial, which remains entire, is undoubtedly one of the most magnificent examples of the Burgundian Romanesque, which, with its fluted pilasters, unfortunately betrays the distressing tradition of Greek art imported into France by the Romans. Still, allowing that these basilicas—which may have been built between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries—are purely Romanesque, as Quicherat opines, mentioning them as examples, their structure is already of a mingled type, and the joyousness of the vaulted arch is already to be seen there.

"Nor have we here, as at Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers, a Romanesque facade, minutely elaborate, flanked at each wing by a low tower supporting a heavy stone spire cut into facets, like a pine-apple. At Paray there is none of the puerile ornament and heavy richness that we see at Poitiers. The barbaric dress of the little toy church of Notre Dame la Grande gives way to the winding-sheet of a flat wall, but the exterior is none the less remarkably impressive with its solemn simplicity of outline. And those two square towers, pierced with narrow windows and overlooked by a round tower resting so calmly, so firmly on an open arcade of columns joined by round arches, are a belfry at once dignified and rustic, spirited and strong.

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“And the august simplicity of the exterior is repeated in the interior of the church.

“Here, however, the Romanesque has already lost its crushed, crypt-like character, its obscure aspect as of a Persian cellar. The strong structural lines are the same; the capitals still display the inflorescence of Mussulman involutions, the fabulous entanglements of Assyrian patterns, reminiscences of Asiatic art transplanted to our soil; but we already see the union of dissimilar bays; columns struggle upwards, pillars are taller, the wide arches are less rigid, and have a lighter and longer trajectory; and the plain walls, enormous but already light, are pierced at prodigious heights with holes admitting the day.

“At Paray the round arch is to be seen in harmony with the pointed arch which appears in the higher summits of the structure, announcing the advent of a less plaintive phase of the soul, a tenderer and less harsh idea of Christ, who is preparing, and already revealing, the Mother’s indulgent smile.

“But then,” said Durtal, suddenly, to himself, “if my theories are correct, the architecture which could, by itself alone, symbolize Catholicism as a whole, and represent the complete Bible in both Testaments, must be either Romanesque with the pointed arch, or a transition style, half Romanesque and half Gothic.

“The deuce!” thought he, thus led to an unforeseen conclusion. “To be sure, it is not necessary perhaps that the church itself should offer so complete a parallel, or that the Old and New Testaments should be bound up in one volume; here, indeed, at Chartres the work, though integral, is in two separate volumes, since the crypt on which the Gothic church rests is Romanesque. Nay, it is thus even more symbolical, and it emphasizes the idea of the windows in which the prophets bear on their shoulders the four Evangelists; once more the Old Testament appears as the base, the foundation of the New.

“What a fulcrum for dreams is this Romanesque!” Durtal went on. “Is it not also the smoke-stained shrine, the gloomy retreat, constructed for black Virgins? This seems all the less doubtful because all the Mauresque Virgins are thick-set and heavy; they are not sylphs, like the fair Virgins of Gothic art. The Byzantine School conceived of Mary as swarthy, ‘of the hue of polished brown ebony,’ as the old historians say; only, in opposition to the text in Canticles, it painted or carved Her as black, indeed, but not comely. Thus figured, She is truly a gloomy Virgin, eternally sorrowing, in harmony with the Romanesque catacombs. Her presence naturally beseems the crypt of Chartres; but in the Cathedral itself, on the pillar where She stands to this day, does She not appear strange? For She is not in Her true home under the soaring white vault.”

“Well, our friend, you are dreaming!”

Durtal started like a man roused from sleep.

“Ah! It is you, Madame Bavoil?”

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“To be sure. I am going home from market, and from your lodgings.”

“From my lodgings?”

“Yes, to invite you to breakfast. The Abbe Plomb’s housekeeper is to be out this afternoon, so he is coming to take his morning meal with us; and the Father thought it would be a good opportunity to make you acquainted.”

“I am much obliged to him; but I must go home and tell Mother Mesurat, that she may not cook my cutlet.”

“You need not do that, as I have just come from her; not finding you, I left word and told Madame Mesurat. Are you still satisfied with her?”

“Once upon a time,” said he, laughing, “I had, to manage my house in Paris, one Sieur Rateau, a drunkard of the first class, who turned everything upside down, and led the furniture a life! Now I have this worthy woman, who sets to work on a different system, but the results are identically the same. She works by persuasion and gentle means; she does not overthrow the furniture, or bellow as she turns the mattress, or rush at the wall with a broom as if she were charging with fixed bayonet; no, she quietly collects the dust and stirs it round and ends by piling it in little heaps that she hides in the corners of the rooms; she does not rummage the bed, but restricts herself to patting it with the tip of her fingers, stroking the creases out of the sheets, puffing up the pillows and coaxing them out of their hollows. The man turned everything topsy-turvy; she moves nothing.”

“Well, well; but she is a good woman!”

“Yes, and in spite of it all, I am glad to have her.”

As they talked they had reached the entrance to the Bishop’s residence. They went through a little gate by the lodge into a large forecourt strewn with small river pebbles, in front of a vast building of the seventeenth century. There were no flowers of stone-work, no sculpture, no decorative doorways—nothing but a frontage of shabby brick and stone, a bare, uninviting structure evidently neglected, with tall windows, behind which the shutters could be seen, painted grey. The entrance was on the level of the first floor; double outside steps led up to the door, and under the landing, in the arch below, there was a glass door, through which, framed in the square, could be seen the trunks of trees beyond.

This courtyard was bordered with tall poplars, which the late Bishop, who had frequented the Tuileries, used to speak of with a smile as his hundred guards.

Madame Bavoil and Durtal crossed this forecourt, sloping to the left towards a wing of the building, roofed with slate.

There, on the first floor, with only a loft above lighted by round dormers, lived the Abbe Gevresin.

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They went up a narrow staircase with a rusty iron balustrade. The walls were trickling with damp, they secreted drops, distilled spots like black coffee; the steps were worn hollow, and thin at the ends like spoons; they led up to a door smeared yellow, with a cast-iron knob as black as ink. A copper ring swung in the wind at the end of a bell-rope, knocking the chipped plaster of the wall. An indescribable smell of stale apples and stagnant water came up the middle of the staircase from the little outer hall below, which was paved with rows of bricks set on edge, eaten into patterns like madrepores, while the ceiling looked like a map, furrowed with seas that were traced in yellow by the soaking through of the rain.

And the Abbe's little apartment, lately "done up" with a vile red-checked paper, reeked of the tomb. It was evident that under the shadow of the Cathedral that overhung this wing no sunshine ever dried the walls, of which the skirting boards were rotting into powder like brown sugar, crumbling slowly, on the icy cold polish of the floor.

"How sad to see an old man, a victim to rheumatism, housed here!" thought Durtal.

When he went into the Abbe's room, he found the chill somewhat taken off by a large coke fire; the priest was reading his breviary, wrapped in a wadded gown, close to the window, of which he had drawn back the blind to see a little better.

This room was furnished with a small iron bedstead hung with white cotton curtains looped back by bands of red cretonne; opposite the bed were a table covered with a cloth, and on it a desk, and a prie-dieu below a Crucifix nailed to the wall; the remainder of the room was fitted with bookshelves up to the ceiling. Three arm-chairs, such as are nowhere to be seen nowadays but in religious houses or seminaries, made of walnut wood with straw bottoms like church chairs, were set round the table, and two more, with round rush mats for the feet, stood one on each side of the fireplace. On the chimney-shelf was an Empire clock between two vases, and from these rose the faded stems of some dried grasses stuck upright into sand.

"Come to the fire," said the Abbe, "for in spite of the brazier it is fearfully cold."

And in answer to Durtal, who spoke of his rheumatism, he resignedly shrugged his shoulders.

"All the residence is the same," said he. "Monseigneur, who is almost a cripple, could not find a single dry room in the whole palace. Heaven forgive me, but I believe his rooms are even damper than mine. In point of fact there ought to be hot-air pipes all over the place, and it will never be done for lack of money."

"But at any rate Monseigneur might have stoves put into the rooms, here and there."

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“He!” cried the Abbe, laughing, “but he has no private means whatever. He draws a stipend of ten thousand francs a year and not another penny; for there is no endowment at Chartres, and the revenue from the fees on the ecclesiastical Acts is nothing. In this rich, but irreligious town he can hope for no assistance; the gardener and porter are paid by him; he is obliged for economy’s sake to employ Sisters from a convent as cook and linen-keeper. Add to that his inability to keep a carriage, so that he has to hire a conveyance for his pastoral rounds. And how much then do you suppose he has left to live on, if you deduct his charities? Why, he is poorer than you or I!”

“But then Chartres is the fag end of Church preferment, a mere raft for the shipwrecked and starving.”

“Thou hast said! Bishop, canons, priests, everybody here is poverty-stricken.”

The bell rang, and Madame Bavoil showed in the Abbe Plomb. Durtal recognized him. He looked even more scared than usual; he bowed, backing away, and did not know what to do with his hands, which he buried in his sleeves.

By the end of half an hour, when he was more at his ease, he expanded into smiles, and at last he talked; Durtal, much surprised, saw that the Abbe Gevresin was right. This priest was highly intelligent and well-informed, and what made the man even more attractive was his perfect freedom from the want of breeding, the narrow ideas, the goody nonsense which make intercourse so difficult with the ecclesiastics in literary circles.

They had settled themselves in the dining-room, as dismal a room as the rest, but warmer, for an earthenware stove was roaring and puffing hot gusts from its open ventilators.

When they had eaten their boiled eggs, the conversation, hitherto discursive as to subject, turned on the Cathedral.

“It is the fifth erection over a Druidical cave,” said the Abbe Plomb. “It has a strange history.

“The first, built at the time of the Apostles by Bishop Aventinus, was razed to the ground. Rebuilt by another Bishop named Castor, it was partly burnt down by Hunaldus Duke of Aquitaine, then restored by Godessaldus; again injured by fire, by Hastings, the Norman chief; repaired once more by Gislebert, and finally destroyed utterly by Richard Duke of Normandy when he sacked the city after the siege.

“We have no very authentic records of these two basilicas; at most are we certain that the Roman Governor of the land of Chartres completely destroyed the first and at the same time slaughtered a great number of Christians, among them his own daughter

Modesta, throwing the corpses into a well dug near the cave, and thence known as *le Puits des Saints Forts*.

“A third fabric, built by Bishop Vulphardus, was burnt down in 1020, when Fulbert was Bishop, and he founded the fourth Cathedral. This was blasted by lightning in 1194; nothing remained but the two belfries and the crypt.

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“The fifth structure, finally, built in the reign of Philippe Auguste, when Regnault de Moucon was Bishop of Chartres, is that we still see; it was consecrated on the 17th of October, 1260, in the presence of Saint Louis. This again has passed through the fire. In 1506 the northern spire was struck by lightning; the structure was of wood covered with lead; a terrific storm raged from six in the evening till four in the morning, fanning the fire to such violence that the six bells were melted like cakes of wax. The flames were, however kept within limits, and the church was refitted. But the scourge returned many times; in 1539, in 1573, and in 1589 lightning fell on the new belfry. Then a century elapsed before the visitation was repeated; in 1701 the same spire was struck again.

“It then stood uninjured till 1825, when a thunder-bolt fell and shook it severely on Whit Monday while the *Magnificat* was being chanted at Vespers.

“Finally, on the 4th of June, 1836, a tremendous fire broke out, caused by the carelessness of two plumbers working under the roof. It lasted eleven hours, and destroyed all the timbers, the whole forest that supported the roof; it was by a miracle that the church was not entirely consumed in this fury of fire.”

“You must allow, Monsieur, that there is something strange in this disaster without respite.”

“Yes, and what is still more strange,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “Is the persistency of fire from heaven, bent on destroying it.”

“How do you account for that?” asked Durtal.

“Sebastien Rouillard, the author of *Parthenie*, believes that these visitations were permitted as a punishment for certain sins, and he insinuates that the conflagration of the third Cathedral was justified by the misconduct of some pilgrims who at that time slept in the nave, men and women together. Others believe that the Devil, who can command the lightning, was bent on suppressing this sanctuary at any cost.”

“But why, then, did not the Virgin protect Her particular church more effectually?”

“You may observe that She has several times preserved it from being utterly reduced to cinders; however, it is, all the same, very strange when we remember that Chartres is the first place where the Virgin was worshipped in France. It goes back to Messianic times, for, long before Joachim’s daughter was born, the Druids had erected, in the cave which has become our crypt, an altar to the Virgin who should bear a child—*Virgini Pariturae*. They, by a sort of grace, had intuitive foreknowledge of a Saviour whose Mother should be spotless; thus it would seem that at Chartres, above all places, there are very ancient bonds of affection with Mary. This makes it very natural that Satan should be bent on breaking them.”

“Do you know,” said Durtal, “that this grotto is prefigured in the Old Testament by a human structure of almost official character? In her “Life of Our Lord,” that exquisite visionary, Catherine Emmerich, tells us that there was, hard by Mount Carmel, a grotto with a well, near which Elias saw a Virgin; and it was to this spot, she says, that the Jews who expected the Advent of the Redeemer made pilgrimages many times a year.

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“Is not this the prototype of the cave of Chartres and the well of the Strong Saints?

“Observe, too, on the other hand, the tendency of the thunder to fall, not on the old belfry, but on the new one. No meteorological reason, I suppose, can account for this preference; but on carefully considering the two spires, I am struck by the delicate foliage, the slender lacework of the new spire, the elegant and coquettish grace of the whole of that side. The other, on the contrary, has no ornament, no carved tracery; it is simply carved in scallops like scale armour; it is sober, stern, stalwart and strong. It might really almost be thought that one is female and the other of the male sex. And then might we not conclude that the first is symbolical of the Virgin and the second of Her Son? In that case my inference would be akin to that offered to us by Monsieur l’Abbe: the fires are to be ascribed to Satan, who would wreak himself on the image of Her who has the power to crush his head.”

“Pray have a slice of beef, our friend,” said Madame Bavoil, coming in with a bottle in her hands.

“No, thank you.”

“And you, Monsieur l’Abbe?”

The Abbe Plomb bowed, but declined.

“Why, you eat nothing!”

“What! I? I may even confess that I am rather ashamed of having eaten so heartily, after reading this morning the life of Saint Laurence of Dublin, who, by way of food, was content to dip his bread in the water clothes had been washed in.”

“Why?”

“Well, in order to be able to say with the Prophet-King that he fed on ashes—since ashes are used for lye; that is a penitential banquet which is very unlike that we have just consumed,” he added, laughing.

“Well, my dear Madame Bavoil, that puts even you to shame,” said the Abbe Gevresin. “You are not yet covetous of so meagre a feast; you are really quite dainty! You must have milk or water to dip your sop in!”

“Dear me,” said Durtal, “by way of high feeding I can improve on that. I remember reading in an old book the story of the Blessed Catherine of Cardona, who, without using her hands, cropped the grass, on her knees, among the asses.”

It had not struck Madame Bavoil that the friends were speaking in fun, and she replied quite humbly,—

“God Almighty has never yet required me to strew my bread with ashes or to graze the field—if He should give me the order, I should certainly obey it.—But it does not matter.”

And she was so far from enthusiastic that they all laughed.

“Then the Cathedral as a whole,” said the Abbe Gevresin after a short silence, “dates from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, excepting, of course, the new spire and numerous details.”

“Yes.”

“And the names of the architects are unknown?”

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“As are those of almost all the builders of great churches,” replied the Abbe Plomb. “It may, however, be safely assumed that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Benedictines of the Abbey of Tiron directed the building of our church, for that monastery had established a House at Chartres in 1117; we also know that this convent contained more than five hundred Brothers practising all the arts, and that sculptors, image-makers, stone-cutters, or workers in pierced stone, were numerous. It would therefore seem very natural that these monks sent to live at Chartres were the men who drew the plans of Notre Dame, and employed the horde of artists whom we see represented in one of the old windows of the apse—men in furred caps shaped like a jelly bag, who are busily carving and polishing the statues of kings.

“Their work was finished at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Jehan Le Texier, known as Jehan de Beauce, who erected the northern belfry, called the New Belfry, and the decorative work inside the church, forming the niches for the groups on the walls of the choir-aisles or ambulatory.”

“And has no one ever been able to discover the name of any one of the original architects, sculptors, or glass-makers of this Cathedral?”

“It has been the subject of much research, and I, personally, may say that I have grudged neither time nor trouble, but all in vain.

“This much we know: At the top of the southern belfry, the Old Belfry as it is called, near the window-bay looking towards the New Belfry, this name was deciphered: ‘Harman, 1164.’ Is it that of an architect, of a workman, or of a night watchman on the look-out at that time in the tower? We can but wonder. Didron, again, discovered on the pilaster of the eastern porch, above the head of a butcher slaughtering an ox, the word ‘Rogerus’ in twelfth century characters. Was he the architect, the sculptor, the donor of this porch—or the butcher? Another signature, ‘Robir,’ is to be seen on the pedestal of a statue in the north porch. Who was Robir? None can say.

“Langlois, too, mentions a glass-worker of the thirteenth century, Clement of Chartres, whose signature he found on a window of the Cathedral at Rouen—*Clement Vitrearius Carnutensis*; but it is a wide leap to infer, as some would do, that merely because this Clement was a native of Chartres, he must have painted one or more of the glass pictures in Notre Dame here. And at any rate we have no information as to his life or his works in this city. It may also be remarked that on a pane in our church we read *Petrus Bal ...;* is this the name, complete or defaced, of a donor or of a painter? Once more we must confess ourselves ignorant.

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“If I add to this that two of Jehan de Beauce’s colleagues have been traced: Thomas Le Vasseur, who assisted him in the building of the new spire, and one Sieur Bernier, whose name occurs in ancient accounts; that from some old contracts, discovered by Monsieur Lecoq, we know that Jehan Soulas, image-maker, of Paris, carved the finest of the groups that are the glory of the choir-aisles, and can verify the names of other sculptors who succeeded this admirable artist, but who are less interesting, since with them pagan art reappears and mediocrity is evident: Francois Marchant, image-maker, of Orleans, and Nicolas Guybert, of Chartres—we have mentioned almost all the records worthy of preservation as to the great artists who laboured at Chartres from the twelfth till the close of the first half of the fifteenth century.”

“And after that period the names that have been handed down to us deserve nothing but execration. Thomas Boudin, Legros, Jean de Dieu, Berruer, Tuby, Simon Mazieres—these were the men that dared to carry on the work begun by Soulas! Louis, the Duc d’Orleans’ architect, who debased and ravaged the choir, and the infamous Bridan, who, to the contemptible delight of some of the Canons, erected his blatant and wretched presentment of the Assumption!”

“Alas!” said the Abbe Gevresin, “and they were Canons who thought fit to break two ancient windows in the choir and fill them with white panes, the better to light that group of Bridan’s!”

“Will you eat nothing more?” asked Madame Bavoil, who, at a negative from the guests, cleared away the cheese and preserves, and brought in coffee.

“Since you are so much charmed by our Cathedral, I shall be most happy to take you over it and explain its details,” said the Abbe Plomb to Durtal.

“I shall accept with pleasure, Monsieur l’Abbe, for it fairly haunts me, it possesses me—your Notre Dame! You know, no doubt, Quicherat’s theories of Gothic art?”

“Yes, and I believe them to be correct. Like him, I am convinced that if the essential character of the Romanesque is the substitution of the vaulted roof for the truss, the distinctive element and principle of the Gothic is the buttress, and not the pointed arch.

“I reserve my opinion, indeed, as to the accuracy of Quicherat’s declaration that ’the history of architecture in the middle ages is no more than the history of the struggle of architects against the thrust and weight of vaulting,’ for there is something in this art beyond material industry and a problem of practice; at the same time he is certainly right on almost every point.

“It may be added as a general principle, that in our use of the terms Ogee and Gothic, we are misapplying words which have lost their original meaning; since the Goths have nothing to do with the style of architecture which has taken their name, and the word

ogee or ogyve, which strictly means the semicircular form, is inaccurate as applied to the arch with a double curve, which has for so long been regarded as the basis, nay, as the characteristic stamp of a style."[1]

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“After all,” the Abbe went on, after a short silence, “how can we judge of the works of a past age, but by such help as we may obtain from the arcades pierced in shoring walls or from vaulting on round or pointed arches? for they are all debased by centuries of repair, or left unfinished. Look at Chartres; Notre Dame was to have had nine spires, and it has but two! The cathedrals of Reims, of Paris, of Laon, and many more, were to have had spires rising from their towers; and where are they? We can form no exact idea of the effect their architects intended to produce. And then, again, these churches were meant to be seen in a setting which has been destroyed, an environment that has ceased to exist; they were surrounded by houses of a character resembling their own; they are now in the midst of barracks five stories high, gloomy, ignoble penitentiaries!—-and we constantly see the ground about them cleared, when they were never intended to stand isolated on a square. Look where you will, there is a total misapprehension of the conditions in which they were placed, of the atmosphere in which they lived. Certain details, which seem to us inexplicable in some of these buildings, were, no doubt, imperatively required by the position and needs of the surroundings. In fact, we stumble, we feel our way—but we know nothing—nothing!”

“And at best,” said Durtal, “archaeology and architecture have only done a secondary work; they have simply set before us the material organism, the body of the cathedrals; who shall show us the soul?”

“What do you mean by the word?” said the Abbe Gevresin.

“I am not speaking of the soul of the building at the moment when man by Divine help had created it; we know nothing of that soul—not indeed as regards Chartres, for some invaluable documents still reveal it; but of the soul of other churches, the soul they still have, and which we help to keep alive by our more or less regular presence, our more or less frequent communion, our more or less fervent prayers.

“For instance, take Notre Dame at Paris; I know that it has been restored and patched from end to end, that its sculpture is mended where it is not quite new; in spite of Hugo’s rhetoric it is second-rate, but it has its nave and its wondrous transept; it is even endowed with an ancient statue of the Virgin before which Monsieur Olier had knelt, and very often. Well, an attempt was made to revive there the worship of Our Lady, to incite a spirit of pilgrimage thither; but all is dead! That Cathedral no longer has a soul; it is an inert corpse of stone; try attending Mass there, try to approach the Holy Table—you will feel an icy cloak fall on you and crush you. Is it the result of its emptiness, of its torpid services, of the froth of runs and trills they send up there, of its being closed in a hurry in the evening and never open till so late in the morning, long after daybreak? Or has it something to do with the permitted rush of tourists, of London gapers that I have seen there talking at the top of their voice, sitting staring at the altar when the Holy Elements were being consecrated just in front of them? I know not—but of one thing I am certain, the Virgin does not inhabit there day and night and always, as she does Chartres.

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“Look at Amiens, again, with its colourless windows and crude daylight, its chapels enclosed behind tall railings, its silence rarely broken by prayer, its solitude. There too is emptiness; and why I know not, but to me the place exhales a stale odour of Jansenism. I am not at large there, and prayer is difficult; and yet the nave is magnificent, and the sculptures in the ambulatory, finer even than those of Chartres, may be pronounced unique.

“But here, too, the soul is absent.

“It is the same with the Cathedral of Laon—bare, ice-bound, dead past hope; while some are in an intermediate state, dying, but not yet cold: Reims, Rouen, Dijon, Tours, and Le Mans for instance; even in these there is some refreshment; and Bourges, with its five porches opening on a long perspective of aisles, and its vast deserted spaces; or Beauvais, a melancholy fragment, having no more than a head and arms flung out in despair like an appeal for ever ignored by Heaven, have still preserved some of the aroma of olden days. Meditation is possible there; but nowhere, nowhere is there such comfort as there is here, nowhere is prayer so fervent as at Chartres!”

“Those are heaven-sent words!” cried Madame Bavoil. “And you shall have a glass of old black currant liqueur for your pains! Yes, indeed, he is quite right—our friend is right,” she went on, addressing the priests, who laughed. “Everywhere else, excepting at Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris and, more especially, Notre Dame de Fourviere at Lyon, when you go to meet Her, you wait and wait; and often enough She does not come. Whereas in our Cathedral She receives you at once, just as She is. And I have told him, told our friend, that he should attend the first morning Mass in the crypt, and he will see what a welcome our Mother gives her visitors.”

“Chartres is a marvellous place,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “with its two black Madonnas —Notre Dame of the Pillar, above in the body of the church, and Notre Dame de Sous-Terre below, in the vault over which the basilica is built. No other sanctuary, I believe, possesses the miraculous images of Mary, to say nothing of the antique relic known as the Shift or Tunic of the Virgin.”

“And what in your opinion constitutes the soul of Chartres?” asked the Abbe Plomb.

“Certainly not the souls of the citizens’ wives and the church servants that are poured out there,” replied Durtal. “No, its vitality comes from the Sisterhoods, the peasant women, the pious schools, the pupils of the Seminary, and perhaps more especially from the children of the choir, who crowd to kiss the Pillar and kneel before the Black Virgin. As for the devotion of the respectable classes! It would scare away the angels!”

“With a few rare exceptions the fine flower of female Pharisaism is no doubt the outcome of that class,” said the Abbe Plomb, and he added in a half jesting, half sorrowful tone,—

“And I, here at Chartres, am the distressful gardener of these souls!”

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“To return to our starting point,” said the Abbe Gevresin: “what was the birthplace of the Gothic?”

“France: so Lecoy de la Marche emphatically asserts. ’The buttress made its appearance as the essential basis of a style in the early years of Louis le Gros, in the district lying between the Seine and the Aisne.’ In his opinion the first practice of this form was in the Cathedral of Laon; other authorities regard it as merely supplementary to earlier basilicas, instancing Saint-Front at Perigueux, Vezelay, Saint-Denis, Noyon, and the ancient college chapel at Poissy; but no two agree. One thing is certain, Gothic art is the art of the North; it made its way into Normandy, and from thence into England. Then it spread to the Rhine in the twelfth century, and to Spain by the beginning of the thirteenth. Gothic churches in the South are but an importation, evidently ill-assorted with the men and women who frequent them, and the merciless blue sky which spoils them.”

“And observe,” said Durtal, “that in our country that aspect of mysticism is discordant with the rest.”

“How is that?”

“Well, you see, in the distribution of the sacred arts France received architecture only. Consider the pre-Raphaelite painters. All the early painters were Italians, Spaniards, Flemings, or Germans. Those whom some writers try to represent as our fellow-countrymen are Flemings transplanted to Burgundy, or docile Frenchmen whose imitative work bears an unmistakable Flemish stamp. Look in the Louvre at our primitive artists; look at Dijon, especially at what remains from the time when northern art was introduced by Philippe le Hardi into his own province. It is impossible to feel a doubt. Everything came from Flanders—Jean Perreal, Bourdichon, even Fouquet are whatever you please, only not the inventors of an original Gallic art.

“It is the same with the mystic writers. Of what use would it be to mention the nationalities to which they belong? They too are Spanish, Italian, German, Flemish—-not one is French.”

“I beg your pardon, our friend!” cried Madame Bavoil, “there was the Venerable Jeanne de Matel, who was born at Roanne.”

“Yes, but she was the daughter of an Italian father who was born at Florence,” said the Abbe Gevresin, who, hearing the bell ring for Nones, now folded up his table napkin. They all stood up and said grace, and Durtal made an appointment with the Abbe Plomb to visit the Cathedral. Then he went home, meditating, as he walked, on this strange division of art in the middle ages, and the supremacy given to France in architecture, when as yet she was so inferior in every other art.

“And it must be owned,” he concluded, “that she has now lost this superiority; for it is long indeed since she produced an architect. The men who assume the name are mere thieving bunglers, builders devoid of all individuality and learning. They are not even able to pilfer skilfully from their precursors. What are they nowadays? Patchers up of chapels, church cobblers, botchers and blunderers!”

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[1] The English use of the word Ogee is thus defined: “An arch or moulding which displays sectionally contrasted curves similar to that of the *cyma reversa*.” FAIRHOLT, “Dict. of Terms used in Art;” and PARKER, “A Concise Glossary of Terms used in Architecture.”—[*Translator*.]

CHAPTER IV.

Madame Bavoil was right; to understand the welcome the Virgin could bestow on Her visitors, the early Mass in the crypt must be attended; above all, the Communion should be received.

Durtal made the experiment; one day when the Abbe Gevresin enjoined on him to approach the Table, he followed the housekeeper’s advice and went to the crypt at early dawn.

The way down was by a cellar-stair lighted by a small lamp with a sputtering wick darkening the chimney with smoke; having safely reached the bottom, he turned to the left in the darkness; here and there, at an angle, a floating wick threw a ruddy light on the circuit which he made in alternate light and shade, till at last he had some notion of the general outline of the crypt. Its plan would be fairly represented by the nave of a wheel whence the spokes radiated in every direction, joining the outer circle or tyre. From the circular path in which he found himself passages diverged like the sticks of a fan, and at the end little fogged glass windows were visible, looking almost bright in the opaque blackness of the walls.

And by following the curve of the corridor, Durtal came to a green baize door which he pushed open. He found himself in the side aisle of a nave ending in a semicircle, where there was a high altar. To the right and left two little recesses formed the arms or transept of a small cross. The centre aisle, forming a low nave, had chairs on either side, leaving a narrow space to give access to the altar.

It was scarcely possible to see; the sanctuary was lighted only by tiny lamps from the roof in little saucers of lurid orange or dull gold. An extraordinarily mild atmosphere prevailed in this underground structure, which was also full of a singular perfume in which a musty odour of hot wax mingled with a suggestion of damp earth. But this was only the background, the canvas, so to speak, of the perfume, and was lost under the embroidery of fragrance which covered it, the faded gold, as it were, of oil in which long kept aromatic herbs had been steeped, and old, old incense powder dissolved. It was a weird and mysterious vapour, as strange as the crypt itself, which, with its furtive lights and breadths of shadow, was at once penitential and soothing.

Durtal went up the broader aisle to the left arm of the cross and sat down; the tiny transept had its little altar, with a Greek cross in relief against a purple disk. Overhead

the enormous curve of the vaulting hung heavy, and so low that a man could touch it by stretching an arm; it was as black as the mouth of a chimney, and scorched by the fires that had consumed the cathedrals built above it.

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Presently the clap-clap of sabots became audible, and then the smothered footfall of nuns; there was silence but for sneezing and nose-blowing stifled by pocket-handkerchiefs, and then all was still.

A sacristan came in through a little door opening into the other transept, and lighted the tapers on the high altar; then strings of silver-gilt hearts became visible in the semicircle all along the walls, reflecting the blaze of flames, and forming a glory for a statue of the Virgin sitting, stiff and dark, with a Child on Her knees. This was the famous Virgin of the Cavern, or rather a copy of it, for the original was burnt in 1793 in front of the great porch of the Cathedral, amid the delirious raving of *sans-culottes*.

A choir-boy came in, followed by an old priest; and then, for the first time, Durtal saw the Mass really as a service, and understood the wonderful beauty that lies inherent in a devout commemoration of the Sacrifice.

The boy on his knees, his soul aspiring and his hands clasped, spoke aloud and slowly, rehearsing the responses of the Psalm with such deep attention and respect, that the meaning of this noble liturgy, which has ceased to amaze us, because we are so used to hearing it stammered out in hot haste, was suddenly revealed to Durtal.

And the priest himself, unconsciously, whether he would or no, took up the child's tone, imitating him, speaking slowly, not merely tripping the verses off the tip of his tongue, but absorbed in the words he had to repeat; and he seemed overwhelmed, as though it were his first Mass, by the grandeur of the rite of which he was to be the instrument.

In fact, Durtal heard the celebrant's voice tremble when standing before the altar in the presence of the Father, like the Son Himself whom he represented, and imploring forgiveness for all the sins of the world which He bore on His shoulders, supported in his grief and hope by the innocence of the child whose loving care was less mature and less lively than the man's.

And as he spoke the despairing words, "My God, my God, wherefore is my spirit heavy, and why dost Thou afflict me?" the priest was indeed the image of Jesus suffering on the hill of Calvary, but the man remained in the celebrant—the man, conscious of himself, and himself experiencing, in behoof of his personal sins and his own shortcomings, the impressions of sorrow contained in the inspired text.

Meanwhile his little acolyte had words of comfort, bid him hope; and after repeating the *Confiteor* in the face of the congregation, who on their part purified their souls by the same ablution of confession, the priest with revived assurance went up the altar steps and began the Mass.

Positively, in this atmosphere of prayers crushed in by the heavy roof, Durtal, in the midst of kneeling Sisters and women, was struck with a sense as of some early

Christian rite buried in the catacombs. Here were the same ecstatic tenderness, the same faith; and it was possible even to imagine some apprehension of surprise, and some eagerness to profess the faith in the face of danger. And thus, as in a vague image, this sacred cellar held the dim picture of the neophytes assembled so long since in the underground caverns of Rome.

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The service proceeded before Durtal's eyes, and he was amazed to watch the boy, who, with half closed eyes and the reserve of timid emotion, kissed the flagons of wine and of water before presenting them to the priest.

Durtal would look no more; he tried to concentrate his mind while the priest was wiping his hands, for the only prayers he could honestly offer up to God were verses and texts repeated in an undertone.

This only had he in his favour, but this he had: that he passionately loved mysticism and the liturgy, plain-song and cathedrals. Without falsehood or self-delusion, he could in all truth exclaim, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." This was all he had to offer to the Father in expiation of his contumely and refractoriness, his errors and his falls.

"Oh!" thought he, "how could I dare to pour out the ready-made collects of which the prayer-books are full, how say to God, while addressing Him as 'Lovely Jesus,' that He is the beloved of my heart, that I solemnly vow never to love anything but Him, that I would die rather than ever displease Him?

"Love none but Him!—If I were a monk and alone, possibly; but living in the world!—And then who but the Saints would prefer death to the smallest sin? Why then humbug Him with these feints and grimaces?

"No," said Durtal, "apart from the personal outpourings, the secret intimacy in which we are bold to tell Him everything that comes into our head, the prayers of the liturgy alone can be uttered with impunity by any man, for it is the peculiarity of these inspirations that they adapt themselves in all ages to every state of the mind and every phase of life. And with the exception of the time-honoured prayers of certain Saints, which are as a rule either supplications for pity or for help, appeals to God's mercy or laments, all other prayers sent forth from the cold insipid sacristies of the seventeenth century, or, worse still, composed in our own day by the piety-mongers who insert in our books of prayer the pious cant of the Rue Bonaparte—all these inflated and pretentious petitions should be avoided by sinners who, in default of every other virtue, at least wish to be sincere.

"Only that wonderful child could thus address the Lord without hypocrisy," he went on, looking at the little acolyte, and understanding truly for the first time what innocent childhood meant—the little sinless soul, purely white.

"The Church, which tries to find beings absolutely ingenuous and immaculate to wait upon the altar, had succeeded at Chartres in moulding souls and transforming ordinary boys on their admission to the sanctuary into exquisite angels. There must certainly be, above and besides their special training, some blessing and goodwill from Our Lady, to mould these little rogues to the service, to make them so unlike others, and endow them

in the middle of the nineteenth century with the fire of chastity and primitive fervour of the middle age.”

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The service proceeded slowly, soaking into the abject silence of the worshippers, and the child, more reverent and attentive than ever, rang the bell; it was like a shower of sparks tinkling under the smoky vault, and the silence seemed deeper than ever behind the kneeling boy, upholding with one hand the chasuble of the celebrant, who bowed over the altar. The Host was elevated amid the shower of silver sound; and then, above the prostrate heads, in the clear sparkle of bells, the golden tulip of a chalice flashed out till, to a final hurried peal, the gilded flower was lowered, and the prostrate worshippers looked up.

And Durtal was thinking,—

“If only He to whom we refused shelter when the Mother who bore Him was in travail, could find a loving refuge in our souls to-day! But alas! apart from these nuns, these children, these priests, and these peasant women who cherish Him so truly, how many here present are, like me, embarrassed by His presence, and at all times incapable of making ready the chamber He requires, of receiving Him in a room swept and garnished?

“Alas! to think that things are always the same, always going back to the beginning! Our souls are still the crafty synagogues who betrayed Him, and the vile Caiaphas that lurks within us rises up at the very moment when we fain would be humble and love Him while we pray! My God! My God! Would it not be better to depart than to drag myself thus, with such a bad grace, into Thy presence? For, after all, it is all very well for the Abbe Gevresin to insist that I should communicate, he is not I—he is not in me; he does not know the wild doings in my hidden lairs, or the turmoil in my ruins. He believes it to be mere nervelessness, indolence. Alas! That is not all. There is a dryness, a coldness, which are not altogether free from a certain amount of irritation and rebelliousness against the rules he insists on.”

The moment of Communion was at hand. The little boy had gently thrown the white napkin back on the table; the nuns and poor women and peasants went forward, all with clasped hands and bowed heads, and the child took a taper and passed in front of the priest, his eyes almost shut for fear of seeing the Host.

There was in this little creature such a glow of love and reverence that Durtal gazed with admiration and trembled with awe. Without in the least knowing why, in the midst of the darkness that fell on his soul, of the impotent and wavering feeling that thrilled it without there being any word to describe them, he felt a tide bearing him to the Saviour, and then a recoil.

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The comparison was inevitably forced upon him between that child's soul and his own. "Why, it is he, not I, who should take the Sacrament!" cried he to himself; and he crouched there inert, his hands folded, not knowing how to decide, in a frame at once beseeching and terrified, when he felt himself gently drawn to the table and received the Sacrament. And meanwhile he was trying to collect himself, and to pray, and at the same time, at the same instant, was in the discomfort of the shuddering fears that surge up within us, and that find expression physically in a craving for air, and in that peculiar condition when the head feels as if it were empty, as if the brain had ceased to act, and all vitality was driven back on the heart, which swells to choking; when it seems, in the spiritual sense, that as energy returns so far as to allow of self-command once more, of introspection, we peer down in appalling silence into a black void.

He painfully rose and returned to his place, not without stumbling. Never, not even at Chartres, had he been able to hinder the torpor that overpowered him at the moment of receiving the Sacrament. His powers were benumbed, his faculties arrested.

In Paris, at the core of his soul, which seemed rolled up in itself like a chrysalis, there had always been a sort of restraint, an awkwardness in waiting, and in approaching Christ, and then an apathy which nothing could shake off. And this state was prolonged in a sort of cold, enveloping mist, or rather in a vacuum all round the soul, deserted and swooning on its couch.

At Chartres this state of collapse was still present, but some indulgent tenderness presently enwrapped and warmed the spirit. The soul as it recovered was no longer alone; it was encouraged and perceptibly helped by the Virgin, who revived it. And this impression, peculiar to this crypt, permeated the body too; it was no longer a feeling of suffocation for lack of air; on the contrary, it was the oppression of inflation, of over-fulness, which would be mitigated by degrees, allowing of easy breathing at last.

Durtal, comforted and relieved, rose to go. By this time the crypt had become a little lighter from the growing dawn; the passages, ending in altars backing against the windows, were still dark, as a result of the ground plan, but in the perspective of each a moving gold cross was to be seen almost distinctly, rising and falling with a priest's back, between two pale stars twinkling one on each side above the tabernacle; while a third, lower and with redder flame, lighted up the book and the white napery.

Durtal wandered away to meditate in the Bishop's garden, where he had permission to walk whenever he pleased.

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The garden was perfectly still, with tomb-like avenues, pollard poplars, and trampled lawns—half dead. There was not a flower, for the Cathedral killed everything under its shadow. Its vast deserted apse, without a statue, rose amid a flight of buttresses flung out like huge ribs, inflated as it were by the breath of incessant prayer within; shade and damp always clung round the spot; in this funereal Close, where the trees were green only in proportion as they were distant from the church, lay two microscopic ponds like the mouths of two wells; one covered to the brim with yellow-green duck-weed, the other full of brackish water of inky blackness, in which three goldfish lay as in pickle.

Durtal was fond of this neglected spot, with its reek of the grave and the salt marsh, and the mouldy smell, that earthy scent that comes up from a rotting soil of wet leaves.

He paced the alleys, where the Bishop never came, and where the children of the household, rushing about at play, destroyed the fragments of grass-plots spared by the Cathedral. Slates cracked underfoot, flung down from the roofs by the wind, and the jackdaws croaked in answer to each other across the silent park.

Durtal came out on a terrace overlooking the city, and he rested his elbows on a parapet of grey time-eaten stone, as dry as pumice and patterned with orange and sulphur-coloured lichens.

Beneath him spread a valley crowded with smoking chimneys and roofs, veiling this upper part of the town in a tangle of blue. Further down all was still and lifeless; the houses were asleep, not so far awake even as to show the transient flash of glass when a window is thrown open, nor was there such a spot of red as is often seen in a country street when an eider-down quilt hangs out to air across the bar of a balcony; everything was closed and dull and soundless; there was not even the hive-like hum that hangs over inhabited places. But for the distant rumble of a cart, the crack of a whip, the bark of a dog, all was still: it was a town asleep, a land of the dead.

And beyond the valley, on the further bank, the scene was still more sullen and silent; the plains of La Beauce stretched away as far as the eye could reach, mute and melancholy, without a smile, under a heartless sky divided by an ignoble barrack facing the Cathedral.

The dreariness of these plains, an endless level without a mound, without a tree! And you felt that even beyond the horizon they still stretched away as flat as ever; only the monotony of the landscape was emphasized by the raging fury of the tempestuous winds, sweeping the hillside, levelling the tree-tops, and wreaking themselves on this basilica, which, perched on high, had for centuries defied their efforts. To uproot it the lightning had been needed to help, firing its towers, and even the combined attacks of the hurricane and the flames had been unable to destroy the original stock, which, replanted after each disaster, had always sprouted in fresh verdure with reinvigorated growth.

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That morning, in the dawn of a rainy autumn day, lashed by a bitter north wind, Durtal, shivering and ill at ease, left the terrace and took refuge in the more sheltered walks, going down presently into a garden-slope where the brushwood afforded some little protection from the wind; these shrubberies wandered at random down the hill, and an inextricable tangle of blackberries clung with the cat's-claws of their long shoots to the saplings that were scattered about.

It was evident that since some immemorial time the Bishops, for lack of funds, had neglected these grounds. Of all the old kitchen garden, overgrown by brambles, only one plot was more or less weeded, and rows of spinach and carrots alternated with the frosted balls of cabbages.

Durtal sat down on a stump that had once supported a bench, and tried to look into his own soul; but he found within, look where he might, only a spiritual Beauce; it seemed to him to mirror the cold and monotonous landscape; only it was not a mighty wind that blew through his being; but a sharp, drying little blast. He knew that he was cross-grained and could not make his observations calmly; his conscience harassed him and insisted on vexatious argument.

"Pride! Ah, how is it to be kept under till the day shall come when it shall be quelled? It insinuates itself so stealthily, so noiselessly, that it has ensnared and bound me before I can suspect its presence; and my case too is somewhat peculiar, and hard to cure by the religious treatment commonly prescribed in such cases. For in fact," said he to himself, "my pride is not of the artless and overweening kind, elated, audacious, boldly displaying, and proclaiming itself to the world; no, mine is in a latent state, what was called vain-glory in the simplicity of the Middle Ages, an essence of pride diluted with vanity and evaporating within me in transient thoughts and unexpressed conceit. I have not even the opportunity afforded by swaggering pride for being on my guard and compelling myself to keep silence. Yes, that is very true; talk leads to specious boasting and invites subtle praise; one is presently aware of it, and then, with patience and determination, it is in one's power to check and muzzle oneself. But my vice of pride is wordless and underground; it does not come forth. I neither see nor hear it. It wriggles and creeps in without a sound, and clutches me without my having heard its approach!

"And the good Abbe answers: 'Be watchful and pray;' well, I am more than willing, but the remedy is ineffectual, for aridity and outside influences deprive it of its efficacy!

"As for outside suggestions—they never seem to come to me but in prayer. It is enough that I kneel down and try to collect my thoughts, they are at once dissipated. The mere purpose of prayer is like a stone flung into a pool; everything is stirred up and comes to the top!

"And people who have not habits of religious practice fancy that there is nothing easier than prayer. I should like to see them try. They could then bear witness that profane

imaginings, which leave them in peace at all other times, always surge up unexpectedly, during prayer.

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“Besides, what use is therein disputing the fact? Merely looking at a sleeping vice is enough to wake it.”

And his thoughts went back to that warm crypt. “Yes, no doubt, like all the buildings of the Romanesque period, it is symbolical of the Old Testament; but it is not simply gloomy and sad, for it is enveloping and comforting, warm and tender! Admitting even that it is the figure in stone of the older Dispensation, would it not seem that it symbolizes it less as a whole, than as embodying more especially a select group of the Holy Women who prefigured the Virgin in the earlier Scriptures? Is it not the expression in stone of those passages in which the illustrious women of the Bible are most conspicuous, who were, in a way, prophetic incarnations of the New Eve?

“Hence this crypt would reproduce the most consoling and the most heroic passages of the Sacred Book, for the Virgin is supreme in this underground sanctuary; it is Hers rather than the terrible Adonai’s, if one may dare say so.

“And again, She is a very singular Virgin, who has inevitably remained in harmony with Her surroundings: a Virgin black and rugged, and stunted, like the rough-hewn shrine She inhabits.

“She is therefore, no doubt, the outcome of the same idea that conceived of Christ as black and ugly because He had assumed the burthen of all the sins of the world, the Christ of the first ages of the Church, who in His humility put on the vilest aspect. In that case Mary would have conceived Her Son in Her own image; She too had chosen to be ugly and obscure, out of humility and loving-kindness, that She might the better console the disfigured and despised creatures whose image She had borrowed.”

And Durtal went on:—

“What a crypt is this where, in the course of so many centuries, kings and queens have come to worship!

“Philip Augustus and Isabella of Hainault, Blanche of Castille and Saint Louis, Philippe de Valois, Jean le Bon, Charles V., Charles VI., Charles VII., Charles VIII. and Anne de Bretagne; then Francois I., Henri III. and Louise de Vaudemont, Catherine de’ Medici; Henri IV., who was crowned in this Cathedral, Anne of Austria, Louis XIV., Maria Leczinska, and so many others—all the nobility of France; and Ferdinand of Spain, and Leon de Lusignan, the last King of Armenia, and Pierre de Courtenay, Emperor of Constantinople—all kneeling like the poor folks of to-day, and like them beseeching Notre Dame de Sous-Terre.”

And what was more interesting still was that the Virgin had wrought many miracles on this spot. She had saved children who had fallen into the well of the Strong Saints, had preserved the guardians who had charge of the relic of Her garment when the edifice

was blazing above them, and had cured crowds, half maddened by the Burning plague in the Middle Ages, shedding Her benefits with a lavish hand.

Times were changed indeed, but fervent worshippers had knelt before the Image, had relinked the bonds broken in the course of years, had, so to speak, recaptured the Virgin in a net of prayer; and so, instead of departing, as She had done elsewhere, She had remained at Chartres.

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By some incredible effect of clemency She had endured the insult of the tenth-day festivals and the outrage of seeing the Goddess of Reason installed in her place on the altar, had suffered the infamous liturgy of obscene canticles rising with the thundering incense of gunpowder. And She had forgiven it all, no doubt for the sake of the love shown Her by preceding generations, and the awed, but real affection of the humble believers who had come back to Her when the storm was over.

This cavern was crowded with memories. The coating of those walls had been formed of the vapours of the soul, of the exhalations of accumulated desires and regrets, even more than of the smoke of tapers; how foolish it was then to have painted this crypt in squalid imitation of the catacombs, to have defaced the glorious darkness of these stones with colours which were indeed fast vanishing, leaving only traces as of palette scrapings in the consecrated soot on the roof!

Durtal was expatiating on these reflections as he went out of the garden, when he met the Abbe Gevresin walking along and reading his breviary. He asked whether Durtal had taken the Sacrament. And perceiving that his penitent always came back to his shame of the inert and torpid grief that came over him in contemplation of the Holy Sacrament, the old priest said to him,—

“That is no concern of yours; all you have to do is to pray to the best of your power. The rest is my concern—if the far from triumphant state of your soul only makes you a little humble, that is all I ask of you.”

“Humble! I am like a water cooler; my vanity sweats out at every pore as the water oozes from the clay.”

“It is some consolation to me that you perceive it,” said the Abbe, smiling. “It would be far worse if you did not know yourself, if you were so proud as to believe that you had no pride.”

“But how then am I to set to work? You advise me to pray; but teach me at least how not to dissipate myself in every direction, for as soon as I try to collect myself I go to pieces; I live in a perpetual state of dissolution. It is like a thing arranged on purpose; as soon as I try to shut the cage all my thoughts fly off—they deafen me with their chirping.”

The Abbe was thinking.

“I know,” said he; “nothing is more difficult than to free the spirit from the images that take possession of it. Still, and in spite of all, you may achieve concentration of mind if you observe these three rules:

“In the first place you must humble yourself, by owning the frailty of your mind, unable to preserve itself from wandering in the presence of God; next you must not be impatient or restless, for that would only stir up the dregs and bring other objects of frivolity to the surface; finally, it is well not to investigate the nature of the distractions that trouble your prayers till they are over. This only prolongs the disturbance, and in a way recognizes its existence. You thus run the risk, in virtue of the law of association of ideas, of inviting new diversions, and there would be no way of escape.

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“After prayer you may examine yourself with benefit; follow my advice, and you will find the advantage of it.”

“That is all very fine,” thought Durtal, “but when it comes to putting the advice into practice it is quite another thing. Are not these mere old women’s remedies, precious ointments, quack medicines, for which the pious and virtuous have a weakness?”

They walked on in silence across the forecourt of the palace to the priest’s rooms. As they went in, they found Madame Bavoil at the foot of the stairs, her arms in a tub full of soap-suds. As she rubbed the clothes, she turned to look at Durtal, and, as if she could read his thoughts, she mildly asked,—

“Why, our friend, wear such a graveyard face when you took the Sacrament this morning?”

“So you heard I had been to Communion?”

“Yes, I went into the crypt while Mass was going forward, and saw you go up to the Holy Table. Well, shall I tell you the truth? You do not know how to address our Holy Mother.”

“Indeed!”

“No. You are shy when She is doing her best to put you at your ease; you creep close to the wall when you ought to walk boldly up the middle aisle to face Her. That is not the way to approach Her!”

“But if I have nothing to say to Her?”

“Then you simply chatter to Her like a child; some pretty speech, and She is satisfied. Oh, these men! How little they know how to pay their court, how greatly they lack little coaxing ways, and even honest artfulness! If you can invent nothing on your own part, borrow from another. Repeat after the Venerable Jeanne de Matel:

“’Holy Virgin, this abyss of iniquity and vileness invokes the abyss of strength and splendour to praise Thy preeminent Glory.’ Well, is that pretty well expressed, our friend? Try; recite that to Our Lady and She will unbind you; then prayer will come of itself. Such little ways are permitted by Her, and we must be humble enough not to presume to do without them.”

Durtal could not help laughing.

“You want me to become a trickster, a sneak in spiritual life!” said he.

“Well, where would be the harm? Does not the Lord know when we mean well? Does not He take note of our intentions? Would you, yourself, repulse anyone who paid you a compliment, however clumsily, if you thought he meant to please you by it? No, of course not.”

“Here is another thing,” said the Abbe, laughing. “Madame Bavoil, I saw Monseigneur this morning; he grants your petition and authorizes you to dig in as many parts of the garden as you choose.”

“Aha!” and amused by Durtal’s surprise she went on: “You must have seen for yourself that excepting a little plot of ground where the gardener plants a few carrots and cabbages for the Bishop’s table, the whole of the garden is left to run wild; it is sheer waste and of no use to anybody. Now instead of buying vegetables, I mean to grow some, since Monseigneur gives me leave to turn over his ground, and by the same token I will give some to your housekeeper.”

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“Thank you. Then do you understand gardening?”

“I? Why, am I not a peasant? I have lived in the country all my life, and a kitchen garden is just my business! Besides, if I were in difficulties, would not my Friends Above come to advise me?”

“You are a wonderful woman, Madame Bavoil,” said Durtal, somewhat disconcerted in spite of himself by the answers of a cook who so calmly asserted that she was on intimate terms with the divine Beyond.

CHAPTER V.

It rained without ceasing. Durtal breakfasted under the assiduous watchfulness of his servant, Madame Mesurat. She was one of those women whose stalwart build and masculine presence would allow of their dressing in men’s clothes without attracting attention. She had a pear-shaped head, cheeks that hung flabby as if they had been emptied of air, a pompous nose that drooped till it very nearly touched a projecting underlip like a bracket, giving her an expression of determined contempt which she very certainly had never felt. In short, she suggested the absurd idea of a solemn, gawky Marlborough disguised as a cook.

She served unvarying meats with inglorious sauces; and as soon as the dish was on the table she stood at attention, waiting to know whether it was good. She was imposing and devoted—quite insufferable. Durtal, on edge with irritation, found it all he could do not to dismiss her to the kitchen, and finally buried his nose in a book that he might not have to answer her, might not see her.

This day, provoked by his silence, Madame Mesurat lifted the window curtain, and for the sake of saying something, exclaimed,—

“Good heavens! What weather! Impossible!”

And in fact the sky offered no hope of consolation. It was all in tears. The rain fell in uninterrupted streams, unwinding endless skeins of water. The Cathedral was standing in a pool of mud lashed into leaping drops by the falling torrent, and the two spires looked drawn together, almost close, linked by loose threads of water. This indeed was the prevailing impression—a briny atmosphere full of strings holding the sky and earth together as if tacked with long stitches, but they would not hold; a gust of wind snapped all these endless threads, which were whirled in every direction.

“My arrangement to meet the Abbe Plomb to go over the Cathedral is evidently at an end,” said Durtal to himself. “The Abbe will certainly not turn out in such weather.”

He went into his study; this was his usual place of refuge. He had his divan there, his pictures, the old furniture he had brought from Paris; and against the walls, shelves, painted black, held thousands of books. There he lived, looking out on the towers, hearing nothing but the cawing of the rooks and the strokes of the hours as they fell one by one on the silence of the deserted square. He had placed his table in front of a window, and there he sat dreaming, praying, meditating, making notes.

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The balance of his personal account was struck by internal damage and mental disputations; if the soul was bruised and ice-bound, the mind was no less afflicted, no less fagged. It seemed to have grown dull since his residence at Chartres. The biographies of Saints which Durtal had intended to write, remained in the stage of charcoal sketches; they blew off before he could fix them. In reality he had ceased to care for anything but the Cathedral; it had taken possession of him.

And besides, the lives of the Saints as they were written by the inferior Bollandists were enough to disgust anybody with saintliness. Offered to publisher after publisher, carted from the Paris libraries to the provincial workshops, this barrow of books had at first been hauled by a single nag, Father Giry; then a second horse had been added, the Abbe Guerin, and, harnessed to the same shafts, these two men pulled their heavy truck over the broken road of souls.

He had only to open a bale of this prosy dulness, taking down a volume at random, to light on sentences of this quality:

“Such an one was born of parents not less remarkable for their rank than for their piety;” or, on the other hand, “His parents were not of illustrious birth, but in them might be seen the distinction of all the virtues which are so far above rank.”

And then the dreadful style of the Pont Neuf: “His historian does not hesitate to say he would have been mistaken for an angel if the maladies with which God afflicted him had not shown that he was a man.”—“The Devil, not enduring to see him advancing by rapid leaps on the way of perfection, adopted various means of hindering him in the happy progress of his career.”

And on turning over to a fresh page he came upon a passage in the life of one of the Elect who was mourning for his mother, excusing him in this solemn rigmarole: “After granting to the feelings of nature such relief as grace cannot forbid on these occasions —”

Or again, here and there were such pompous and ridiculous definitions as this, which occurs in the life of Cesar de Bus: “After a visit to Paris, which is not less the throne of vice than the capital of the kingdom—” And this went on in meagre language through twelve to fifteen volumes, ending by the erection of a row of uniform virtue, a barrack of pious idiotcy. Now and again the two poor nags seemed to wake up and trot for a little space, though gasping for breath, when they had some detail to record which no doubt moved them to rapture; they expatiated complacently on the virtues of Catherine of Sweden or Robert de la Chaise-Dieu, who as soon as they were born cried for sinless wet-nurses, and would suck none but pious breasts; or they spoke with ravishment of the chastity of Jean the Taciturn, who never took a bath, that he might not shock “his modest eyes,” as the text says, by seeing himself; and the bashful purity of San Luis de

Gonzagua, who had such a terror of women that he dared not look at his mother for fear of evil thoughts!

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In consternation at the poverty of these distressing non-sequiturs, Durtal turned to the less familiar biographies of the Blessed Women; but here again, what a farrago of the commonplace, what glutinous unction, what a hash by way of style! There was certainly some curse from Heaven on the old women of the Sacristy who dared take up a pen. Their ink at once turned to stickiness, to bird-lime, to pitch, which smeared all it touched. Oh, the poor Saints! the hapless Blessed Women!

His meditations were interrupted by a ring at the bell:

“Why, has the Abbe Plomb really come out in spite of the gale?”

It was indeed the priest that Madame Mesurat showed in.

“Oh,” said he to Durtal, who lamented over the rain, “the weather will clear up all in good time; at any rate, as you had not put me off I was determined not to keep you waiting.”

They sat chatting by the fire; and the room took the Abbe’s fancy, no doubt, for he settled himself at his ease. He threw himself back in an arm-chair, tucking his hands into his cincture. And when, in answer to his question as to whether Durtal were not too dull at Chartres, the Parisian replied, “It seems to me that I live more slowly, and yet am not such a burthen to myself,” the Abbe went on,—

“What you must feel painfully is the lack of intellectual society; you, who in Paris lived in the world of letters—how can you endure the atmosphere of this provincial town?”

Durtal laughed.

“The world of letters! No, Monsieur l’Abbe, I should not be likely to regret that, for I had given it up many years before I came to live here; and besides, I assure you it is impossible to be intimate with those train-bands of literature and remain decent. A man must choose—them or honest folks; slander or silence; for their speciality is to eliminate every charitable idea, and above all to cure a man of friendship in the winking of an eye.”

“Really?”

“Yes, by adopting a homoeopathic pharmacopoeia which still makes use of the foulest matter—the extract of wood-lice, the venom of snakes, the poison of the cockchafer, the secretions of the skunk and the matter from pustules, all disguised in sugar of milk to conceal their taste and appearance; the world of letters, in the same way, triturates the most disgusting things to get them swallowed without raising your gorge. There is an incessant manipulation of neighbours’ gossip and play-box tittle-tattle, all wrapped up in perfidious good taste to mask their flavour and smell.

“These pills of foulness, exhibited in the required doses, act like detergents on the soul, which they almost immediately purge of all trustfulness. I had enough of this regimen, which acted on me only too successfully, and I thought it well to escape from it.”

“But the pious world, too, is not absolutely free from gossip,” said the Abbe, smiling.

“No doubt, and I am well aware that devotion does not always sweeten the mind, but—

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“The truth is,” said he after reflection, “that the assiduous practice of religion generally results in some intense effects on the soul. Only they may be of two kinds. Either it develops the soul’s taint and evolves in it the final ferments which putrefy it once for all, or it purifies the spirit and makes it clean and clear and exquisite. It may produce hypocrites or good and saintly people; there is really no medium.

“But when such divine husbandry has completely cleansed souls, how guileless and how pure they may be! Nor am I speaking of the Elect, such as I saw at La Trappe—-merely of young novices, little priestlings whom I have known. They had eyes like clear glass, undimmed by the haze of a single sin; and, looking into them, behind those eyes you would have seen their open soul burning like a soaring crown of fire framing the smiling face in a halo of white name.

“In fact, Jesus simply fills up all the room in their soul. Do not you think, Monsieur l’Abbe, that these youths occupy their bodies just enough for suffering and to expiate the sins of others? Without knowing it, they have been sent into the world to be safe tenements of the Lord, the resting-place where Jesus finds a home after wandering over the frozen steppes of other souls.”

“Yes,” said the Abbe, taking off his spectacles to wipe them on his bandana, “but to acquire so fine a strain of being, how much mortification, penance, and prayer have been needed in the generations that have ended by giving them birth! The spirits of whom you speak are the flower of a stem long nourished in a pious soil. The Spirit, of course, bloweth where it listeth, and may find a saint in the heart of a listless family; but this mode of operation must always be an exception. The novices you have known must certainly have had grandmothers and mothers who frequently incited them to kneel and pray by their side.”

“I do not know—I knew nothing of the origin of these lads—but I feel that you are right. It is obvious, indeed, that children, slowly brought up from their earliest years, and sheltered from the world under the shadow of such a sanctuary as this at Chartres, must end in the blossoming of an unique flower.”

And when Durtal told him of the impression made on him by the angelic service of the Mass, the Abbe smiled.

“Though our boys are not unique, they are no doubt rare. Here, the Virgin Herself trains them, and note, the little lad you saw is neither more diligent nor more conscientious than his fellows; they are all alike. Dedicated to the priesthood from the time when they can first understand, they learn quite naturally to lead a spiritual life from their constant intimacy with the services.”

“What then is the system of this Institution?”

“The Foundation of the Clerks of Our Lady dates from 1853, or rather it was reconstituted in that year—for it existed in the Middle Ages—by the Abbe Ychard. Its purpose is to increase the number of priests by admitting poor boys to begin their studies. It receives intelligent and pious children of every nationality, if they are supposed to show any vocation for Holy Orders. They remain in the choir school till they are in the third class, and are then transferred to the Seminary.

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“Its funds?—are, humanly speaking, nothing, based on trust in Providence, for it has altogether, for the maintenance of eighty pupils, nothing but the pay earned by these children for various duties in the Cathedral, and the profits from a little monthly magazine called ’The Voice of the Virgin,’ and finally and chiefly the charity of the faithful. All this does not amount to a very substantial income; and yet, to this day, money has never been lacking.”

The Abbe rose and went to the window.

“Oh, the rain will not cease,” said Durtal. “I am very much afraid, Monsieur l’Abbe, that we cannot examine the Cathedral porches to-day.”

“There is no hurry. Before going into the details of Notre Dame, would it not be well to contemplate it as a whole, and let its general purpose soak into the mind before studying each page of its parts?

“Everything lies contained in that building,” he went on, waving his hand to designate the church; “the scriptures, theology, the history of the human race, set forth in broad outline. Thanks to the science of symbolism a pile of stones may be a macrocosm.

“I repeat it, everything exists within this structure, even our material and moral life, our virtues and our vices. The architect takes us up at the creation of Adam to carry us on to the end of time. Notre Dame of Chartres is the most colossal depository existing of heaven and earth, of God and man. Each of its images is a word; all those groups are phrases—the difficulty is to read them.”

“But it can be done?”

“Undoubtedly. That there may be some contradictions in our interpretations I admit, but still the palimpsest can be deciphered. The key needed is a knowledge of symbolism.”

And seeing that Durtal was listening to him with interest, the Abbe came back to his seat, and said,—

“What is a symbol? According to Littre it is a ’figure or image used as a sign of something else;’ and we Catholics narrow the definition by saying with Hugues de Saint Victor that a symbol is an allegorical representation of a Christian principle under a tangible image.

“Now symbolism has existed ever since the beginning of the world. Every religion adopted it, and in ours it came into being with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the first chapter of Genesis, while it still is in full splendour in the last chapter of the Apocalypse.

“The Old Testament is an anticipatory figure of all the New Testament tells us. The Mosaic dispensation contains, as in an allegory, what the Christian religion shows us in reality; the history of the People of God, its principal personages, its sayings and doings, the very accessories round about it, are a series of images; everything came to the Hebrews under a figure, Saint Paul tells us. Our Lord took the trouble to remind His disciples of this on various occasions, and He Himself, when addressing the multitude, almost always spoke in parables as a means of conveying one thing by an illustration from another.

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“Symbols, then, have a divine origin; it may be added that from the human point of view this form of teaching answers to one of the least disputable cravings of the human mind. Man feels a certain enjoyment in giving proof of his intelligence, in guessing the riddle thus presented to him, and likewise in preserving the hidden truth summed up in a visible formula, a perdurable form. Saint Augustine expressly says: ’Anything that is set forth in an allegory is certainly more emphatic, more pleasing, more impressive, than when it is formulated in technical words.’”

“That is Mallarme’s idea too,” thought Durtal, “and this coincidence in the views of the saint and the poet, on grounds at once analogous and different, is whimsical, to say the least.”

“Thus in all ages,” the Abbe went on, “men have taken inanimate objects, or animals and plants, to typify the soul and its attributes, its joys and sorrows, its virtues and its vices; thought has been materialized to fix it more securely in the memory, to make it less fugitive, more near to us, more real, almost tangible.

“Hence the emblems of cruelty and craft, of courtesy and charity, embodied by certain creatures, personified by certain plants; hence the spiritual meanings attributed to precious stones, and to colours. And it may be added that in times of persecution, in the early Christian times, this hidden language enabled the initiated to hold communication, to give each other some token of kinship, some password which the enemy could not interpret. Thus, in the paintings discovered in catacombs, the Lamb, the Pelican, the Lion, the Shepherd, all meant the Son; the Fish *Ichthys*, of which the characters express the Greek formula: ’Jesus, Son of God, Saviour,’ figures, in a secondary sense, the believer, the rescued soul, fished out from the sea of Paganism; the Redeemer having told two of His Apostles that they should be fishers of men.

“And of course the period when human beings lived in closest intercourse with God—-the Middle Ages—was certain to follow the revealed tradition of Christ, and express itself in symbolical language, especially in speaking of that Spirit, that essence, that incomprehensible and nameless Being who to us is God. At the same time it had at its command a practical means of making itself understood. It wrote a book, as it were, intelligible to the humblest, superseding the text by images, and so instructing the ignorant. This indeed was the idea put into words by the Synod of Arras in 1025: ’That which the illiterate cannot apprehend from writing shall be shown to them in pictures.’

“The Middle Ages, in short, translated the Bible and Theology, the lives of the Saints, the apocryphal and legendary Gospels into carved or painted images, bringing them within reach of all, and epitomizing them in figures which remained as the permanent marrow, the concentrated extract of all its teaching.”

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“It taught the grown-up children the catechism by means of the stone sentences of the porches,” exclaimed Durtal.

“Yes, it did that too. But now,” the Abbe went on, after a pause, “before entering on the subject of architectural symbolism, we must first establish a distinct notion of what Our Lord Himself did in creating it, when, in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John, He speaks of the Temple at Jerusalem, and says that if the Jews destroy it He will rebuild it in three days, expressly prefiguring by that parable His own Body. This set forth to all generations the form which the new temples were thenceforth to take after His death on the Cross.

“This sufficiently accounts for the cruciform plan of our churches. But we will study the inside of the church later; for the present we must consider the meanings of the external parts of a cathedral.

“The towers and belfries, according to the theory of Durand, Archbishop of Mende in the thirteenth century, are to be regarded as preachers and prelates, and the lofty spire is symbolical of the perfection to which their souls strive to rise. According to other interpreters of the same period, such as Saint Melito, Bishop of Sardis, and Cardinal Pietro of Capua, the towers represent the Virgin Mary, or the Church watching over the salvation of the Flock.

“It is a certain fact,” the Abbe went on, “that the position of the towers was never rigidly laid down once for all in mediaeval times; thus different interpretations are admissible according to their position in the structure. Still, perhaps the most ingeniously refined, the most exquisite idea is that which occurred to the architects of Saint Maclou at Rouen, of Notre Dame at Dijon, and of the Cathedral at Laon, for example, who built rising from the centre of the transepts—that is above the very spot where, on the Cross, the breast of Christ would lie, a lantern higher than the rest of the roof, often finishing outside in a tall and slender spire, starting as it were from the Heart of Christ to leap with one spring to the Father, to soar as if shot up from the bow of the vaulting in a sharp dart to reach the sky.

“The towers, like the buildings they overshadow, are almost always placed on a height that commands the town, and they shed around them like seed into the soil of the soul, the swarming notes of their bells, reminding all Christians by this aerial proclamation, this bead-telling of sound, of the prayers they are commanded to use and the duties they must fulfil; nay, at need, they may atone before God for man’s apathy by testifying that at least they have not forgotten Him, beseeching Him with uplifted arms and brazen tongues, taking the place as best they may of so many human prayers, more vocal perhaps than they.”

“With its ship-like character,” said Durtal, who had thoughtfully approached the window, “this Cathedral strikes me as amazingly like a motionless vessel with spires for masts

and the clouds for sails, spread or furled by the wind as the weather changes; it remains the eternal image of Peter’s boat which Jesus guided through the storm.”

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“And likewise of Noah’s Ark—the Ark outside which there is no safety,” added the Abbe.

“Now consider the church in all its parts. Its roof is the symbol of Charity, which covereth a multitude of sins; its slates or tiles are the soldiers and knights who defend the sanctuary against the heathen, represented by the storm, its stones, all joined, are, according to Saint Nilus, emblematic of the union of souls, or, as the *Rationale* of Durand of Mende has it, of the multitude of the faithful; the stronger stones figuring the souls that are most advanced in the way of perfection and hinder the weaker brethren, represented by the smaller stones, from slipping and falling. However, to Hugues de Saint Victor, a monk of the abbey of that name in the twelfth century, this collection of stones is merely the mingled assembly of the clerks and the laity.

“Again, these blocks of stone of various shapes are bound and held together by mortar, of which Durand of Mende will tell you the meaning. ‘Mortar,’ saith he, ’is compounded of lime and sand and water; lime is the burning quality of charity, and it combines by the aid of water, which is the Spirit, with the sand, of the earth earthy.’

“Thus these united stones form the four walls of the church, which Prudentius of Troyes tells us are the four evangelists; or, according to other interpreters, they represent in stone the cardinal virtues of religion: Justice, Fortitude, Prudence, and Temperance, already prefigured by the walls of the City of God in the Apocalypse.

“Thus you see each part may be regarded as having more than one meaning, but all included in one general idea common to all.”

“And the windows?” asked Durtal.

“I am coming to them; they are emblematic of our senses, which are to be closed to the vanities of the world and open to the gifts of Heaven; they are also provided with glass, giving passage to the beams of the true Sun, which is God. But Dom Villette has most clearly set forth their symbolical meaning: ‘They are,’ says he, ’the Scriptures, which receive the glory of the sun and keep out the wind, the hail and the snow, the images of false doctrine and heresies.’

“As to the buttresses, they symbolize the moral force that sustains us against temptation; they are likewise the hope which upholds the soul and strengthens it; others see in them the image of the temporal powers who are called upon to defend the power of the Church; and others again, regarding more especially the flying buttresses which resist the thrust of the span, say that they are imploring arms clinging to the safe-keeping of the Ark in time of danger.

“The principal entrance, the great portal of so many churches, such as those of Vezelay, Paray-le-Monial and Saint German l’Auxerrois, in Paris, was approached through a covered vestibule, often very deep and intentionally dark, called the Narthex. The

baptismal pool was in this porch. It was a place for probation and forgiveness, emblematical of Purgatory, an ante-room to Heaven, where, before being permitted access to the sanctuary, penitents and neophytes had their place.

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“Such, briefly, is the allegorical meaning of the parts. If we now regard it again as a whole, we may observe that the cathedral, built over a crypt symbolical of the contemplative life, and also of the tomb in which Christ was laid, was naturally obliged to have its apse towards that point of the heavens where the sun rises at the equinox, so as to convey, says the Bishop of Mende, that it is the Church’s mission to show moderation in its triumphs as in its reverses. All the liturgical commentators are agreed that the high altar must be placed at the eastern end, so that the worshippers, as they pray, may turn their eyes towards the cradle of the Faith; and this rule was held absolute, and so well approved by God that He confirmed it by a miracle. The Bollandists in fact have a legend that Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, seeing a church that had been built on another axis, made it turn to the East by a push with his shoulder, thus placing it in its right position.

“The church has generally three doors, in honour of the Holy Trinity; and the portal in the middle, called the Royal Porch, is divided by a pier and a pillar surmounted by a statue of Our Lord, who says of Himself in the Gospel, ‘I am the door,’ or of the Virgin, if the Church is consecrated to Her, or even of the patron Saint in whose name it is dedicated. The door, thus divided, typifies the two roads which man is free to follow. Indeed, in most cathedrals this symbol is emphasized by a representation of the Last Judgment placed above the entrance.

“This is the case in Paris, at Amiens, and at Bourges. At Chartres, on the contrary, the Judgment of Souls is relegated, as at Reims, to the tympanum of the northern porch; but here it is to be seen in the rose-window over the western portal, in contradiction to the system usual in the Middle Ages of treating in the windows above the doors the subject carved in the porch; thus presenting on the same side a repetition of the same symbols, in glass as seen from within, and in stone without.”

“Good; but how then can you account, by the ternary rule so universally adopted, for that marvellous cathedral at Bourges, where, instead of three porches and three aisles, we find five?”

“Nothing can be simpler—we cannot account for it. At most can we suppose that the architect of Bourges intended by those five doors to figure the five wounds of Christ. Even then we should be left to wonder why he placed all the wounds in a single line; for that church has no transept, no arms at the end of which the holes in the hands may be symbolized by doors, which is the usual course.”

“And the cathedral at Antwerp, which has two more aisles?”

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“They no doubt typify the seven avenues, the seven gifts of the Paraclete. This question of number leads me to speak of theological enumeration, a peculiar element which plays a part in the varied subject of symbolism,” the Abbe went on. “The allegorical science of numbers is a very old one. Saint Isidor of Seville, and Saint Augustine studied it. Michelet, who talks nonsense as soon as he has to do with a cathedral, is hard on the mediaeval architects for their belief in the meaning of figures. He accuses them of having observed mystic rules in the arrangement of certain parts of the buildings; of having, for instance, restricted the number of windows, or arranged pillars and bays in accordance with some arithmetical combination. Not understanding that each detail of a church had a meaning and was a symbol, he could not understand that it was important to calculate each, since its meaning might be modified or even completely altered. Thus a pillar by itself may not necessarily typify an Apostle, but if there should be twelve, they evidently show the meaning attributed to them by the builder, since they recall the exact number of Christ’s disciples. Sometimes, indeed, to prevent any mistake, the answer is supplied with the problem; as in an old church at Etampes, where I read, inscribed on the twelve Romanesque shafts, the names of the Apostles in relief, in the traditional setting of a Greek cross.

“At Chartres they had adopted a still better plan: statues of the twelve Apostles were placed in front of the pillars of the nave: but the Revolution took offence at these figures, overthrew and destroyed them.

“In considering the system of symbolism it is necessary to study the significance of numbers. The secrets of church building can only be discerned by recognizing the mysterious idea of the unity of the figure I., which is the image of God Himself. The suggestion of II., which figures the two natures of the Son, the two dispensations, and, according to Saint Gregory the Great, the two-fold law of love of God and man. Three is the number of the Persons of the Trinity, and of the theological virtues. Four typifies the cardinal virtues, the four Greater Prophets, the Gospels and the elements. Five is the number of Christ’s wounds, and of our senses, whose sins He expiated by a corresponding number of wounds. Six records the days devoted by God to the creation, determines the number of the Commandments promulgated by the Church, and, according to Saint Melito, symbolizes the perfection of the active life. Seven is the sacred number of the Mosaic law; it is the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, of the Sacraments, of the words of Jesus on the Cross, of the canonical hours, and of the successive orders of priesthood. Eight, says Saint Ambrose, is the symbol of regeneration, Saint Augustine says of the Resurrection, and it recalls the idea of the eight Beatitudes. Nine is the number of the angelic hierarchy, of the special gifts of the Spirit as enumerated

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by Saint Paul; and it was at the ninth hour that Christ died. Ten is the number of laws given by Jehovah, the law of fear; but Saint Augustine explains it otherwise, saying that it includes the knowledge of God, since it may be decomposed into three, the symbol of a triune God, and seven, figuring the day of rest after the Creation. Eleven, the same saint explains as an image of transgressing the law and an emblem of sin; and Twelve is the great mystic number, the tale of the patriarchs and the Apostles, of the tribes, the minor prophets, the virtues, the fruits of the Holy Ghost, and the articles of faith embodied in the *Credo*. And this might be repeated to infinity. Hence it is quite evident that the artists of the Middle Ages added to the meaning they assigned to certain creatures and certain things, that of quantity, supporting one by the other, emphasizing or moderating a suggestion by this added-means, working back sometimes on a former idea, and expressing this duplication in a different form or concentrating it in the energetic conciseness of a cipher. They thus produced a whole at once speaking to the eye and, at the same time, giving synthetical expression to the complete text of a dogma in a compact allegory."

"But what hermetic concentration!" exclaimed Durtal.

"Very true; these various meanings of persons and objects, resulting from numerical differences, are at first very puzzling."

"And do you suppose that, on the whole, the height, breadth, and length of a cathedral reveal a specialized idea, a particular purpose on the part of the architect?"

"Yes; but I must at once confess that the key to these religious calculations is lost. Those archaeologists who have racked their brains to find it have vainly added together the measurements of naves and clerestories; they have not yet succeeded in formulating the idea they expected to see emerge from the sums total.

"In this matter we must confess ourselves ignorant. Besides, have not the standards of measurement been different at different times? As with the value of coins in the Middle Ages, we know nothing about them. So, in spite of some very interesting investigations carried out from this point of view by the Abbe Crosnier at the Priory of Saint Gilles, and the Abbe Devoucoux at the Cathedral of Autun, I remain sceptical as to their conclusions, which I regard as very ingenious, but far from trustworthy.

"The method of numbers is to be seen in perfection only in the details, such as the pillars of which I spoke just now; it is no less evident when we find the same number prevailing throughout the edifice, as for instance at Paray-le-Monial, where all things are in threes. There the designer has not been content to reproduce the sacred number in the general scheme of the structure; he has applied it in every part. The church has, in fact, three aisles; each aisle has three compartments; each compartment is formed by

three arches surmounted by three windows. In short, it is the principle of the Trinity, the primary Three, applied to every part."

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“Well, but do you not think, Monsieur l’Abbe, that, apart from such instances of indisputable meaning, there are in such symbolism some very fine-drawn and obscure similitudes?”

The Abbe smiled.

“Do you know,” said he, “the theories of Honorius of Autun as to the symbolism of the censer?”

“No.”

“Well, then, after having pointed out the natural and very proper interpretation that may be applied to this vessel, as representing the Body of Our Lord, while the incense signifies His Divinity, and the fire is the Holy Spirit within Him; and after having defined the various interpretations of the metal of which it is made—if of gold, it answers to the perfection of His Divinity; if of silver, to the matchless excellence of His Humility; if of copper, to the frailty of the flesh He assumed for our salvation; if of iron, to the Resurrection of that Body which conquered death—the scholiast comes to the chains.

“And then, indeed, his elucidation becomes somewhat thin and fine-drawn.

“If there are four chains, he says, they represent the four cardinal virtues of the Lord, and the chain by which the cover is lifted from the vessel answers to the Soul of Christ quitting His Body. If, on the other hand, there are but three chains, it is because the Person of the Saviour includes three elements: a human organism, a soul, and the Godhead of the Word. And Honorius adds: ’the ring through which the chains run represents the Infinite in which all these things are included.’”

“That is subtle, with a vengeance!”

“Less so than Durand de Mende when he speaks of the snuffers,” replied the Abbe; “after that, we will kick away that ladder.

“The snuffers for trimming the lamps are, he asserts, ’the divine words off which we cut the letter of the law, and by so doing reveal the Spirit which giveth light.’ And he adds, ’the pots in which the snuff is extinguished are the hearts of the faithful who observe the law literally.’”

“It is the very madness of Symbolism!” cried Durtal.

“At least, it is a too curious excess of it; but if this interpretation of the snuffers is certainly grotesque, if even the theory of the censer seems beaten somewhat thin on the whole, you must admit that it is fascinating and exact so far as it is applied to the chain which lifts the upper part of the vessel in a cloud of fragrance, and thus symbolizes the ascent of Our Lord into Heaven.

“That certain exaggerations should creep in through this use of parables was difficult to prevent; but, on the other hand, what marvels of analogy, and what purely mystical notions are revealed through the meanings given by the liturgy to certain objects used in the services.

“To the tapers, for instance, when Pierre d’Esquilin explains the purport of the three component parts: the wax, which is the spotless Body of the Saviour born of a Virgin; the wick, which, enclosed in the wax, is His most Holy Soul hidden in the veil of the flesh; and the light, which is emblematic of His Godhead.

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“Or, again, take the substances used by the Church in certain ceremonies: water, wine, ashes, salt, oil, balsam, incense. Incense, besides representing the divinity of the Son, is likewise the symbol of prayer, ‘*thus devotio orationis*’ as it is described by Raban Maur, Archbishop of Mayence in the ninth century. I happen to remember also, *a propos* of this resin and the censer in which it is burnt, a verse I read long since in the ‘Monastic Distinctions’ of the anonymous English writer of the thirteenth century, which sums up their signification more neatly than I can:

’*vas notatur,*
Mens pia; thure preces; igne supernus amor.’

The vase is the spirit of piety; the incense, prayer; the fire, divine love.

“As to water, wine, ashes, and salt, they are used in compounding a precious ointment used by the bishop when consecrating a church. They are mingled to sign the altar with the cross, and to sprinkle the aisles: the water and wine symbolize the two natures united in Our Lord; the salt is divine wisdom; the ashes are in memory of His Passion.

“Balsam, as you know, is emblematical of virtue and good repute, and is combined with oil, signifying peace and wisdom, to compose the sacramental ointment.

“Think, too,” the priest went on, “of the pyx, in which the transubstantiated elements are preserved, the consecrated oblations, and note that in the Middle Ages these little cases were formed in the figure of a dove and contained the Host in the very image of the Paraclete and the Virgin; this was well done, but here is something better. The jewellers of the time carved ivory and gave these little shrines the form of a tower. Is not the sentiment exquisite of our Lord dwelling in the heart of the Virgin, the Ivory Tower of the Canticles? Is not ivory indeed the most admirable material to serve as a sanctum for the most pure white flesh of the Sacrament?”

“It is certainly mystical, and far more appropriate than the vessels of every form, the *ciboria* of silver-gilt, of aluminum, of silver of these days.”

“And need I remind you that the liturgy assigns a meaning to each vestment, each ornament of the Church, according to its use and form?

“Thus, for instance, the surplice and alb signify innocence; the cord that serves as a girdle is an emblem of chastity and modesty; the amice, of purity of heart and body—the helmet of salvation mentioned by Saint Paul. The maniple, of good works, vigilance, and the tears and sweat poured out by the priest to win and save souls; the stole, of obedience, the clothing on of immortality given to us in baptism; the dalmatic, of justice, of which we must give proof in our ministrations; the chasuble, of the unity of the faith, and also of the yoke of Christ.

“But the rain has not ceased, and I must nevertheless be gone, for I have a penitent waiting for me,” exclaimed the Abbe, looking at his watch. “Will you come the day after to-morrow at about two o’clock? We will hope it may be fine enough to examine the outside of the Cathedral.”

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“And if it still rains?”

“Come all the same. But I must fly.”

He pressed Durtal’s hand and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

“Yes, I know when I confessed in her presence that I did not yet know of which Saint I might write the history, Madame Bavoil—dear Madame Bavoil, as the Abbe Gevresin calls her—exclaimed: ’The life of Jeanne de Matel! Why not?’

“But it is a biography that is not easy to deal with or that can be lightly handled,” said Durtal to himself, as he arranged the notes he had collected by degrees as bearing on this Venerable woman.

And he sat meditating.

“What is quite unintelligible,” said he to himself, “is the disproportion between the promises made to her by Jesus and the results achieved. Never, I really believe, have so many tribulations and hindrances, or so much ill-fortune attended the founding of a new Order. Jeanne spent her days on the high roads, running from one monastery to another, and toil as she would to dig up the conventual soil, nothing would grow. She could not even assume the habit of her Institution, or at any rate only a few minutes before her death, for, in order to travel with greater ease all over France, she wore the livery of a world she abominated, and to which she appealed in vain in the name of the Lord to take an interest in the formation of her cloister. Unhappy woman! She went to Court—as her confessor Father de Gibalin bears witness, while he testifies that he had never known a humbler soul—as others go to the stake.

“And yet the Lord certainly commanded her to found this Order of the Incarnate Word. He sketched the scheme, laid down the rule, and prescribed the costume, explaining its symbolism, declaring that the white robe of its maidens would do honour to that with which He was mockingly invested in Herod’s palace; that their red cloak would keep in memory that which was cast over Him in the house of Pilate; that their crimson scapulary and girdle would preserve the remembrance of the stake and the cords dyed in His blood. And He seems to have mocked her.

“He solemnly assured her that after sorrowful trials the seed she had sown should bring forth an abundant harvest of nuns. He expressly told her that she would rank as the sister of Saint Theresa and Saint Clare; those holy women appeared to ratify these promises by their presence, and when nothing would come of it, nothing would work, when, quite worn out, she burst into tears, the Lord calmly bade her be still and take patience.

“Meanwhile, she was living amid a howling storm of recrimination and threats. The clergy persecute her, the Archbishop of Lyon, the Cardinal de Richelieu, aims only at hindering the completion of her abbeys on his lands; she cannot even manage her Sisterhood, since we find her wandering in search of a protector or an assistant; they are torn by divisions, and their insubordination is such that at length she is compelled to return in hot haste, and, with many tears, expel the contumacious sisters from the cloister.

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“It really seems as though no sooner had she built up a monastic wall than it split and fell; nothing would hold. In short, the Order of the Incarnate Word was born rickety and died a dwarf. It lingered in the midst of universal apathy, and survived till 1790, when it was buried. In 1811 one Abbe Denis revived it at Azerables in la Creuse, and since then it has struggled on for better for worse, scattered through about fifteen houses, one of these at Texas in the New World.

“There is no doubt of it,” Durtal concluded; “we are far enough from the strong sap which Saint Theresa and Saint Clare could infuse into the centennial growth of their mighty trees!

“To say nothing of the fact that Jeanne de Matel, who has never been canonized like her two sisters, and whose name remains unknown to most Catholics, intended to found an order of men as well as women; she did not succeed, and the attempts since made in our day by the Abbe Combalot to carry her plan into effect have been equally vain!

“Now, what is the reason? Is it because there are too many and various communities in the Church? Why, new foundations are set on foot and flourish every day! Is it by reason of the poverty of the monasteries? Nay, for indigence is the great test of success, and experience shows that God only blesses the most destitute convents and abandons the others! Is it, then, the austerity of the rule? But this was very mild; it was that of Saint Augustine, which yields to every compromise, and at need accepts every shade of practice. The sisters rose at five in the morning; the diet was not restricted to Lenten fare excepting at the Paschal season, but one fast day was enjoined in the week, and even that was compulsory only to the Sisters who were strong enough to bear it. Thus there is nothing to account for such persistent failure.

“And Jeanne de Matel was a saint endowed with remarkable energy and really moulded by the Saviour! In her writings she is an eloquent and subtle theologian, an ardent and rapturous mystic, dealing in metaphors and hyperbole, in tangible parallels, passionate questionings, and apostrophes; she resembles both Saint Denys the Areopagite and Saint Maddalena dei Pazzi; Saint Denys in matter, Saint Maddalena in manner. As a writer, no doubt she is not supreme, and the poverty of her borrowed style is sometimes painful; still, considering that she lived in the seventeenth century, she was at any rate not a mere scribbler of vapid aspirations, like most of the prosy pietists of the time.

“And her works have met with the same fate as her foundations. They remain for the most part unpublished. Hello, who was familiar with them, only extracted a very mediocre *cento*; some others, as Prince Galitzin and the Abbe Penaud, have explored her writings with better results and printed some loftier and more impassioned passages.

“And this Abbess wrote some of genuine inspiration.

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“Yes, but all this does not alter the fact that I do not see the book I could write about her,” muttered Durtal. “In spite of my wish to be agreeable to dear Madame Bavoil, no —I have no inclination to undertake the task.

“All things considered, if I did not so heartily hate a move, if I had energy enough to go back to Holland, I would try to do honour in loving and respectful terms to the worshipful Lidwina, who is of all the female saints one whose life I should best love to write; but merely to attempt to reconstruct the surroundings amid which she lived, I should have to settle in the town where she dwelt, *Schiedam*.

“If God grants me life, no doubt I shall one day do this; but the plan is not yet ripe. Put that aside, then, and since on the other hand Jeanne de Matel does not captivate me, perhaps I had better think of another abbess even less known, and whose career was one of more tranquil endurance, less wandering and more concentrated, and at any rate more attractive.

“Besides, her life can now only be found in an octavo volume by an anonymous writer, whose incoherent chapters, in language as clogging as a linseed poultice, will for ever hinder the world from knowing her. So it will be interesting to work it up and make it readable.”

As he turned over his papers he was thinking of one Mother Van Valckenissen, in religion Mary Margaret of the Angels, foundress of the Priory of Carmelite Sisters at Oirschot in Dutch Brabant.

This pious lady was the daughter of a noble house, born on the 26th of May, 1605, at Antwerp, during the wars which devastated Flanders, and at the very time when Prince Maurice of Nassau was besieging the town. As soon as she could read, her parents sent her to school in a convent of Dominican nuns near Brussels. Her father dying, her mother removed her from that convent and placed her with the White Ursulines of Louvain; then she too died, and at fifteen the girl was an orphan.

Her guardian again removed her to the House of the Carmelite Sisters at Mechlin; but the struggle between the Spaniards and the Flemings came close to the district watered by the Dyle, and Marie Marguerite was once more taken from her convent to find refuge with the canonesses of Nivelles. Thus her whole childhood was spent in rushing from one convent to another.

She was happy in these retreats, especially with the Carmelites, adopting the hair shirt and submitting to the severest discipline; but now, on coming forth from the most rigid cloistered life, she found herself in the midst of a gay world. This Chapter of Canonesses, which ought to have inculcated the mystic life, was one of those hybrid institutions not altogether white nor quite black, a cross between profane piety and pious laity. This Chapter, filled up exclusively from the ranks of rich and high-born

women, while the Abbess, nominated by the Sovereign, assumed the title of Princess of Nivelles, led a devout and frivolous life, passing strange. Not only might these semi-nuns go out walking whenever they thought fit, they had a right to live at home for a certain part of their time, and might even marry after obtaining the consent of the Abbess.

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In the morning those who chose to reside in the Abbey put on a monastic habit during the services; then their religious duties ended; they doffed the convent livery, dressed in splendid attire, the hoops and bows and farthingales and ruffs that were then the fashion, and sat in the parlour where visitors poured in.

The unhappy Marie loathed the dissipation of a life which hindered her from ever being alone with her God. Bewildered by the gossip and ashamed of wearing clothes that were offensive to her, compelled to steal away before daylight, disguised as a waiting-woman, to pray in a deserted church far from all this turmoil, she at last pined away with sorrow, and was dying of grief at Nivelles.

At this juncture a certain Father Bernard de Montgaillard, Abbot of Orval, of the Cistercian Order, came to the town. She flew to him, and besought him to rescue her; and this monk, enlightened by a truly divine spirit, understood that she was born to be a victim of expiation, to atone for the insults offered to the Holy Eucharist in churches. He gave her comfort, and announced to her her vocation as a Carmelite. She set out for Antwerp to visit the Mother Anne de Saint Barthelemy, a saintly woman, who, warned of her coming by a vision of Saint Theresa, consented to receive her into the Carmel of which she was the Superior.

Then obstacles arose, the work of the Devil. Having returned to her guardian, pending her reception at the convent, she suddenly fell paralyzed, losing all at once her hearing, speech, and sight. She nevertheless succeeded in making it understood that they were to carry her, as she was, to the convent, where she was left half dead. There she fell at the feet of Mother Anne, who blessed her, and raised her up cured.

Then her novitiate began.

In spite of her delicate frame, she endured the most terrible fasts, the most violent scourging; she bound her body in chains with points on the links, fed on the parings thrown out on plates, drank dirty water to quench her thirst, and was so cold one winter that her legs froze.

Her body was one wound, but her soul was glorious; she lived in God, who loaded her with mercies and communed with her sweetly; her probation was near its end, and again, just when she became a postulant, she fell dangerously sick. There were doubts as to her being admitted to the Order, and again Saint Theresa intervened and commanded the Abbess to receive her.

She took the habit, and then fell a prey to the temptation of despair, which has assailed some Saints; after this came a sense of dryness and desertion, which lasted for three years. She held out; she endured all the tortures of the Mystical Substitution, bearing the most painful and repulsive diseases to save souls. The Lord vouchsafed at last to

intermit the penitential task of suffering. He allowed her to breathe, and the Devil took advantage of this lull to come upon the scene.

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He appeared to her under the most hostile and monstrous form, breaking everything, and vanishing in a trail of pestilential vapours. Meanwhile a good man, one Sylvester Lindermans, had determined to found a Carmel on an estate he possessed at Oirschot, in Holland. As is ever the case when a convent is to be established, tribulations abounded. It seemed, in fact, that the time was ill-chosen for transferring the Sisters to a town in arms against the Catholics, across a country infested by bands of armed Protestants. When the Mother Superior selected Marie Marguerite to go forth and found this new House, she entreated to be left to pray in peace in her little nook; but Jesus interposed; commanding her to depart. She obeyed; exhausted, sick, and worn out, she dragged herself along the roads, and at last arrived, with the Sisters accompanying her, at Oirschot, where she organized the Convent as best she might in a house which had never been intended to serve as a nunnery.

She was made Vicar-Prioress, and at once revealed a marvellous power of influencing souls. Living the austere life of a Carmelite, which she aggravated for herself by fearful mortifications, she was always tolerant to others, and although she was known to murmur, so great were her bodily sufferings, “Till the Day of Judgment, none can ever know what I endure!” she was always gay, and preached cheerfulness to her daughters in these words: “It is all very well for those who sin to be sad; but we ought to have twice as much joy as the angels, since we, like them, fulfil the will of God, and we, in addition, can suffer for His glory, which they can never do.”

She was the most indulgent and considerate of Abbesses. For fear of giving offence to her flock by exerting her authority, she never gave an order in an imperative form; never said, “Do this or that,” but only, “Let us do it.” And if at any time she found herself obliged to punish a nun in the refectory, she would forthwith kiss the feet of the others, and entreat them to buffet her to humble her.

But it would have been too perfect if she and the angelic flock over which she ruled could have lived the inward life in peace, and sunk their soul in God. The Cure of Oirschot hated her, and, why no one knew, he defamed her throughout the town. The Devil too, on his part, returned to the charge; he appeared, in the midst of an uproar that shook the walls and made the roof tremble, in the form of an Ethiopian giant, blew out all the lights, and tried to strangle the nuns. Most of them almost died of fear; but in compensation for their sufferings Heaven granted them the comfort of incessant miracles.

The Mother enabled them to prove in her person the authenticity of the incredible tales they had read during meals, of the Lives of the Saints. She had the gift of bilocation, appearing in several places at the same time, shedding a trail of delicious fragrance wherever she passed, curing the sick by the Sign of the Cross, scenting out and discerning hidden sins as a hunting dog puts up game, and reading souls.

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And her daughters adored her, wept to see her lead a life which now was one long torment. As a result of the intense cold, she became a victim to acute rheumatism; for the Rule of Saint Theresa, which prohibits the lighting of a fire anywhere but in the kitchens, if it is endurable in Spain, is simply murderous in the frozen climate of Flanders.

“After all,” said Durtal to himself, “this life so far is not very unlike that experienced by many another cloistered nun; but towards the approach of death the amazing beauty of this spirit was revealed in so special a manner, and in wishes so remarkable, that it remains unique in the records of the Monastic Houses.”

Her health grew worse and worse. Added to the rheumatism, which crippled her, she had pains in the stomach, which nothing could relieve. Sciatica was presently engrafted on this flourishing stock of torments, and dropsy, a common disease in cloisters of austere rule, supervened.

Her legs swelled and refused to carry her; she lay helpless on her bed. The Sisters who nursed her now discovered a secret which she had always kept, out of humility; they perceived that her hands were pierced with red holes surrounded by a blue halo, and that her feet, also pierced, lay of their own accord, unless they were held down, one above the other, in the position of Christ’s feet on the cross. At last she confessed that many years before Jesus had marked her with the stigmata of the Passion, and that the wounds burnt night and day like red hot iron.

Her sufferings constantly increased. Feeling that this time she was dying, she grieved over the pitiless macerations she had used, and with touching artlessness begged forgiveness of her poor body for having exhausted its strength, and so having perhaps hindered it from living to suffer longer.

And she then put up the most strangely fragrant, the most wildly extravagant prayer that ever a Saint can have addressed to God.

She had so loved the Holy Eucharist, she had so longed to kneel at His feet and atone for the outrages inflicted on Him by the sins of mankind, that she waxed faint at the thought that after her death what would remain of her could no longer worship Him.

The idea that her body would rot in uselessness, that the last handfuls of her miserable flesh would decay without having served to honour the Saviour, broke her heart; and then it was that she besought Him to suffer her to melt away, to liquefy into an oil which might be burnt before the tabernacle in the lamp of the sanctuary.

And Jesus vouchsafed to her this excessive privilege, such as the like is unknown in the history of the Saints; and at the moment when she died she enjoined her daughters to leave her body exposed in the chapel, and unburied for some weeks.

On this point there is abundant authentic evidence. More or less minute inquiries were made, and the reports of medical experts are so precise that we can follow from day to day the state of the corpse until it had turned to oil and could be preserved in phials, from which, by her desire, a spoonful was poured every morning to feed the wick of a lamp hanging near the altar.

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When she died—then aged fifty-two, having lived as a nun for thirty-three years, and fourteen as Superior of Oirschot—her face was transfigured, and in spite of the cold of a winter when the Scheldt could be crossed in a carriage, her body remained soft and pliable; but it swelled. Surgeons examined it and opened it in the presence of witnesses. They expected to find the stomach filled with water, but scarcely half a pint was removed, and the body did not collapse.

This autopsy led to the incomprehensible discovery in the gall-bladder of three nails with black heads, angular and polished, of an unknown metal; two weighed as much as half a French gold crown, within seven grains; the third, which was as large as a nutmeg, weighed five grains more.

The operators then filled up the intestines with tow soaked in wormwood, and sewed the body up again with a needle and thread. And during and after these proceedings not only did the dead nun give out no smell of putrefaction, but, as in her lifetime, she diffused an ineffable and exquisite perfume.

Nearly three weeks elapsed; boils formed and broke, giving out blood and water for more than a month; then the skin showed patches of yellow; exudation ceased and oil came out, at first white, limpid, and fragrant, afterwards darker and of about the colour of amber. It filled more than a hundred phials, each containing two ounces, several of them being still preserved in the Carmels of Belgium; and her remains when buried were not decomposed, but had assumed the golden brown colour of a date.

“A book might really be written on the life of this admirable woman,” thought Durtal. “And then what a group of wonderful nuns were those about her! The convents of Antwerp, Mechlin, and Oirschot swarmed with saintly nuns. In the time of Charles V. the Order of Carmelites renewed in Flanders the mystical prodigies which, four centuries before, in the Middle Ages, the Dominicans had accomplished in the Monastery of Unterlinden at Colmar.

“How such women as these carry one away and throw one, as it were! What strength of soul we see in this Marie Marguerite! What grace must have sustained her, that she could thus shed all the natural frenzy of the senses, and endure so cheerfully and bravely the most overwhelming sufferings!

“Well, now, shall I harness myself to a history of this venerable Abbess? But then I must procure the volume by Joseph de Loignac, her first biographer, the notice by the Recluse of Marlaigne, the pamphlet by Monseigneur de Ram, the narrative by Papebroech; above all I must have at hand the translation, made by the Carmelites of Louvain, of the Flemish manuscript written while the Mother was still alive, by her daughters. Where can I unearth that? In any case the search must be a long one. No, I must set aside that scheme, which for the present is impracticable.

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“What I ought to do I know very well; I ought to put the article into shape on Angelico’s picture in the Louvre. I promised the paper at least four months ago to the magazine which clamours for it every morning by letter. It is disgraceful! Since I left Paris I have ceased to work; and I have no excuse, for the subject interests me, since it affords me an opportunity for studying the complete system of the symbolism of colour in the Middle Ages. ’The Early Painters, and Prayer in Colour as seen in their Works.’ What a subject for thought! However, that is not the immediate matter. I must not sit dreaming, but go to join the Abbe Plomb; and the weather is clouding over again! I certainly have no luck.”

As he crossed the square he was lost again in meditations, captivated once more by the haunting thought of the Cathedral, and saying to himself as he looked up at the spires, —

“How many varieties there are in the immense family of the Gothic; and what dissimilarities. No two churches are alike.”

The towers and belfries of those he knew rose before him as in those diagrams on which, irrespective of distance, the buildings are placed all close together at the same point of view to show their relative height.

“It is quite true,” thought he, “the towers vary like the basilicas. Those of Notre Dame de Paris are thick-set and gloomy, almost elephantine; cleft almost from top to bottom by deep bays, they seem to mount slowly and with difficulty, and stop short, crushed as it were by the burden of sins, dragged down to earth by the wickedness of the city; we feel the effort with which they rise, and we are saddened as we contemplate those captive masses, all the more depressing by reason of the dismal hue of the louvre-boards. At Reims, on the contrary, they are open from top to bottom, pierced as with needles’ eyes, long narrow windows of which the opening seems filled with a herring-bone of enormous size, or a gigantic comb with teeth on each side. They spring into the air, as light as filigree; and the sky gets into the mouldings, plays between the mullions, peeps through the tracery and the innumerable lancets, in strips of blue, is focussed and reflected in the little carved trefoils above. These towers are mighty, expansive, immense, and yet light. They are as speaking, as much alive, as those in Paris are stern and mute.

“At Laon they are more especially strange. With their light columns, here thrust forward and there standing back, they suggest a series of shelves piled up in a hurry, crowned merely by a platform, over which lowing oxen look down.

“The two towers at Amiens, built, like those of the Cathedrals at Rouen and at Bourges, at different periods, do not match. They are of different heights, lame against the sky; another that is really magnificent in its solitude, and putting to shame the mediocrity of the two belfries lately erected on each side of the west front, is the Norman tower of

Saint Ouen, its summit encircled by a crown. This is the patrician tower among so many that preserve a peasant air, with bare heads, or coifs made narrow and square at the top, sloped somewhat like the mouthpiece of a whistle, such as that of Saint Romain at Rouen, or rustic, pointed caps like that worn by the church of Saint Benigne at Dijon, or the queer sort of awning which shades the Cathedral of Saint Jean at Lyon.

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“And in any case a tower without a tapering spire never soars to heaven. It always rises heavily, pants on the way, and falls asleep exhausted. It is, as it were, an arm without a hand, a wrist without palm and fingers, a stump; or, again, a pencil uncut, having no point wherewith to write up beyond the clouds the prayers from below; in short, it is for ever inert.

“We must turn to the steeple, to the stone spire, to find the true symbol of prayers shot up to pierce the sky and reach the Heart of the Father, which is their target.

“And in this family of arrows what a variety we see; no two darts are alike!

“Some are set in a collar of turrets at their base, held in a circle of pinnacles, like the points of a Magian king’s diadem; this we see in the bell-tower of Senlis.

“Others seem to have about them the children born in their image, little spires, all round them; some are covered with bosses, knobs, and blisters; others pierced like colanders and strainers, in patterns of trefoils and quaterfoils that seem to have been punched out; here we find some that are covered with ornament, with teeth like a rasp, ridges of notches, or bristling with spines; others are imbricated with scales like a fish, as we see in the older spire at Chartres; and others again, like that at Caudebec, display the emblem of the Roman Church, the triple crown of the Pope.

“Out of this general outline, which was almost forced upon them, and which they hardly ever tried to avoid, this pyramid or pepper-caster, jelly-bag or extinguisher, the architects of the Middle Ages evolved the most ingenious combinations and varied their designs to infinity.

“How mysterious for the most part is the origin of our cathedrals! Most of the artists who built them are unknown; nay, the age of the stones is rarely a matter of certainty, for the greater part of them have been wrought upon by the alluvium of ages.

“They almost all cover intervals of two, three, or four centuries each; they extend from the beginning, of the thirteenth century till the first years of the sixteenth.

“And on reflection that is very intelligible.

“It has been accurately remarked that the thirteenth century was the great period of cathedral-building. It gave birth to almost every one of them; and then, being created, their growth was checked for nearly two hundred years.

“The fourteenth century was torn by frightful disasters. It began with the ignoble quarrels between Philippe le Bel and the Pope; it saw the stake lighted for the Templars, made bonfires in Languedoc of the *Begards* and the *Fraticelli*, the lepers and the Jews; wallowed in blood under the defeats of Crecy and Poitiers, the furious excesses of the Jacquerie and of the Maillotins, and the ravages of the brigands known as the *Tard-*

venus; and finally, having run so wild, its madness was reflected in the incurable insanity of the king.

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“Thus it ended, as it had begun, writhing in the most horrible religious convulsions. The Tiaras of Rome and Avignon clashed, and the Church, standing unsupported on these ruins, tottered on its base, for the Great Western Schism now shook it.

“The fifteenth century seemed to be born mad. Charles VI.’s insanity seemed to be infectious; the English invasion was followed by the pillage of France, the frenzied contest of the Bourguignons and the Armagnacs, by plagues and famines, and the overthrow at Agincourt; then came Charles VII., Joan of Arc, the deliverance and the healing of the land by the energetic treatment of King Louis XI.

“All these events hindered the progress of the works in cathedrals.

“The fourteenth century on the whole restricted itself to carrying on the structures begun during the previous century. We must wait till the end of the fifteenth, when France drew breath, to see architecture start into life once more.

“It must be added that frequent conflagrations at various times destroyed a whole church, and that it had to be rebuilt from the foundations; others, like Beauvais, fell down, and had to be reconstructed, or, if money was lacking, simply strengthened and the gaps repaired.

“With the exception of a very few—Saint Ouen at Rouen for one, a rare example of a church almost entirely built during the fourteenth century (excepting the western towers and front, which are quite modern), and the Cathedral at Reims for another, which appears to have been constructed without much interruption, on the original plans of Hugues Libergier or Robert de Coucy—not one of our cathedrals was erected throughout in accordance with the designs of the architect who began it, nor has one remained untouched.

“Most of them, consequently, represent the combined efforts of successive pious generations; still, this apparently improbable fact is true: until the dawn of the Renaissance the genius of successive builders was singularly well matched. If they made any alterations in their predecessors’ plans, they were able to introduce some touch of individuality, inventions of exquisite beauty that did not clash with the whole. They engrafted their genius on that of their first masters; there was the perpetuated tradition of an admirable conception, a perennial breath of the Holy Spirit. It was the interloper, the period of false and farcical Pagan art, that extinguished that pure flame, and annihilated the luminous truthfulness of the Mediaeval past, when God had dwelt intimately, at home, in souls; it substituted a merely earthly form of art for one that was divine.

“As soon as the sensuality of the Renaissance revealed itself, the Paraclete fled; the mortal sin of stone could display itself at will. It contaminated the buildings that were

finished, defiled the churches, debasing their purity of form; this, with the gross license of sculpture and painting, was the great stupration of the cathedrals.

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“And this time the Spirit of Prayer was quite dead; everything went to pieces. The Renaissance, so lauded afterwards by Michelet and the historians, was the death of the Mystical soul of monumental theology, of religious art—all the great art of France.

“Bless me! where am I?” Durtal suddenly asked himself, finding himself in the ill-paved alleys which lead from the Cathedral square to the lower town. He saw that, dreaming as he walked, he had passed the Abbe’s lodgings.

He turned up the street again, stopped in front of an old house and rang. A brass wicket was opened and closed, and a housekeeper, shuffling up in old shoes, half opened the door. Durtal was met by the Abbe Plomb, who was watching for him, and who led him into a room full of statues; there were carved images in every spot—on the chimney-shelf, on a chest of drawers, on a side table, and in the middle of the room.

“Do not look at them,” said the Abbe, “do not heed them; I have no part in the selection of this horrible bazaar. I have to endure it in spite of myself; these are offerings from my penitents.”

Durtal laughed, though somewhat scared by the extraordinary specimens of religious art that crowded the room.

There was every kind of work: black frames with brass flats, and in them engravings of Virgins by Bouguereau and Signol, Guido’s *Ecce Homo*, Pietas, Saint Philomenas—and then the assembly of polychrome statues: Mary painted with the crude green of angelica and the acrid pinks of English pear-drops; Madonnas gazing in rapture at their own feet, with extended hands whence proceeded fans of yellow rays; Joan of Arc squatting like a hen on her eggs, with eyes raised to heaven like white marbles, and pressing a standard to her bosom in its plaster cuirass; Saint Anthonys of Padua, clean and snug, as neat as two pins; Saint Josephs, not enough the carpenter and too little the Saint; Magdalens weeping silver pills; a whole mob of semi-divinities, best quality, of the class known as “The Munich Article” in the Rue Madame.

“Oh, Monsieur l’Abbe, the donors are certainly terrible people—but could you not, quite by accident, drop one of these objects every day—”

The priest gave a shrug of despair.

“They would only bring me more,” cried he. “But if you are willing, we will be off at once, for I am afraid of being caught here if I linger.”

And as they walked, talking of the Cathedral, Durtal exclaimed,—

“Is it not a monstrous thing that in the splendour of this Cathedral of Chartres it is impossible to hear any genuine plain-song? I am reduced to frequenting the sanctuary only at hours when there is no high service going on. Above all I avoid being present at

High Mass on Sundays; the music that is tolerated infuriates me! Is there no way of having the organist dismissed, and a clean sweep made of the precentor and the teachers in the choir-school, of packing off the basses with their vinous voices to the taverns? Ugh! And the gassy effervescence that rises from the thin pipes of the little boys! and the street tunes eructed in a hiccough, like the run of a lamp-chain when you pull it up, mingling with the noisy bellow of the basses! What a disgrace, what a shame! How is it that the Bishop, the priests, the Canons do not prohibit such treason?

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“Monseigneur, I know, is old and ill; but those Canons!—They look so weary, to be sure! As I see them droning out the Psalms in their stalls, I wonder whether they know where they are and what they are doing; they always seem to me in a half unconscious state—”

“The high winds of la Beauce induce lethargy,” said the Abbe, laughing. “But allow me to assure you that though the Cathedral scorns Gregorian chants, here, at Chartres, at the little Seminary, at the church of Notre Dame de la Breche, and at the convent of the Sisters of Saint Paul, they are sung after the Use of Solesmes, so that you can alternately attend that church and those chapels and the Cathedral, since perfection is to be found in neither.”

“Of course. Still, is it not horrible to think that the Hottentot taste of a few bawling old men can pursue the Virgin even in Her sanctuary with such musical insults? Ah, there is the rain again,” said Durtal with vexation, after a short silence.

“Well, here we are. We can take shelter in the church, and study the interior at our leisure.”

They knelt before the Black Virgin of the Pillar; then they sat down in the deserted nave, and the Abbe said in an undertone,—

“I explained to you the other day the symbolism of the outside of the building. Would you like me now to inform you in a few words as to the allegories set forth in the aisles?”

And on seeing Durtal agree by a nod, the priest went on,—

“You are, of course, aware that almost all our cathedrals are cruciform. In the primitive Church, it is true, you will find that some were constructed of a circular form and surmounted by a dome. But most of these were not built by our forefathers; they are ancient temples of the heathen adapted by the Catholics, with more or less alteration, to their own use, or imitated from such temples before the Romanesque style was recognized.

“We need then seek in these no liturgical meaning, since that form was not a Christian invention. At the same time Durand of Mende, in his *Rationale*, asserts that a building of rounded form symbolizes the extension of the Church over the whole circle of the universe. Others explain the dome as being the crown of the Crucified King, and the smaller cupolas which occasionally support it as the huge heads of the Nails. But we may set aside these explanations, which are but based on existing facts, and study the cruciform plan shown here, as in other cathedrals, in the arrangement of the nave and transepts.

“It may be noted that in a few churches, as, for instance, the abbey church of Cluny, the interior, instead of showing a Latin Cross, was planned on the lines of the Cross of Lorraine, two *crosslets* being added to the arms.—Now, behold the whole scheme!” the priest said, with a gesture that comprehended the whole of the interior of the basilica of Chartres.

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“Jesus is dead; His head is at the altar; His outstretched arms are the two transepts; His pierced hands are the doors; His legs are the nave where we are standing; His pierced feet are the door by which we have come in. Now consider the systematic deviation of the axis of the building; it imitates the attitude of a body bent over from the upright tree of sacrifice, and in some cathedrals—for instance, at Reims—the narrowness, the strangulation, so to speak, of the choir in proportion to the nave represents all the more closely the head and neck of a man, drooping over his shoulder when he has given up the ghost.

“This twist in the church is to be seen almost everywhere—in Saint Ouen and in the Cathedral at Rouen, in Saint Jean at Poitiers, at Tours and at Reims. Sometimes, indeed—but this statement needs verification—the architect had substituted for the body of the Saviour that of the Saint in whose name the church was dedicated, and the curved axis of Saint Savin, for instance, has been supposed to represent the bend of the wheel which was the instrument of that Saint’s martyrdom.

“But all this is evidently familiar to you.

“This is less well known: So far we have studied the image of Christ motionless, and dead, in our churches. I will now tell you of a singular instance of a church which, instead of reproducing the attitude of the Divine Corpse, represents that of His still living Body, a church which seems to have a suggestion of movement as if bending like Christ on the Cross.

“In fact it seems to be certain that some architects strove to represent in the plan of their building the motion of the human frame, to imitate the action of a drooping figure; in short, to give life to stones.

“Such an attempt was made in the abbey church of Preuilly-sur-Claise in Touraine. The plan and photographs of this basilica are to be found in an interesting volume that I can lend you; the author, the Abbe Picardat, is the Cure of the church. You will from them readily perceive that the curve of the plan is that of a body leaning on one side, drawn out and bending over.

“And the movement of the body is represented by the curve of the axis, beginning at the very first bay and continued along the nave, the choir, and the apse to the end, which bends aside to imitate the droop of the head.

“Thus, even better than at Chartres, at Reims, and at Rouen, this humble sanctuary, built by Benedictine monks whose names are unknown, represents in its serpentine line, in the perspective of its aisles and the obliquity of its vaulting, the allegorical presentment of our Lord on the Cross. In all other churches the architects have to some extent imitated the cadaverous rigidity of the head fallen in death; at Preuilly the monks have perpetuated the never-to-be-forgotten instant that elapsed between the ‘*Sitio*’ (I

thirst) and the '*Consummatum est*' (It is finished), as recorded in the Gospel of Saint John. Thus the old Touraine church is in the image of Christ Crucified, but still living.

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“Now, to look at home once more, we will consider the inward parts of our sanctuaries. It may be noted incidentally that the length of the cathedral figures the long-suffering of the Church in adversity; its breadth symbolizes charity, which expands the souls of men; its height, the hope of future reward; and we can then proceed to details.

“The choir and sanctuary symbolize Heaven; the nave is the emblem of the earth; as the gulf that divides the two worlds can only be passed by the help of the Cross, it was formerly the custom, now, alas, fallen into desuetude, to erect an enormous Crucifix over the grand arch between the nave and the choir. Hence the name of triumphal arch was given to the vast space in front of the High altar. It may also be remarked that a railing or screen marks the limits of these two parts of the cathedral. Saint Gregory Nazianzen regards this as the border line traced between the two parts—that of God, and that of man.

“There is, however, a different explanation given by Richard de Saint Victor, as to the sanctuary, the choir, and the nave. According to him, the first symbolizes the Virgins, the second the chaste souls, and the third the married hearts. As to the altar, or, as old liturgical writers call it, the *Cancel* (chancel), it is Christ Himself, the spot whereon His Head rests, the Table of the Last Supper, the Stake whereon He shed His blood, the Sepulchre that held His body; and again, it is the Spiritual Church, and its four angles the four corners of the earth over which it shall reign.

“Now behind this altar we find the apse, assuming in most cathedrals the form of a semicircle. There are exceptions; to mention three: at Poitiers, at Laon, and in Notre Dame du Fort at Etampes the wall is square, as in the ancient civic basilicas, and does not describe the sort of half-moon, of which the significance is one of the most beautiful inventions of symbolism.

“This semicircular end, this apsidal shell, with the chapels that surround the choir, simulates the Crown of Thorns on the Head of Christ. Excepting in Sanctuaries which are wholly dedicated to Our Lady—this one, Notre Dame de Paris, and some others—-one of these chapels, that in the centre and the largest, is dedicated to the Virgin, to show by the place that it occupies at the end of the church that Mary is the last refuge of sinners.

“She, in person, is again symbolized by the Sacristy, whence the priest comes forth as Christ’s representative after putting on his sacerdotal vestments, as Jesus came forth from His Mother’s womb after clothing Himself in flesh.

“It must constantly be repeated; every part of a church and every material object used in divine worship is representative of some theological truth. In the script of architecture everything is a reminiscence, an echo, a reflection, and every part is connected to form a whole.

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“For instance, the altar, which is the Image of Our Lord, must be draped with white linen in memory of the winding-sheet in which Joseph of Arimathea wrapped His body—and that linen must be woven of pure thread, of hemp or flax. The chalice, which according to the texts adduced by the *Spicilegium* of Solesmes, is to be taken now as a symbol of glory, and now as a sign of opprobrium, may be regarded, by the most generally received theory, as the figure of the sacred Tomb; then the paten appears as the stone which served to close it, while the corporal is the shroud itself.

“When I tell you further,” added the Abbe, “that according to Saint Nilus, the columns signify the divine dogmas, or, according to Durand of Mende, the Bishops and the Doctors of the Church, that the capitals are the words of Scripture, that the pavement of the church is the foundation of faith and humility, that the ambos and rood-loft, almost everywhere destroyed, figure the pulpit of the gospel, the mountain on which Christ preached; again, that the seven lamps burning before the altar are the seven gifts of the Spirit, that the steps to the altar are the steps to perfection; that the alternating choirs represent on the one side the angels, and on the other the righteous, combining to do homage with their voices to the glory of the Most High, I have pretty well explained to you the general meaning and detailed symbolism of the interior of the cathedral, and more particularly that of Chartres.

“Now you must observe a peculiarity which is also to be seen in the Cathedral at Le Mans; the side aisles of the nave in which we are sitting are single, but they are double round the choir—”

But Durtal was not listening; far away from this architectural exegesis, he was admiring the amazing structure without even trying to analyze it.

Wrapped in the mystery of its own shadow thick with the haze of rain, it soared up lighter and lighter as it rose in the skyey whiteness of its arcades, aspiring like a soul purifying itself with increasing light as it toils up the ways of the mystic life.

The clustered columns sprang in slender sheaves, their groups so light that they looked as if they might bend at a breath; yet it was not till they had reached a giddy height that these stems curved over, flying from one side of the Cathedral to the other to meet above the void, mingling their sap and blossoming at last, like a basket of flowers, in the once gilt pendants from the roof.

This church appeared as a supreme effort of matter striving for lightness, rejecting, as though it were a burden, the diminished weight of its walls and substituting a less ponderous and more lucent matter, replacing the opacity of stone by the diaphanous texture of glass.

It grew more spiritual—wholly spiritual, purely prayer, as it sprang towards the Lord to meet Him; light and slender, as it were imponderable, it remained the most glorious expression of Beauty escaping from its earthly dross, Beauty become seraphic.

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It was as slender and colourless as Roger Van der Weyden's Virgins, who are so fragile, so ethereal, that they might blow away were they not held down to earth by the weight of their brocades and trains. Here was the same mystical conception of a long-drawn body and an ardent soul, which, unable to free itself completely from that body, strove to purify it by reducing it, refining it, almost distilling it to a fluid.

The building bewildered him with the giddy flight of its vault, the dazzling splendour of its windows. The weather was gloomy, and yet a furnace of gems flamed in the lancets of the windows and the blazing wheels of the roses.

Up there, high in air, as they might be salamanders, human beings with faces ablaze and robes on fire dwelt in a firmament of glory; but these conflagrations were enclosed and limited by an incombustible frame of darker glass which set off the youthful and radiant joy of the flames by the contrast of melancholy, the suggestion of the more serious and aged aspect presented by gloomy colouring. The bugle cry of red, the limpid confidence of white, the repeated Hallelujahs of yellow, the virginal glory of blue, all the quivering crucible of glass was dimmed as it got nearer to this border dyed with rusty red, the tawny hues of sauces, the harsh purples of sandstone, bottle-green, tinder-brown, fuliginous blacks, and ashy greys.

As at Bourges, where the glass is of the same period, Oriental influence was visible in these windows at Chartres. Not only had the figures the hieratic appearance, the sumptuous and barbarous dignity of Asiatic personages, but the borders, in their design and the arrangement of their colours, were an evident reminiscence of the Persian carpets which undoubtedly served as models to the painters; since it is known from the *Livre des Metiers* that in the thirteenth century hangings copied from those which the Crusaders brought from the Levant were manufactured in France, and in Paris itself.

But, apart from the question of subjects or borders, the various colours of these pictures were, so to speak, but an accessory crowd, handmaidens whose part it was to set off another colour, namely blue—a glorious, indescribable blue, a vivid sapphire hue of excessive transparency, pale but piercing and sparkling throughout, glittering like the broken glass of a kaleidoscope—in the top-lights, in the roses of the transepts, and in the great west window, where it burned like the blue flame of sulphur, among the lead-lines and black iron bars.

Taken for all in all, with the tones of its stone-work and its windows, Notre Dame de Chartres was fair with blue eyes. He personified Her as a sort of white fairy, a tall and slender virgin, with large blue eyes under lids of translucent rose. This was the Mother of a Christ of the North, the Christ of a Pre-Raphaelite Flemish painter. She sat enthroned in a Heaven of ultramarine, surrounded by these Oriental hangings of glass —a pathetic reminder of the Crusades.

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And these transparent hangings were like flowers, redolent of sandal and pepper, fragrant with the subtle spices of the Magian kings; a perfumed flower-bed of hues culled at the cost of so much blood in the fields of Palestine; and here offered by the West, under the cold sky of Chartres, to the Virgin Mother in remembrance of the sunny lands where She dwelt and where Her Son chose to be born.

“Where could you find a grander shrine or a more sublime dwelling for Our Mother?” said the Abbe as he pointed to the nave.

This exclamation roused Durtal from his reflections, and he listened as the priest went on,—

“Though this cathedral is unique as regards its width, in spite of its enormous height it cannot compare with the extravagant elevation of Bourges, Amiens, and more especially of Beauvais, where the vault of the roof rises to forty-eight metres from the ground. That cathedral, it is true, was bent on outstripping its sisters.

“Springing into the air at one flight, when it reached the upper spaces it tottered and fell. You know the portions which survived the wreck of that mad attempt?”

“Yes, Monsieur l’Abbe; and that sanctuary and that apse, so narrow and restricted, with columns so close together, and the iridescent light, like filmy soap bubbles, from walls which seem made of glass, disturb and bewilder you; on first entering it gives the impression of indescribable uneasiness, a sort of anxious and distressed anticipation. And in truth it is neither quite healthy nor sound; it seems only to live by dint of aids and expedients; it struggles to be free and is not; it is long drawn and not ethereal; it has—-how shall I express it?—large bones. You remember the pillars? They are like the smooth muscular trunks of beech trees, which have also the angular edges of reeds. How different from the harp-strings which form the aerial skeleton of Chartres! No, in spite of all, Beauvais, like Reims, and like Paris, is a fleshy cathedral; it has not the elegant leanness, the perennial youthfulness of form, the Patrician stamp of Amiens, and more especially of Chartres!

“And have you not been struck, Monsieur l’Abbe, by the way in which the genius of man has constantly borrowed from Nature in the construction of his basilicas? It is almost certain that the arcades of the forest were the starting-point for the mystic avenues of our aisles. And again, look at the pillars. I was speaking of those at Beauvais as suggesting the beech and the reed; if you think of the columns at Laon, they have nodes all up their stems, resembling the regular swelling of bamboos, to the point of imitation. Note also the stone flora of the capitals and the pendants of the vault, terminating the long ribs of the arches. Here the animal kingdom seems to have inspired the architect. Might we not conceive of a fabulous spider, of which the key-stone is the body and the ribs stretching under the vaults are the legs? The image is so accurate as to be irresistible. And then what a marvel is the gigantic Arachne, wrought

like a jewel and heightened with gold, which might have spun the web of those three flaming rose windows!”

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“By the way,” said the Abbe, when they had left the church and were walking down the street, “I forgot to point out to you the Number which is everywhere stamped on Chartres; it is identical with Paray-le-Monial. Here, again, everything is in threes. Thus there are three aisles, and three entrances each with three doors; if you count the pillars of the nave, you will count twice three on each side. The transept aisles again have each three bays and three pillars, the windows are in threes under the three great roses. So, you see, Notre Dame is full of the Trinity.”

“And it is also the great store-house of Mediaeval painting and sculpture.”

“Yes, and like other Gothic cathedrals, it is the completest and most trustworthy collection of symbolism; for the allegories we fancy we can interpret in Romanesque churches are on the whole but artificial and doubtful—and that is quite conceivable. The Romanesque is a convert, a pagan turned monk. It was not born Catholic as the pointed arch was; it only became so by baptism conferred by the Church. Christianity discovered it in the Roman *basilica*, and utilized while modifying it; thus its origin is pagan, and it was only as it grew up that it could learn the language and use the forms of our emblems.”

“And yet, to me, as a whole, it seems to be a symbol, for it is the image in stone of the Old Testament, a figure of contrition and fear.”

“And yet more of the soul’s peace,” replied the Abbe. “Believe me, really to understand that style we must go back to the fountain-head, to the earliest times of Monasticism, of which it is a perfect expression; back, in fact, to the Fathers of the Church, the monks of the Desert.

“Now, what is the very special character of the mysticism of the East? It is the calmness of faith, love feeding on itself, ecstasy without display, ardent but reserved, internal.

“In the books of the Egyptian Recluses you will never find the vehemence of a Maddalena de’ Pazzi or a Catherine of Siena, the passionate ejaculations of a Saint Angela. Nothing of the kind, no amorous addresses, no trepidations, no laments. They look upon the Redeemer less as the Victim to be wept over than as the Mediator, the Friend, the Elder Brother. To them He was, to quote Origen’s words, ’The Bridge between us and the Father.’

“These tendencies, transplanted from Africa to Europe, were preserved by the first monks of the West, who followed the example of their predecessors, and modified and built their churches on the same pattern.

“That repentance, contrition, and awe dwell under these dark vaults, among these heavy pillars, in this fortress, as it were, where the elect shut themselves in to resist the

assaults of the world, is quite certain—but this mystical Romanseque also suggests the notion of a sturdy faith, of manly patience, and stalwart piety—like its walls.

"It has not the flaming raptures of the mystical Gothic, which finds utterance in all these soaring shafts of stone; the Romanesque lives self-centred, in reserved fervour, brooding in the depths of the soul. It may be summed up in this saying of Saint Isaac's: *In mansuetudine et in tranquillitate, simplifica animam tuam*.'"

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“You will confess, Monsieur l’Abbe, that you have a weakness for the style.”

“Perhaps I have, in so far as that it is less petted, more humble, less feminine, and more claustral than the Gothic.”

“On the whole,” the priest concluded, as he shook hands with Durtal at his own door, “it is the symbol of the inner life, the image of the monastic life; in a word, the true architecture of the cloister.”

“On condition, nevertheless,” said Durtal to himself, “that it is not like that of Notre Dame de Poitiers, where the interior is gaudy with childish colouring and raw tones; for there, instead of expressing regret and tranquillity, it rouses a suggestion of the childish glee of an old savage in his second childhood, who laughs when his tattoo marks are renewed, and his skin rough-cast with crude ochres.”

CHAPTER VII.

“How many worshippers can the Cathedral contain? Well, nearly 18,000,” said the Abbe Plomb. “But I need hardly tell you, I suppose, that it is never full; that even during the season for pilgrimages the vast crowds of Mediaeval times never assemble here. Ah, no! Chartres is not exactly what you would call a pious town!”

“It strikes me as indifferent to religion, to say the least, if not actually hostile,” said the Abbe Gevresin.

“The citizen of Chartres is money-getting, apathetic, and salacious,” replied the Abbe Plomb. “Above all, greedy of money, for the passion for lucre is fierce here, under an inert surface. Really, from my own experience, I pity the young priest who is sent as a beginner to evangelize la Beauce.

“He arrives full of illusions, dreaming of Apostolic triumphs, burning to devote himself—-and he drops into silence and the void. If he were but persecuted he would feel himself alive; but he is met, not with abuse, but with a smile, which is far worse; and at once he becomes aware of the futility of all he can do, of the aimlessness of his efforts, and he is discouraged.

“The clergy here are, it may be said, admirable, composed of good and saintly priests; but they vegetate, torpid with inaction; they neither read nor work; their joints become ankylose; they die of weariness in this provincial spot.”

“You do not!” exclaimed Durtal, laughing; “for you make work. Did you not tell me that you especially devote yourself to ladies who can still condescend to take an interest in Our Lord in this town?”

“Your satire is scathing,” replied the Abbe. “I can assure you that if I had serving-women and the peasant girls to deal with, I should not complain; for in simple souls there are qualities and virtues and a responsive spring, but not in the commercial or the richer classes! You cannot imagine what those women are. If only they attend Mass on Sunday and perform their Easter duties they think they may do anything and everything; and thenceforth their

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one idea is not so much to avoid offending the Saviour as to disarm Him by mean subterfuges. They speak ill of their neighbour, injuring him cruelly, refusing him all help and pity, and they make excuses for themselves as though these were mere venial faults; but as to eating meat on a Friday! That is quite another thing; they are persuaded that this is the unpardonable sin. To them their stomach is the Holy Ghost; consequently, the great point is to tack and veer round that particular sin, never to commit it, while only just avoiding it, and not depriving themselves in the least. What eloquence they will pour out on me to convince me of the penitential quality of water-fowl.

"During Lent they are possessed with the idea of giving dinners, and rack their brains to provide a lenten meal in which there is no meat, though it would be supposed that there was; and then come interminable discussions as to teal, wild duck, and cold-blooded birds. They should consult a naturalist and not a priest on such cases of conscience.

"As to Holy Week, that is another affair; the mania for water-birds gives way to a hankering for the *Charlotte Russe*. May they, without offence to God, enjoy a *Charlotte*? There are eggs in it, to be sure, but so whipped and scourged that the dish is almost ascetic; culinary explanations are poured into my ear, the confessional becomes a kitchen, and the priest might be a master-cook.

"But as to the general sin of greediness, they hardly admit that they are guilty of it. Is it not so, my dear colleague?"

The Abbe Gevresin nodded assent. "They are indeed hollow souls," said he, "and what is more, impenetrable. They are sealed against every generous idea, regarding the intercourse they hold with the Redeemer as beseeming their rank and in good style; but they never seek to know Him more nearly, and restrict themselves, of deliberate purpose, to calls of politeness."

"Such visits as we pay to an aged parent on New Year's Day," said Durtal.

"No, at Easter," corrected Madame Bavoil.

"And among these Fair Penitents," the Abbe Plomb went on, "we have that terrible variety, the wife of the Depute who votes on the wrong side, and to his wife's objurgations retorts: 'Why, I am at heart a better Christian than you are!'

"Invariably and every time, she repeats the list of her husband's private virtues, and deplores his conduct as a public man; and this history, which is never ending, always leads up to the praises she awards herself, almost to requiring us to apologize for all the annoyance the Church occasions her."

The Abbe Gevresin smiled, and said,—

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“When I was in Paris, attached to one of the parishes on the left bank of the Seine, in which there is a huge draper’s and fancy shop, I had to deal with a very curious class of women. Especially on days when there was a great show of cotton and linen goods, or a sale of bankrupt stock, there was a perfect rush of well-dressed women to the confessional. These people lived on the other side of the water; they had come to that part of the town to buy bargains, and finding the departments of the shop too full, no doubt, they meant to wait till the crowd should be thinner, to make their selection in comfort; so then, not knowing what to be doing, they took refuge in the church, and, tortured by the need for speech, they asked for the priest whose turn it was to attend, and to justify themselves, chattered in the confessional as if it had been a drawing-room, merely to kill time.”

“Not being able to go to a *cafe* like a man, they go to church,” said Durtal.

“Unless it is,” said Madame Bavoil, “that they would rather confide to an unknown priest the sins it would pain them to confess to their own director.”

“At any rate, this is a new light on things: the influence of big shops on the tribunal of penance!” exclaimed Durtal.

“And of railway stations,” added the Abbe Gevresin.

“How of railway stations?”

“Yes, I assure you that churches situated near railway stations have a special following of women on their journeys. There it is that our dear Madame Bavoil’s shrewd remark finds justification. Many a country-woman who has the Cure of her own parish to dinner dares not tell him the tale of her adultery, because he could too easily guess the name of her lover, and because the propinquity of a priest living on intimate terms in her house would be inconvenient; so she takes advantage of an excursion to Paris to open her heart to another confessor who does not know her. As a general rule, when a woman speaks ill of her Cure, and begins the tale of her confession by explaining that he is dull, uneducated, unsympathetic in understanding and guiding souls, you may be certain that a confession is coming of sin against the sixth (seventh) Commandment.”

“Well, well; the people who flutter around the Lord are cool hands!” exclaimed Madame Bavoil.

“They are unhappy creatures, who try to strike a balance between their duties and their vices.

“But enough of this; let us turn to something more immediate. Have you brought us the article on the Angelico, as you promised? Read it to us.”

Durtal brought out of his pocket the manuscript he had finished, which was to be posted that evening to Paris.

He seated himself in one of the straw-bottomed arm-chairs in the middle of the room where they were sitting with the Abbe Gevresin, and began:—

THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN.
By Fra Angelico. In the Louvre.

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The general arrangement of this picture reminds the spectator of the tree of Jesse, of which the branches, supporting a human figure on every twig, spread fan-like as they rise on each side of a throne, while at the top, on a single stem, the radiant beauty of a Virgin is the crowning blossom.

In Fra Angelico's 'Coronation of the Virgin,' to the right and left of the isolated knoll on which Christ sits under a carved stone canopy, placing the crown He holds with both hands on His Mother's bowed head, we see a perfect espalier of Apostles, Saints, and Patriarchs, rising in close and crowded ramification at the lower part of the panel, to burst into a luxuriant blossoming of angels relieved against the blue sky, their heads in a sunshine of glories.

The arrangement of the persons represented is as follows:—

At the foot of the throne, under the gothic canopy—to the left, Saint Nicholas of Myra kneels in prayer, wearing his mitre and clasping his crozier, from which the maniple hangs like a folded banner; Saint Louis the King with a crown of fleurs de lys; the monastic saints; St. Antony, St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Thomas, who holds an open book in which we read the first lines of the *Te Deum*, St. Dominic holding a lily, St. Augustine with a pen. Then, going upwards, St. Mark and St. John carrying their gospels, St. Bartholomew showing the knife with which he was flayed; and higher still the lawgiver Moses, ending in the serried ranks of angels against the azure firmament, each head circled with a golden nimbus.

On the right, below, by the side of a monk whose back only is seen—possibly St. Bernard—Mary Magdalene is on her knees with a vase of spices by her side, robed in vermilion; behind her come St. Cecilia, crowned with roses, St. Clara or St. Catherine of Sienna, in a blue hood, patterned with stars, St. Catherine of Alexandria, leaning on her wheel of martyrdom, St. Agnes, cherishing a lamb in her arms, St. Ursula flinging an arrow, and others whose names are unknown; all female saints, facing the Bishop, the King, the Recluses, and the founders of Orders. By the steps of the throne are St. Stephen, with the green palm of martyrdom, St. Lawrence, with his gridiron, St. George, wearing a breastplate, and on his head a helmet, St. Peter the Dominican recognizable by his split skull; and yet further up St. Matthew, St. Philip, St. James the Greater, St. Jude, St. Paul, St. Matthias, and King David. Finally, opposite the angels on the left a group of angels, whose faces, set in gold discs, are relieved against the pure ultramarine background.

In spite of injury from the restorations it has endured, this panel, with its stamped and diapered gold, is splendid in the freshness of its colours, laid on with white of egg.

As a whole, it represented, so to speak, a stairway for the eye, a circular stair of two flights, in steps of glorious blue hung with gold.

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The lowest to the left is seen in the blue mantle of Saint Louis, and others lead up through a glimpse of blue drapery, the robe of St. John, and then, higher still before reaching the blue expanse of the sky, the robe of the first angel.

The first on the right is the mantle of St. Cecilia; others are the bodice of St. Agnes, St. Stephen's robe, a prophet's tunic; and above these, before reaching the lapis-lazuli border of sky, the robe of the first angel.

Thus blue, which is the predominating colour in the whole, is regularly piled up in steps and spaced almost identically on the opposite sides of the throne. This azure hue of the draperies, their folds faintly indicated with white, is extraordinarily serene, indescribably innocent. This it is which gives the work its soul of colour—this blue, helped out by the gold which gleams round the heads, runs or twines on the black robes of the monks; in Y's on those of St. Thomas; in suns, or rather in radiating chrysanthemums, on those of St. Antony and St. Benedict; in stars on St. Clara's hood; in filagree embroidery in the letters of their names, in brooches and medallions on the bodices of the other female saints.

At the very bottom of the picture a splash of gorgeous red—the Magdalen's robe—that finds an echo in the flame-colour of one of the steps of the throne, and reappears here and there, but softened in fragmentary glimpses of drapery, or smothered under a running pattern of gold (as in St. Augustine's cope) serves as a spring-board, as it were, to start the whole stupendous harmony.

The other colours seem to fill no part, but that of necessary stop-gaps, indispensable supports. They are too, for the most part, common and ugly to a degree that is most puzzling. Look at the greens: they range from boiled endive to olive, ending in the absolute hideousness of two steps of the throne which lie across the picture—two bars, two streaks of spinach dipped in tawny mud. The only tolerable green of them all is that of St. Agnes' mantle, a Parmigiano green, rich in yellow, and made still richer by the lining which affords the pleasing adjunct of orange.

On the other hand, consider this blue which Angelico uses so sumptuously in his celestial tones; when he makes it darker it loses its fulness, and looks almost dull; we see this in St. Clara's hood.

But what is yet more amazing is that this painter, so eloquent in blue, is but a stammerer when he makes use of the other angelic hue—rose-pink. In his hands it is neither subtle nor ingenuous; it is opaque, of the colour of blood thinned with water, or of pink sticking-plaister, excepting when it trends on the hue of wine-lees, like that of the Saviour's sleeves.

And it is heaviest of all in the saints' cheeks. It looks glazed, like the surface of pie-crust; it has the quality of raspberry syrup drowned in white of egg.

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These are in the main the only colours used by Angelico. A magnificent blue for the sky and another vile blue, white, brilliant red, melancholy pinks, a light green, dark greens, and gold. No bright yellow like everlastings, no luminous straw-colour; at most a heavy opaque yellow for the hair of his female saints; no truly bold orange, no violet, either tender or strong, unless in the half-hidden lining of a cloak or in the scarcely visible robe of a saint, cut off by the frame; no brown that does not lurk in the background. His palette, as may be seen, is very limited.

And it is symbolical, if we consider it. He has undoubtedly done in his hues what he has done in the arrangement of the work. His picture is a hymn to Chastity, and round the central group of Christ and His Mother he has placed in ranks the Saints who best concentrated this virtue on earth. St. John the Baptist, beheaded for the bounding impurity of an Herodias; St. George, who saved a virgin from the emblematic Dragon; such saints as St. Agnes, St. Clara, and St. Ursula; the heads of the Orders—St. Benedict and St. Francis; a king like St. Louis, and a bishop like St. Nicholas of Myra, who hindered the prostitution of three young girls whom a starving father was fain to sell. Everything, down to the smallest details, from the attributes of the persons represented to the steps of the throne, of which the number is nine—that of the choirs of angels—everything in this picture is symbolical.

It is permissible therefore to assume that he selected his colours for their allegorical signification.

White: the symbol of the Supreme Being, and of absolute Truth, and employed by the Church in its adornments for the festival of our Lord and the Virgin because it signifies Goodness, Virginity, Charity, and is the splendour, the emblem of Divine Wisdom when it is enhanced to the pure radiance of silver.

Blue: because it symbolizes Chastity, Innocence, and Guilelessness.

Red: which is the colour adopted for the offices of the Holy Ghost and of the Passion; the garb of Charity, Suffering and Love.

Rose-pink; the Love of Eternal Wisdom, and, as Saint Mechtildis teaches, the anguish and torments of Christ.

Green: used liturgically at Seasons of Pilgrimage, and which seems to be the colour preferred by the Benedictine Sisterhood, interpreting it as meaning freshness of soul and perennial sap; the green which, in the hermeneutics of colour, expresses the hopes of the regenerated creature, the yearning for final repose, and which is likewise the mark of humility, according to the Anonymous English writer of the thirteenth century, and of contemplation, according to Durand of Mende.

On the other hand, Angelico has intentionally refrained from introducing the hues which are emblematic of vices, excepting of course those adopted for the garb of the Monastic Orders, which altogether changes their meaning.

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Black: the colour of error and the void, the seal of death, and, according to Sister Emmerich, the image of profaned and wasted gifts.

Brown: which, as the same Sister tells us, is synonymous with agitation, barrenness and dryness of the spirit, and neglect of duty; brown; which being composed of black and red—smoke darkening the sacred fire—is Satanic.

Grey: the ashes of penance, the symbol of tribulation, according to the Bishop of Mende, the sign of half-mourning formerly used in the Paris ritual instead of violet in Lent. The mingling of white and black, of virtue and vice, of joy and grief, the mirror of the soul that is neither good nor evil, the medium being, the lukewarm creature that God spueth out, grey can only rise by the infusion of a little purity, a little blue; but can, when thus converted to pearl grey, become a pious hue, and attempt a step towards Heaven, an advance in the lower paths of Mysticism.

Yellow: considered by Sister Emmerich as the colour of idleness, of a horror of suffering, and often given to Judas in mediaeval times, is significant of treason and envy. Orange: of which Frederic Portal speaks as the revelation of Divine Love, the communion of God with man, mingling the blood of Love to the sinful hue of yellow, may be taken to bear a worse meaning with the idea of falsehood and torment; and, especially when it verges on red, expresses the defeat of a soul over-ridden by its sins, hatred of Love, contempt of Grace, the end of all things.

Dead leaf colour: speaking of moral degradation, spiritual death, the hopefulness of green for ever extinct.

Finally, violet: adopted by the Church for the Sundays in Advent and in Lent, and for penitential services. It was the colour of the mortuary-shroud of the kings of France; during the Middle Ages it was the attribute of mourning, and it is at all times the melancholy garb of the exorcist.

What is certainly far less easy to explain is the limited variety of countenance the painter has chosen to adopt. Here symbolism is of no use. Look, for instance, at the men. The Patriarchs with their bearded faces do not show us the almost translucent texture, as of the sacramental wafer, in which the bones show through the dry and diaphanous parchment-like skin, or like the seeds of the cruciferous flower called *Monnaie du Pape* (honesty); they have all regular and pleasant faces, are all healthy, full-blooded personages, attentive and devout. His monks too have round faces and rosy cheeks; not one of his Saints looks like a Recluse of the Desert overcome by fasting, or has the exhausted emaciation of an ascetic; they are all vaguely alike, with the same solidity and the same complexion. In fact, as we see them in this picture, they are a contented colony of excellent people.

At least, so they appear at a first glance.

The women, too, are all of one family; sisters more or less exactly alike; all fair and rosy, with light snuff-coloured eyes, heavy eyelids, and round faces; they form a train of rather an insipid type round the Virgin with her long nose and bird-like head kneeling at the feet of Christ.

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Altogether, among all these figures we find scarcely four distinct types, if we take into consideration their more or less advanced years and the modifications resulting from the arrangement of their hair, their being bearded or shaven, and the pose of the head, front face or profile, which distinguishes them.

The only groups which are not of an almost uniform stamp are the angels, sexless youths for ever charming. They are of matchless purity, of a more than human innocence in their blue and rose-pink and green robes sprigged with gold, with their yellow or red hair, at once aerial and heavy, their chastely downcast eyes, and flesh as white as pith. Grave, but in ecstasy, they play on the harp or the theorbo, on the Viol d'Amore or the rebeck, singing the eternal glory of the most Holy Mother.

Thus, on the whole, the types used by Angelico are not less restricted than his colours.

But then, in spite of the exquisite array of angels, is this picture monotonous and dull? Is this much-talked-of work over-praised?

No, for this Coronation of the Virgin is a masterpiece, and superior to all that enthusiasm can say about it; indeed, it outstrips painting and soars through realms which the mystics of the brush had never penetrated.

Here we have not a mere manual effort, however admirable; this is not merely a spiritual and truly religious picture such as Roger van der Weyden and Quentin Matsys could create; it is quite another thing. With Angelico an unknown being appears on the scene, the soul of a mystic that has entered on the contemplative life, and breathes it on the canvas as on a perfect mirror. It is the soul of a marvellous monk that we see, of a saint, embodied on this coloured mirror, exhaled in a painted creation. And we can measure how far that soul had advanced on the path of perfection from the work that reflects it.

He carries his angels and his saints up to the Unifying Life, the supreme height of Mysticism. There the weariness of their dolorous ascent is no more; there is the plenitude of tranquil joy, the peace of man made one with God. Angelico is the painter of the soul immersed in God, the painter of his own spirit.

None but a monk could attempt such paintings. Matsys, Memling, Dierck Bouts, Roger van der Weyden were no doubt sincere and pious worthies. They gave their work a reflection of Heaven; they too reflected their own soul in the faces they depicted; but though they gave them a wonderful stamp of art, they could only infuse into them the semblance of the soul beginning the practice of Christian asceticism; they could only represent men still detained, like themselves, in the outer chambers of those Castles of the Soul of which Saint Theresa speaks, and not in the Hall where, in the centre, Christ sits and sheds His glory.

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They were, in my opinion, greater and keener observers, more learned and more skilful, even better painters than Angelico; but their heart was in their craft, they lived in the world, they often could not resist giving their Virgins fine-lady airs, they were hampered by earthly reminiscences, they could not rise in their work above the trammels of daily life; in short, they were and remained men. They were admirable; they gave utterance to the promptings of ardent faith; but they had not had the specific culture which is practised only in the silence and peace of the cloister. Hence they could not cross the threshold of the seraphic realm where roamed the guileless being who never opened his eyes, closed in prayer, excepting to paint—the monk who had never looked out on the world, who had seen only within himself.

And what we know of his life is worthy of this work. He was a humble and tender recluse, who always prayed or ever he took up his brush, and could not draw the Crucifixion without melting into tears.

Through the veil of his tears his angelic vision poured itself out in the light of ecstasy, and he created beings that had but the semblance of human creatures, the earthly husk of our existence, beings whose souls soared already far from their prison of flesh. Study his picture attentively, and see how the incomprehensible miracle works of such a sublimated state of mind.

The types chosen for the Apostles and Saints are, as we have said, quite ordinary. But gaze firmly at the countenances of these men, and you will see how little they really take in of the scene before them. Whatever attitude the painter may have given them, they are all absorbed into themselves; they behold the scene, not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the soul. Each is looking into himself. Jesus dwells in them, and they can gaze on Him better in their inmost heart than on His throne.

It is the same with his female Saints. I have said that they are insignificant looking, and it is true; but how their features, too, are transfigured and effaced under the Divine touch! They are drowned in adoration, and spring buoyant, though motionless, to meet the Heavenly Spouse. Only one remains but half escaped from her material shell: Saint Catherine of Alexandria, who, with upturned eyes of a brackish green, is neither as simple nor as innocent as her sisters; she still sees the form of man in Christ; she still is a woman; she is, if one may so, the sin of the work.

Still, all these spiritual degrees clothed in human figures are but the accessories of this picture. They are placed there, in the august assumption of gold and the chaste ascending scale of blue, to lead by a stair of pure joy to the sublime platform whereon we see the group of the Saviour and the Virgin.

And here, in the presence of the Mother and Son, the ecstatic painter overflows. One could imagine that the Lord had merged into him, and transported him beyond the life of

sense, love and chastity are so perfectly personified in the group above all the means of expression at the command of man.

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No words could express the reverent tenderness, the anxious affection, the filial and paternal love of the Christ, who smiles as He crowns His Mother; and She is yet more incomparable. Here the words of adulation are too weak; the invisible is made visible by the sacramental use of colour and line. A feeling of infinite deference, of intense but reserved adoration, flows and spreads about this Virgin, who, with Her arms crossed over Her bosom, bends Her little dove-like head, with downcast eyes and a rather long nose, under a veil. She resembles the Apostle St. John who is just behind her, and might be his daughter; and she is enigmatic; for that soft, delicate face, which in the hands of any other painter would be merely charming and trivial, breathes out the purest innocence. She is not even flesh and blood; the material that clothes Her swells softly with the breath of the fluid that shapes it. Mary is a living but a volatilized and glorious body.

We can understand certain ideas of the Abbess of Agreda who declares that She was exempt from the defilements inflicted on women; we see what St. Thomas meant who asserted that Her beauty purified instead of agitating the senses.

Her age is indeterminate; She is not a woman, yet She is no longer a child. It is hard to say even that She is grown up, just marriageable, a girl-child, so entirely is She refined above all humanity, beyond the world, so exquisitely pure and for ever chaste.

She remains incomparable, unapproached in painting. By Her, other Madonnas are vulgar; they are in every case women; She alone is the white stem of the divine Ear of corn, the Wheat of the Eucharist. She alone is indeed the Immaculate, the *Regina Virginum* of the hymns; and She is so youthful, so guileless, that the Son seems to be crowning His Mother before She can have conceived Him.

It is in this that we see the glory of the gentle Friar's superhuman genius. He painted as others have spoken, inspired by Grace; he painted what he saw within him just as St. Angela of Foligno related what she heard within her. Both one and the other were mystics absorbed into God; thus this picture by Angelico is at the same time a picture by the Holy Ghost, bolted through a purified sieve of art.

If we consider it, this soul is that of a female saint rather than of a monk. Turn to his other pictures; those, for instance, in which he strove to depict Christ's Passion; we are not looking at the stormy scene represented by Matsys or Gruenewald; he has none of their harsh manliness, nor their gloomy energy, nor their tragic turbulence; he only weeps with the uncomforted grief of a woman. He is a Sister rather than a Friar-artist; and it is from this loving sensibility, which in the mystic vocation is more generally peculiar to women, that he has drawn the pathetic orisons and tender lamentation of his works.

And was it not also in this spiritual nature, so womanly in its complexion, that he found, under the impulse of the Spirit, the wholly angelical gladness, the really glorious

apotheosis of Our Lord and His Mother, as he has painted them in this Coronation of the Virgin, which, after being revered for centuries in the Dominican Church at Fiesole, has now found shelter and admiration in the little gallery devoted to the Italian School at the Louvre.

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“Your article is very good,” said the Abbe Plomb. “But can the principles of a ritual of colour which you have discerned in Angelico be verified with equal strictness in other painters?”

“No, if we look for colour as Angelico received it from his monastic forefathers, the illuminators of Missals, or as he applied it in its strictest and most usual acceptation. Yes, if we admit the law of antagonism, the rules of inversion, and if we know that symbolism authorizes the system of contraries, allowing the use of the hues which are appropriated to certain virtues to indicate the vices opposed to them.”

“In a word, an innocent colour may be interpreted in an evil sense, and vice versa,” said the Abbe Gevresin.

“Precisely. In fact, artists who, though pious, were laymen, spoke a different language from the monks. On emerging from the cloister the liturgical meaning of colours was weakened; it lost its original rigidity and became pliant. Angelico followed the traditions of his Order to the letter, and he was not less scrupulous in his respect for the observances of religious art which prevailed in his day. Not for anything on earth would he have infringed them, for he regarded them as a liturgical duty, a fixed rule of service. But as soon as profane painters had emancipated the domain of painting, they gave us more puzzling versions, more complicated meanings; and the symbolism of colour, which is so simple in Angelico, became singularly abstruse—supposing that they even were constantly faithful to it in their works—and almost impossible to interpret.

“For instance, to select an example: the Antwerp gallery possesses a tryptich, by Roger van der Werden, known as ‘The Sacraments.’ In the centre panel, devoted to the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Redeemer is shown under two aspects, the bleeding form of the Crucifixion and the mystic form of the pure oblation on the altar; behind the Cross, at the foot of which we see the weeping Mary, Saint John and the Holy Women, a priest is celebrating Mass and elevating the Host in the midst of a cathedral which forms the background of the picture.

“On the left-hand shutter, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Penance are shown, in small detached scenes; and on the right-hand shutter those of Ordination, Marriage and Extreme Unction.

“This picture, a work of marvellous beauty, with the ’Descent from the Cross’ by Quentin Matsys, are the inestimable glory of the Belgium gallery; but I will not linger over a full description of this work; I will omit any reflection suggested by the supreme art of the painter, and restrict myself to recording that part of the work which bears on the symbolism of colour.”

“But are you sure that Roger van der Weyden intended to ascribe such meanings to the colours?”

“It is impossible to doubt it, for he has assigned a different hue to each Sacrament, by introducing above the scenes he depicts, an angel whose robe is in each instance different in accordance with the ceremony set forth. His meaning therefore is beyond question; and these are the colours he affects to the means of Grace consecrated by the Saviour:

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“To the Eucharist, green; to Baptism, white; to Confirmation, yellow; to Penance, red; to Ordination, purple; to Marriage blue; to Extreme Unction, a violet so deep as to be almost black.

“Well, you will admit that the interpretation of this sacred scheme of colour is not altogether easy.

“The pictorial imagery of Baptism, Extreme Unction, and Ordination is quite clear; Marriage even as symbolized by blue may be intelligible to simple souls; that Communion should blazon its coat with *vert*, is even more appropriate, since green represents sap and humility, and is emblematical of the regenerative power. But ought not Confession to display violet rather than red; and how, in any case, are we to account for Confirmation being figured in yellow?”

“The colour of the Holy Ghost is certainly red,” remarked the Abbe Plomb.

“Thus there are differences of interpretation between Angelico and Roger van der Weyden, though they lived at the same time. Still, the monk seems to me the more trustworthy authority.”

“For my part,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “I cannot but think of the right side of the lining of which you were speaking just now.”

“This rule of contraries is not peculiar to the ritual of colour; it is to be seen in almost every part of the science of symbolism. Look at the emblems derived from the animal world; the eagle alternately figuring Christ and the Devil; the snake which, while it is one of the most familiar symbols of the Demon, may nevertheless, as in the brazen serpent of Moses, prefigure the Saviour.”

“The anticipatory symbol of Christian symbolism was the double-faced Janus of the heathen world,” said the Abbe Plomb, laughing.

“Indeed, these allegories of the palette turn completely to the right-about,” said Durtal. “Take red, for instance: we have seen that in the general acceptation it is to be interpreted as meaning charity, endurance, and love. This is the right side out; the wrong side, according to Sister Emmerich, is dulness, and clinging to this world’s goods.

“Grey, the emblem of repentance and sorrow, and at the same time the image of a lukewarm soul, is also, according to another interpretation, symbolical of the Resurrection—white, piercing through blackness—light entering into the Tomb and coming out as a new hue—grey, a mixed colour still heavy with the gloom of death, but reviving as it gets light by degrees from the whiteness of day.

“Green, to which the mystics gave favourable meanings, also acquires a disastrous sense in some cases; it then represents moral degradation and despair; it borrows

melancholy significance from dead leaves, is the colour given to the bodies of the devils in Stephan Lochner's Last Judgment, and in the infernal scenes depicted in the glass windows and pictures of the earliest artists.

"Black and brown, with their inimical suggestions of death and hell, change their meaning as soon as the founders of religious Orders adopt them for the garb of the cloister. Black then symbolizes renunciation, repentance, the mortification of the flesh, according to Durand de Mende; and brown and even grey suggest poverty and humility.

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“Yellow again, so misprized in the formulas of symbolism, becomes significant of charity; and if we accept the teaching of the English monk who wrote in about 1220, yellow is enhanced when it changes to gold, rising to be the symbol of divine Love, the radiant allegory of eternal Wisdom.

“Violet, finally, when it appears as the distinctive colour of prelates, divests itself of its usual meaning of self-accusation and mourning, to assume a certain dignity and simulate a certain pomp.

“On the whole, I find only white and blue which never change.”

“In the Middle Ages, according to Yves de Chartres,” said the Abbe Plomb, “blue took the place of violet in the vestments of bishops, to show them that they should give their minds rather to the things of Heaven than to the things of earth.”

“And how is it,” asked Madame Bavoil, “that this colour, which is all innocence, all purity, the colour of Our Mother Herself, has disappeared from among the liturgical hues?”

“Blue was used in the Middle Ages for all the services to the Virgin, and it has only fallen into desuetude since the eighteenth century,” replied the Abbe Plomb; “and that only in the Latin Church, for the orthodox Churches of the East still wear it.”

“And why this neglect?”

“I do not know, any more than I know why so many colours formerly used in our services have been forgotten. Where are the colours of the ancient Paris use: saffron yellow, reserved for the festival of All Angels; salmon pink, sometimes worn instead of red; ashen grey, which took the place of violet; and bistre instead of black on certain days.

“Then there was a charming hue which still holds its place in the scale of colour used in the Roman ritual, though most of the Churches overlook it—the shade called ‘old rose,’ a medium between violet and crimson, between grief and joy, a sort of compromise, a diminished tone, which the Church adopted for the third Sunday in Advent and the fourth Sunday in Lent. It thus gave promise, in the penitential season that was ending, of a beginning of gladness, for the festivals of Christmas and Easter were at hand.

“It was the idea of the spiritual dawn rising on the night of the soul, a special impression which violet, now used on those days, could not give.”

“Yes, it is to be regretted that blue and rose-colour have disappeared from the Churches of the West,” said the Abbe Gevresin. “But to return to the monastic dress which delivered brown, grey, and black from their melancholy significance, does it not strike you that from the point of view of emblematic language, that of the Order of the Annunciation was the most eloquent? Those sisters were habited in grey, white, and

red, the colours of the Passion, and they also wore a blue cape and a black veil in memory of Our Mother’s mourning.”

“The image of a perpetual Holy Week!” exclaimed Durtal.

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“Here is another question,” the Abbe Plomb went on. “In the earliest religious pictures the cloaks in which the Virgin, the Apostles, and the Saints are draped almost always show the hue of their lining in ingeniously contrived folds. It is of course different from that of the outer side, as you yourself observed just now with regard to the mantle of Saint Agnes in Angelico’s work. Now, do you suppose that, apart from contrast of colour selected for technical purposes, the monk meant to express any particular idea by the juxtaposition of the two colours?”

“In accordance with the symbolism of the palette the outer colour would represent the material creature, and the lining colour the spiritual being.”

“Well, but then what is the significance of Saint Agnes’ mantle of green lined with orange?”

“Obviously,” replied Durtal, “green denoting freshness of feeling, the essence of good, hope; and orange, in its better meaning, being regarded as representing the act by which God unites Himself to man, we might conclude from these data that Saint Agnes had attained the life of union, the possession of the Saviour, by virtue of her innocence and the fervour of her aspirations. She would thus be the image of virtue yearning and fulfilled, of hope rewarded, in short.

“But now I must confess that there are many gaps, many obscurities in this allegorical lore of colours. In the picture in the Louvre, for instance, the steps of the throne, which are intended to play the part of veined marble, remain unintelligible. Splashed with dull red, acrid green, and bilious yellow, what do these steps express, suggesting as they do by their number the nine choirs of angels?”

“It seems to me difficult to allow that the monk intended to figure the celestial hierarchies by smears with a dirty brush and these crude streaks.”

“But has the colour of a step ever represented an idea in the science of symbolism?” asked the Abbe Gevresin.

“Saint Mechtildis says so. When speaking of the three steps in front of the altar, she propounds that the first should be of gold, to show that it is impossible to go to God save by charity; the second blue, to signify meditation on things divine; the third green, to show eager hope and praise of Heavenly things.”

“Bless me!” cried Madame Bavoil, who was getting somewhat scared by this discussion, “I never saw it in that light. I know that red means fire, as everybody knows; blue, the air; green, water; and black, the earth. And this I understand, because each element is shown in its true colour; but I should never have dreamed that it was so complicated, never have supposed that there was so much meaning in painters’ pictures.”

“In some painters’!” cried Durtal. “For since the Middle Ages the doctrine of emblematic colouring is extinct. At the present day those painters who attempt religious subjects are ignorant of the first elements of the symbolism of colours, just as modern architects are ignorant of the first principles of mystical theology as embodied in buildings.”

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“Precious gems are lavishly introduced in the works of the primitive painters,” observed the Abbe Plomb. “They are set in the borders of dresses, in the necklets and rings of the female saints, and are piled in triangles of flame on the diadems with which painters of yore were wont to crown the Virgin. Logically, I believe we ought to seek a meaning in every gem as well as in the hues of the dresses.”

“No doubt,” said Durtal, “but the symbolism of gems is much confused. The reasons which led to the choice of certain stones to be the emblems, by their colour, water, and brilliancy, of special virtues, are so far-fetched and so little proven, that one gem might be substituted for another without greatly modifying the interpretation of the allegory they present. They form a series of synonyms, each replacing the other with scarcely a shade of difference.

“In the treasury of the Apocalypse, however, they seem to have been selected, if not with stricter meaning, with a more impressive breadth of application, for expositors regard them as coincident with a virtue, and likewise with the person endowed with it. Nay, these jewellers of the Bible have gone further; they have given every gem a double symbolism, making each embody a figure from the Old Testament and one from the New. They carry out the parallel of the two Books by selecting in each case a Patriarch and an Apostle, symbolizing them by the character more especially marked in both.

“Thus, the amethyst, the mirror of humility and almost childlike simplicity, is applied in the Bible to Zebulon, a man obedient and devoid of pride, and in the Gospel to St. Matthias, who also was gentle and guileless; the chalcedony, as an emblem of charity, was ascribed to Joseph, who was so merciful and pitiful to his brethren, and to St. James the Great, the first of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom for the love of Christ; the jasper, emblematical of faith and eternity, was the attribute of Gad and of St. Peter; the sard, meaning faith and martyrdom, was given to Reuben and St. Bartholomew; the sapphire, for hope and contemplation, to Naphtali and St. Andrew, and sometimes, according to Aretas, to St. Paul; the beryl, meaning sound doctrine, learning, and long-suffering, to Benjamin and to St. Thomas, and so forth. There is, indeed, a table of the harmony of gems and their application to patriarchs, apostles, and virtues, drawn up by Madame Felicie d’Ayzac, who has written an elaborate paper on the figurative meaning of gems.”

“The avatar of some other Scriptural personages might be equally well carried out by these emblematical minerals,” observed the Abbe Gevresin.

“Obviously; and as I warned you, the analogies are very far-fetched. The hermeneutics of gems are uncertain, and founded on mere fanciful resemblances, on the harmonies of ideas hard to assimilate. In mediaeval times this science was principally cultivated by poets.”

“Against whom we must be on our guard,” said the Abbe Plomb, “since their interpretations are for the most part heathenish. Marbode, for example, though he was a Bishop, has left us but a very pagan interpretation of the language of gems.”

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“These mystical lapidaries have on the whole chiefly applied, their ingenuity to explaining the stones of the breastplate of Aaron, and those that shine in the foundations of the New Jerusalem, as described by St. John; indeed, the walls of Sion are set with the same jewels as the High Priest’s pectoral, with the exception of the carbuncle, the ligure, agate, and onyx, which are named in Exodus, and replaced in the Book of Revelation by chalcedony, sardonyx, chrysoprase, and jacinth.”

“Yes, and the symbolist goldsmiths wrought diadems, setting them with precious stones, to crown Our Lady’s brow; but their poems showed little variety, for they were all borrowed from the *Libellus Corona Virginis*, an apocryphal work ascribed to St. Ildefonso, and formerly famous in convents.”

The Abbe Gevresin rose and took an old book from the shelf.

“That brings to my mind,” said he, “a hymn in honour of the Virgin composed in rhyme by Conrad of Haimburg, a German monk in the fourteenth century. Imagine,” he continued, as he turned over the pages, “a litany of gems, each verse symbolizing one of Our Mother’s virtues.

“This prayer in minerals opens with a human greeting. The good monk, kneeling down, begins:—

“’Hail, noble Virgin, meet to become the Bride of the Supreme King! Accept this ring in pledge of that betrothal, O Mary!’

“And he shows Her the ring, turning it slowly in his fingers, explaining to Our Lady the meaning of each stone that shines in the gold setting; beginning with green jasper, symbolical of the faith which led the Virgin to receive the message of the angelic visitant; then comes the chalcedony, signifying the fire of charity that fills Her heart; the emerald, whose transparency signifies Her purity; the sardonyx, with its pale flame, like the placidity of Her virginal life; the red sard-stone, one with the Heart that bled on Calvary; the chrysolite, sparkling with greenish gold, reminding us of Her numberless miracles and Her Wisdom; the beryl, figurative of Her humility; the topaz, of Her deep meditations; the chrysoprase of Her fervency; the jacinth of Her charity; the amethyst, mingling rose and purple, of the love bestowed on Her by God and men; the pearl, of which the meaning remains vague, not representing any special virtue; the agate, signifying Her modesty; the onyx, showing the many perfections of Her grace; the diamond, for patience and fortitude in sorrow; while the carbuncle, like an eye that shines in the night, everywhere proclaims that Her glory is eternal.

“Finally the donor points out to the Virgin the interpretation of certain other matters set in the ring, which in the Middle Ages were regarded as precious: crystal, emblematic of chastity of body and soul; ligurite, resembling amber, more especially figurative of the

quality of temperance; lodestone, which attracts iron, as She touches the chords of repentant hearts with the bow of her loving-kindness.

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“And the monk ends his petition by saying: ’This little ring, set with gems, which we offer Thee as at this time, accept, glorious Bride, in Thy benevolence. Amen.’”

“It would no doubt be possible,” said the Abbe Plomb, “to reproduce almost exactly the invocations of these Litanies by each stone thus interpreted.” And he reopened the book his friend the priest had just closed.

“See,” he went on, “how close is the concordance between the epithets in the sentences and the quality assigned to the gems.

“Does not the emerald, which in this sequence is emblematical of incorruptible purity, reflect in the sparkling mirror of its water the *Mater Purissima* of the Litanies to the Virgin? Is not the chrysolite, the symbol of wisdom, a very exact image of the *Sedes Sapientiae*? The jacinth, attribute of charity and succour vouchsafed to sinners, is appropriate to the *Auxilium Christianorum* and the *refugium peccatorum* of the prayers. Is not the diamond, which means strength and patience, the *Virgo potens*?—the carbuncle, meaning fame, the *Virgo praedicanda*?—the chrysoprase, for fervour, the *Vas insigne devotionis*?

“And it is probable,” said the Abbe, in conclusion, as he laid the book down, “that if we took the trouble we could rediscover one by one, in this rosary of stones, the whole rosary of praise which we tell in honour of Our Mother.”

“Above all,” remarked Durtal, “if we did not restrict ourselves to the narrow limits of this poem, for Conrad’s manual is brief, and his dictionary of analogies small; if we accepted the interpretations of other symbolists, we could produce a ring similar to his and yet quite different, for the language of the gems would not be the same. Thus to St. Bruno of Asti, the venerable Abbot of Monte Cassino, the jasper symbolizes Our Lord, because it is immutably green, eternal without possibility of change; and for the same reason the emerald is the image of the life of the righteous; the chrysoprase means good works; the diamond, infrangible souls; the sardonyx, which resembles the blood-stained seed of a pomegranate, is charity; the jacinth, with its varying blue, is the prudence of the saints; the beryl, whose hue is that of water running in the sunshine, figures the Scriptures elucidated by Christ; the chrysolite, attention and patience, because it has the colour of the gold that mingles in it and lends it its meaning; the amethyst, the choir of children and virgins, because the blue mixed in it with rose pink suggests the idea of innocence and modesty.

“Or, again, if we borrow from Pope Innocent III. his ideas as to the mystical meanings of gems, we find that chalcedony, which is pale in the light and sparkles in the dark, is synonymous with humility; the topaz with chastity and the merit of good works, while the chrysoprase, the queen of minerals, implies wisdom and watchfulness.

“If we do not go quite so far back into past ages, but stop at the end of the sixteenth century, we find some new interpretations in a Commentary on the Book of Exodus by Corneille de la Pierre; for he ascribes truth to the onyx and carbuncle, heroism to the beryl, and to the ligure, with its delicate and sparkling violet hue, scorn of the things of earth, and love of heavenly things.”

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“And then St. Ambrose regards this stone as emblematical of Eucharist,” the Abbe Gevresin put in.

“Yes; but what is the ligure or ligurite?” asked Durtal. “Conrad of Haimburg speaks of it as resembling amber; Corneille de la Pierre believes it to be violet-tinted, and St. Jerome gives us to understand that it is not identifiable; in fact, that it is but another name for the jacinth, the image of prudence, with its water of blue like the sky and changing tints. How are we to make sure?”

“As to blue stones, we must not forget that St. Mechtildis regarded the sapphire as the very heart of the Virgin,” observed the Abbe Plomb.

“We may also add,” Durtal went on, “that a new set of variations on the subject of gems was executed in the seventeenth century by a celebrated Spanish Abbess, Maria d’Agreda, who applies to Our Mother the virtues of the precious stones spoken of by St. John in the twenty-first chapter of the Apocalypse. According to her, the sapphire figures the serenity of Mary; the chrysolite shows forth Her love for the Church Militant, and especially for the Law of Grace; the amethyst, Her power against the hordes of hell; the jasper, Her invincible fortitude; the pearl, Her inestimable dignity—”

“The pearl,” interrupted the Abbe Plomb, “is regarded by St. Eucher as emblematic of perfection, chastity, and the evangelical doctrine.”

“And all this time you are forgetting the meaning of other well-known gems,” cried Madame Bavoil. “The ruby, the garnet, the aqua-marine; are they speechless?”

“No,” replied Durtal. “The ruby speaks of tranquility and patience; the garnet, Innocent III. tells us, symbolizes charity. St. Bruno and St. Rupert say that the aqua-marine concentrates in its pale green fire all theological science. There yet remain two gems, the turquoise and the opal. The former, little esteemed by the mystics, is to promote joy. As to the second, of which the name does not occur in treatises on gems, it may be identified with chalcedony, which is described as a sort of agate of an opaque quality, dimmed with clouds and flashing fires in the shadows.

“To have done with this emblematical jewelry, we may add that the series of stones serves to symbolize the hierarchies of the angels. But here, again, the meanings commonly received are derived from more or less forced comparisons and a tissue of notions more or less flimsy and loose. However, it is so far established that the sard-stone suggests the Seraphim, the topaz the Cherubim, the jasper means the Thrones, the chrysolite figures the Dominions, the sapphire the Virtues, the onyx the Powers, the beryl the Principalities, the ruby the Archangels, and the emerald the Angels.”

“And it is a curious fact,” said the Abbe Plomb, “that while beasts, colours, and flowers are accepted by that symbolists sometimes with a good meaning and sometimes with

an evil one, gems alone never change; they always express good qualities, and never vices.”

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“Why is that?”

“St. Hildegarde perhaps affords a clue to this stability when, in the fourth book, of her treatise on Physics, she says that the Devil hates them, abhors and scorns them, because he remembers that their splendour shone in him before his fall, and that some of them are the product of the fire that is his torment.

“And the saint added, ’God, who deprived him of them, would not that the stones should lose their virtues; He desired, on the contrary, that they should ever be held in honour, and used in medicine to the end that sickness should be cured and ills driven out.’ And, in fact, in the Middle Ages they were highly esteemed and used to effect cures.”

“To return to those early pictures,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “in which the Virgin emerges like a flower from amid the gorgeous assemblage of gems, it may be said as a general thing, that the glow of jewels declares by visible signs the merits of Her who wears them; but it would be difficult to say what the painter’s purpose may have been when, in the decoration of a crown or a dress, he placed any particular stone in one spot rather than another. It is, as a rule, a question of taste or harmony, and has nothing, or very little, to do with symbolism.”

“Of that there can be no doubt,” said Durtal, who rose and took leave, as Madame Bavoil, hearing the cathedral clock strike, handed to the two priests their hats and breviaries.

CHAPTER VIII.

The somewhat dolefully calm frame of mind in which Durtal had been living since settling at Chartres came to a sudden end. One day *ennui* made him its prey, the black possession which would allow him neither to work, nor to read, nor to pray; so overwhelming that he knew not whither to turn nor what to do.

After spending dark and futile days in lounging round his library, taking down a volume and shutting it up again, opening another of which he failed to master a single page, he tried to escape from the weariness of the hours by taking walks, and he determined finally to study the town of Chartres.

He found a number of blind alleys and break-neck steeps, such as the road down the knoll of St. Nicolas, which tumbles from the top of the town to the bottom in a precipitous flight of steps; and then the Boulevard des Filles-Dieu, so lonely with its walks planted with trees, was worthy of his notice. Starting from the Place Drouaise, he came to a little bridge where the waters meet of the two branches of the Eure; to the right, above the eddying current and the buildings on the shore, he could see the pile of the old town shouldering up the cathedral; to the left, all along the quay, and looking out

on the tall poplars that fanned the water-mills, were saw-mills and timber-yards, the washing places where laundresses knelt on straw in troughs, and the water foamed before them in widening inky circles splashed into white bubbles by the dip of a bird’s wing.

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This arm of the river diverted into the moat of the old ramparts, encircled Chartres, bordered on one side by the trees of the alleys, and on the other by cottages with terraced gardens down to the level of the stream, the two banks joined by foot-bridges of planks or cast iron arches.

Near where the Porte Guillaume uplifted its crenelated towers like raised pies, there were houses that looked as if they had been gutted, displaying, as in the vanished *cagnards* or vaults of the Hotel Dieu at Paris, cellars open on the level of the water, paved basements in whose depths of prison twilight stone steps could be seen; and on going out through the Porte Guillaume across a little humpbacked bridge, under the archway still showing the groove in which the portcullis had worked which was let down of yore to defend this side of the town, he came upon yet another arm of the river washing the feet of more houses, playing at hide and seek in the courts, musing between walls; and at once he was haunted by the recollection of another river just like this, with its decoction of walnut hulls frothed with bubbles; and to contribute to the suggestion, the more clearly to evoke a vision of the dismal Bievre, the rank, acrid, pungent smell of tan, steeped, as it were, in vinegar, came up in fumes from this broth of medlar juice brought down by the Eure.

The Bievre, a prisoner now in the sewers of Paris, seemed to have escaped from its dungeon and to have taken refuge at Chartres that it might live in the light of day; winding by the Rues de la Foulerie, de la Tannerie, du Massacre, the quarters invaded by the leather-dressers, the skinners and tan-peat makers.

But the Parisian environment, so pathetic in its aspect of silent suffering, was absent from this town; these streets suggested merely a declining hamlet, a poverty-stricken village. He felt something lacking in this second Bievre, the fascination of exhaustion, the grace of the woman of Paris faded and smirched by misery; it lacked the charm compounded of pity and regret, of a fallen creature.

Such as they were, however, these streets, traced with a sort of descending twist round the hill on which the cathedral stood exalted, were the only curious by-ways of Chartres worth wandering through.

Here Durtal often succeeded in getting out of himself, in dreaming over the distressful weariness of these streams, and in ceasing to meditate on his own qualms, till he presently was tired of constant excursions in the same quarter of the town, and then he tramped through it in every direction, trying to find an interest in the sight of time-worn spots—the grace of Queen Berthe’s tower, of Claude Huve’s house and other buildings that have survived the shock of ages; but the enthusiasm he threw into the study of these relics, spoilt by the foregone eulogiums of the guides, could not last, and he then fell back on the churches.

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Although the cathedral crushed everything near it, Saint-Pierre, the ancient Abbey church of a Benedictine monastery, now used as barracks, deserved a lingering visit for the sake of its splendid windows, the dwelling-place of Abbots and Bishops who look down with stern eyes, holding up their croziers. And these windows, damaged by time, were very singular. Upright, in each lancet-shaped setting of white glass, rose a sword-blade bereft of its point; and in these square-tipped blades Saint Benedict and Saint Maur stood lost in thought, with Apostles and Popes, Prelates and Saints, standing out in robes of flame against the luminous whiteness of the borders.

Certainly Chartres could show the finest glass windows in the world; and each century had left its noblest stamp on its sanctuaries: the twelfth, thirteenth, and even the fifteenth, on the cathedral; the fourteenth on Saint Pierre; and a few examples—-unfortunately broken up and used in a medley mosaic—of painted glass of the sixteenth century in Saint Aignan, another church where the vaulted roof had been washed of the colour of gingerbread speckled with anise-seed, by painters of our own day.

Durtal got through a few afternoons in these churches; then the charm of this prolonged study was at an end, and gloom took possession of him, even worse than before.

The Abbe Plomb, to divert his mind, took him for walks in the country, but La Beauce was so flat, so monotonous, that any variety of landscape was impossible to find. Then the Abbe took him through other parts of the town. Some of the buildings claimed their attention, as, for instance, the House of Detention, in the Rue-Sainte-Therese near the Palais de Justice. The edifices themselves were not, indeed, very impressive, but the history of their origin made them available as the fulcrum for old dreams. There was something in the prison walls, in their height and austerity, in their look of order and precision, which made the cloister wall of a Carmel look small. They had, in fact, of old, sheltered a Sisterhood of that Order, and a few steps further on, in a blind alley, was the entrance to the ancient convent of the Jacobins, the Mother-House of the great Sisterhood of Chartres: the Nursing Sisters of Saint Paul.

The Abbe Plomb took him to visit this house, and he retained a cheerful impression of the walk in the fresh air on the old ramparts. The Sisters had kept up the sentry's walk, which followed a long and narrow avenue with a statue of the Virgin at each end, one representing the Immaculate Conception, the other the Virgin Mother. And this walk, strewn with river-pebbles and edged with flowers, shut in on one side by the Abbey and the novices' schools, on the left overlooked a precipice down to the Butte des Charbonniers, and below that again, the Rue de la Couronne; while beyond lay the grass lawns of the Clos Saint Jean, the line of the railroad, labourers' hovels, and convent buildings.

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“There you see,” said the Abbe, “behind the embankment of the Western Railway stands the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady and of the Carmelites; here, nearer to the town on this side of the line, are the Little Sisters of the Poor.”

And indeed the place swarmed with convents: Sisters of the Visitation, Sisters of Providence, Sisters of Good Comfort, Ladies of the Sacred Heart, all lived in hives close round Chartres. Prayer hummed up on every side, rising as the fragrant breath of souls above a city where, by way of divine service, nothing was chanted but the price-current of grain and the higher and lower cost of horses in the fairs which, on certain days, brought all the copers of La Perche together in the *cafes* on the Place.

Besides this walk on the old ramparts, the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Paul was attractive by reason of its quiet and cleanliness. Down silent passages the backs of the good women might be seen crossed by the triangular fold of linen, and the click could be heard of their heavy black rosaries on links of copper, as they rattled on their skirts against the hanging bunch of keys. Their chapel was redolent of Louis XIV., at once childish and pompous, too much bedizened with gold, and the floor too shiny with wax; but there was an interesting detail: at the entrance large panes of glass had been substituted for the walls, so that in winter the sick, sitting in a warm room, could look through the glass partition and follow the services and hear the plain song of Solesmes which the Sisters had the good taste to use.

This visit revived Durtal’s spirit; but he inevitably compared the peaceful hours told out in that retreat with others, and his disgust was increased for this town, and its inhabitants, and its avenues, and its boasted Place des Epars, aping a little Versailles, with its surrounding blatant mansions, and its ridiculous statue of Marceau in the middle.

And then the limpness of the place, hardly awake by sunrise and asleep again by dusk!

Once only did Durtal see it really awake, and that was on the day when Monseigneur Le Tilloy des Mofflaines was enthroned as Bishop.

Then suddenly the city was galvanized; projects were made, the various bodies corporate sat in committee, and men came forth who had lived within doors for years.

Scaffold poles were brought out from the masons’ yards; blue and yellow flags were hoisted on them, and these masts were linked together by garlands of ivy-leaves sewn one over the other with white cotton.

Then Chartres was exhausted, and paused for breath.

Durtal, startled by these unexpected preparations and such an assumption of life, had gone out to meet the Bishop, as far as to the Rue Saint Michel. There, on the open square, a gymnastic apparatus had been erected, the swing bars and rings having been

removed, and the poles garnished with pine branches and gilt paper rosettes, and surmounted by a trophy of tricolour flags arranged in a fan behind a painted cardboard shield. This was an arch of triumph, and under this the Brethren of the Christian Schools were to escort the canopy.

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The procession, which had gone forth to fetch the Bishop from the Hospice of Saint Brice, where, in obedience to time-honoured custom, he had slept the night before entering his See, had made its way thither under a fine rain of chanted canticles, broken by heavier showers of brass sounding a pious flourish of trumpets. Slowly, with measured steps, the train wound along between two hedges of people crowded on the sidewalks, and all the way the windows, hung with drapery, displayed bunches of faces and leaning bodies, cut across the middle by the balcony bar.

At the head of the procession, behind the gaudy uniforms of the ponderous beadles, came the girls of the Congregational Schools, dressed in crude blue with white veils, in two ranks, filling up the roadway; then followed delegates of nuns from every Order that has a House in the diocese; Sisters of the Visitation from Dreux, Ladies of the Sacred Heart from Chateaudun, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception from Nogent le Rotrou, the uncloistered Sisters of the Cloistered Orders of Chartres, Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul and Poor Clares, whose dresses of blueish grey and peat-brown contrasted with the black robes of the others.

What was most odd was the various shapes of their coifs. Some had soft flapping blinkers, others wore them goffered and stiffened with starch; these hid their face at the bottom of a deep white tunnel; others, on the contrary, showed their countenance set in an oval frame of pleated cambric, prolonged behind into conical wings of starched linen lustrous from heavy irons. As he looked over this expanse of caps, Durtal was reminded of the Paris landscape of roofs, in shapes resembling the funnels worn by these nuns and the cocked hats of the beadles.

Then, behind these long files of sober-coloured garments, the scarlet vestments of the choirs came like the blare of trumpets. The little ones marched with downcast eyes, their arms crossed under their red capes edged with ermine, and behind them, a little in advance of the next group, walked two white cowls, that of a Brother of Picpus, and that of a Trappist who represented the Trappist Sisterhood of La Cour Peytral, to which he was chaplain.

Finally the Seminarists came on in a black crowd; those of the Great Seminary of Chartres and of the Little Seminary of Saint Cheron preceding the priests, and behind them, under a purple velvet canopy embroidered in gold with wheat ears and grapes, and decorated at each corner with bunches of snow-white feathers, with his mitre on his head and holding his crozier, came Monseigneur Le Tilloy des Mofflaines.

As he passed, in the act of blessing the street, many an unknown Lazarus rose up, the forgotten dead come back to life; His Reverence seemed to multiply the Miracles of the Lord. Effete old men, huddled in their chairs in the doorways or at the windows, revived for a second, and found strength enough to cross themselves. Persons who had been supposed dead for years managed almost to smile. The vacant eyes of old, old children gazed at the violet cross outlined in the air by the Prelate’s gloved hand. Chartres, that

city of the dead, had changed to a vast nursery; in the extravagance of its joy the town was in its second childhood.

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But as soon as the Bishop was past the scene changed. Durtal was startled, and he tittered.

A whole “Court of Miracles” seemed to follow in the Prelate’s train, strutting but tottering; a procession of old wrecks, dressed out in such garments as are sold from the dead-house, staggered along holding each other’s arms, propped one against another. Every reach-me-down that had been hanging these twenty years flapped about their limbs, hindering their progress. Trousers with baggy ankles or with gaiter tops, balloon-shaped or close-fitting, made of loose-woven stuff or so shrunk that they would not meet the boot, displaying feet where the elastic sides wriggled like living vermin, and ankles covered with vermicelli dipped in ink; then the most impossibly threadbare and discoloured coats, made, as it seemed, of old billiard cloths, of tarpaulin worn to the canvas, of cast-off awnings; overcoats of cast iron, the surface worn off the back-seam and sleeves—glaucous waistcoats, sprigged with flowers and furnished with buttons of dry brawn-parings; and all this was as nothing; what was prodigious, beyond the bounds of belief, fabulous, positively insane, was the collection of hats that crowned these costumes.

The specimens of extinct headgear, lost in the night of ages, that were collected here! The veterans wore muff-boxes and gas-pipes; some had tall white hats, for all the world like toilet-pails turned upside down, or huge spigots with a hole for the head; others had donned felt hats like sponges, shaggy, long-haired Bolivars, melons on flat brims just like a tart on a dish; others, again, had crush-hats, which swayed and played the accordion on their own account, their ribs showing through the stuff.

The craziness of the gibus hats beats description. Some were very tall, the shaft crowned with a platform larger than the head, like the shako of an Imperial Lancer; others very low, ending in an inverted cone—the mouth of a blunderbuss or a Polish schapska.

And under this Sanhedrim of drunken hats were the mopping, wrinkled faces of very old men, with whiskers like white rabbits’ paws, and bristles like tooth-brushes in their nostrils.

Durtal shook with inextinguishable laughter at this carnival of antiquities; but his mirth was soon over; he saw two Little Sisters of the Poor who were in charge of this school of fossils, and he understood. These poor creatures were dressed in clothes that had been begged, the rummage of wardrobes, for which the owners had no further use. Then the queerness of their outfit was pathetic; the Little Sisters must have been at infinite trouble to utilize these leavings of charity; and the old children, recking little of fashion, plumed themselves with pride at being so fine.

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Durtal followed to the cathedral. When he reached the little square, the procession, caught by a gale of wind, was struggling and clinging to the banners, which bellied like the sails of a ship, carrying on the men who clutched the poles. At last, more or less easily, all the people were swallowed up in the basilica. The *Te Deum* was pouring out in a torrent from the organ. At this moment it really seemed as though, under the impulsion of this glorious hymn, the church, springing heavenward in a rapturous flight, were rising higher and higher; the echo resounded down the ages, repeating the hymn of triumph which had so often been sung under that roof; and for once the music was in harmony with the building, and spoke the language which the cathedral had learnt in its infancy.

Durtal was exultant. It seemed to him that Our Lady smiled down from those glowing windows, that She was touched by these accents, created by the saints she had loved, to embody for ever, in a definite melody, and in unique words, the scattered praise of the faithful, the unformulated rejoicing of the multitude.

Suddenly his exalted mood was sobered. The *Te Deum* was ended; a roll of drums and a clarion flourish rang out from the transept. And while the brass band of Chartres cannonaded the old walls with the balista of mere noise, he fled to breathe away from the crowd, which, however, did not nearly fill the church; and then, after the ceremony, he went to see the parade of representatives of the various institutions in the town, who came to pay their respects to the new Bishop in his palace.

There he could laugh and not be ashamed. The forecourt was packed full of priests. All the superiors of the different Archdeaconries—Chartres, Chateaudun, Nogent le Rotrou, and Dreux—had left there, within the great gate, their following of parish priests and cures, who were pacing round and round the green circus of a grass plot.

The big-wigs of the town, not at all less ridiculous than the pensioners of the Little Sisters of the Poor, crowded in, driving the ecclesiastics into the garden walks. Teratology seemed to have emptied out its specimen bottles; it was a seething swarm of human larvae, of strange heads—bullet-shaped, egg-shaped, faces as seen through a bottle or in a distorting mirror, or escaped from one of Redon’s grotesque albums; a perfect museum of monsters on the move. The stagnation of monotonous toil, handed down for generations from father to son in a city of the dead, was stamped on every face, and the Sunday-best festivity of the day added a touch of the absurd to hereditary ugliness.

Every black coat in Chartres had come out to take the air. Some dated from the days of the Directory, swallowed up the wearer’s neck, climbed up high behind the nape, muffled the ears and padded the shoulders; others had shrunk by lying in the drawer, and their sleeves, much too short, cut the wearer round the armholes so that he dared not move.

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A miasma of benzine and camphor exhaled from these groups. The clothes, only that morning taken out of pickle to be aired by the good wife, were pestilential. The stove-pipe hats were to match. Left to themselves on wardrobe shelves, they had surely grown taller; they towered immense, displaying on their mill-board column a thin covering of hairs.

This assembly of worthies admired and congratulated each other; clasped hands encased in white gloves—gloves scoured with paraffin, cleaned with indiarubber or breadcrumb. Presently a retiring wave cleared a space in the crowd of priests and laymen, who shrank back hat in hand to make way for an old hearse of a landau, drawn by a consumptive horse and driven by a sort of Moudjik, a coachman with a puffy face behind a thicket of hair sprouting on his cheeks and his mouth, in his ears and nose. This vehicle came to an anchor before the front steps, and out of it stepped a fat man, blown out like a bladder and buttoned up in an uniform with silver lace; after him came a thinner personage in a coat with facings of dark and light blue, and everybody bowed to the Prefet attended by one of his three Councillors.

They had lifted their plumed cocked hats, distributed a dole of hand-shaking, and vanished into the vestibule when the army made its appearance, represented by a Colonel of Cuirassiers, some officers of the Artillery and the Commissariat, a few subalterns of Infantry, and one gendarme.

This was all.

Within an hour of this reception the exhausted town was asleep again, not having energy enough even to remove the poles; Lazarus had gone back to his sepulchre, the resuscitated antiquities had relapsed into death; the streets were empty; reaction had ensued; Chartres would be exhausted for months by this outbreak.

“What a sty it is! What a hole!” cried Durtal to himself.

On certain days, tired of spending his afternoons shut up with his books or of attending service in the cathedral, hearing the canons languidly playing rackets from side to side of the choir with the Psalms, of which they tossed the verses to and fro in a mumbling tone, he would go down after dinner and smoke cigarettes in the little Place. At Chartres, eight o’clock in the evening was as three in the morning in any other town; every light was out, every house closed.

The priesthood, eager for bed, had shut up shop. No prayers to the Virgin, no Benediction, nothing in this cathedral! At such an hour, kneeling in the dark, you feel as if the Mother were more immediately present, nearer, more intimately your own; but these moments of confidence, when it is easier to tell Her all your trivial woes, were unknown at Notre Dame. No one was worn out by midnight prayer in that church!

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But though he could not go in, Durtal could prowl round and about it. And then, scarcely seen by the light of the poverty-stricken lamps standing here and there on the square, the cathedral assumed strange aspects. The portals yawned as caverns full of blackness, and the outer shape of the body of the building, from the towers to the apse, with its abutments and buttresses merely guessed at in the dark, stood up like a cliff worn away by invisible waves. It might have been a mountain, its summit jagged by storms, eaten into deep caverns at the foot by a vanished ocean; and on going nearer he could in the gloom imagine ill-defined paths steeply running up the cliff, or winding on shelves at the edge of a rock; and, occasionally, midway on one of these dark paths, some white statue of a Bishop would start forth under a moonbeam, like a ghost haunting the ruins, and blessing all comers with uplifted fingers of stone.

These wanderings in the precincts of the cathedral, which by daylight was so light and slender, and in the dark seemed so ponderous and threatening, were ill-adapted to cure Durtal of his melancholy.

This illusion of rocks riven by the lightning, of caverns deserted by the waves, plunged him into fresh reveries, and at last threw him back on himself, ending, after many divagations of mind, in the contemplation of the ruin within him. Then once more he sounded his soul, and tried to reduce his thoughts to some sort of order.

“I am simply bored to death,” said he to himself, “and why?” And by dint of analyzing his condition he came to this conclusion: “My state of boredom is not simple but two-fold; or, if it is indeed all of a piece, it may be divided into two very distinct phases: I am bored by myself, independently of place, of home, of books; and I am also bored by provincial life—the special form of boredom inherent in Chartres.

“Bored by myself—ah, yes, most heartily! How tired I am of watching myself, of trying to detect the secret of my disgust and contentiousness. When I contemplate my life I could sum it up thus: the past has been horrible; the present seems to me feeble and desolate; the future—is appalling.”

He paused, and then went on,—

“During my first days here I was happy in the dream suggested by this cathedral. I believed it would re-act on my life, that it would people the solitude I felt within me, that it would, in a word, be a help to me in this provincial atmosphere. But I beguiled myself. In fact, it still weighs on me, it still holds me wrapped in the mild gloom of its crypt; but I can now reason about it, I can scrutinize its details, I try to talk to it of art, and in these inquiries I have lost the unreasoning sense of its environment, the silent fascination of the whole.

“I am less conscious now of its soul than of its body. I tried to study archaeology, that contemptible anatomy of building, and I have fallen humanly in love with its beauty; the

spiritual aspect has vanished, to leave nothing behind but the earthly part. Alas! I was determined to see, and I have wrecked trust; it is the eternal allegory of Psyche over again!

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“And besides—besides—is not the weariness that is crushing me to some extent the fault of the Abbe Gevresin? By compelling me to much repetition he has exhausted in me the soothing and, at the same time, subversive virtue of the Sacrament; and the most evident result of this treatment is that my soul has collapsed and has no spirit to reinvigorate it.

“No, no,” he went on presently. “Here I am working back on my perennial presumption, my incessant round of cares; and once more I am unjust to the Abbe. But it is certainly no fault of his if frequent Communion makes me cold. I look for sensations; but the very first thing should be to convince myself that such cravings are contemptible, and next, to understand clearly that it is precisely because Communion is so frigid that it is the more meritorious and virtuous, yes, that is very easy to say; but where is the Catholic who prefers such coldness to a glow? The saints may, no doubt; but even they suffer under it! It is so natural to entreat God for a little joy, to look forward to an Union consummated by a loving word, a sign—a mere nothing that may show that He is present.

“Say what they may, we cannot help being pained by a dead absorption of that living bread! And it is very hard to admit that Our Lord is wise when He keeps us in ignorance of the ills from which it preserves us and the progress it enables us to make, since, but for that, we might be defenceless against the attacks of self-conceit and the assaults of vanity—helpless against ourselves.

“In short, whatever the reason, I am no better off at Chartres than in Paris,” was his conclusion. And when these reflections beset him, especially on Sundays, he regretted having accompanied the Abbe Gevresin into the country.

In Paris, in old days, he at any rate got through the hours at the services. He could attend Mass in the morning at the Benedictine chapel or at Saint Severin, and go to Saint Sulpice for vespers or compline.

Here there was nothing; and yet where were there more promising conditions for the performance of Gregorian music than at Chartres?

Setting aside a few antiquated basses who could only bark, and whom it would be necessary to dismiss, there was a whole sheaf of rich young voices, a school of nearly a hundred boys who could have rolled out in clear, sweet tones the broad melodies of the old plain-song.

But in this ill-starred cathedral an inept precentor gave out, by way of liturgical canticles, a perfect menagerie of outlandish tunes, which, let loose on Sunday, seemed to scamper like marmosets up the pillars and under the roof. And the artless voices of the choir-boys were drilled to these musical monkey-tricks. At Chartres it was impossible to attend High Mass in the cathedral with any decent devotion.

The other services were not much better; indeed, Durtal was reduced to attending vespers at Notre Dame de la Breche, in the lower town, a chapel where the priest, a friend of the Abbe Plomb, had introduced the use of Solesmes, and patiently trained a little choir composed of faithful working-men and pious boys.

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The voices, especially the trebles, were not first-rate; but the priest, being a skilled musician, had contrived to train and soften them, and had, in fact, succeeded in getting the Benedictine art accepted in his church.

Unfortunately it was so ugly, so painfully adorned with images, that only by shutting his eyes could Durtal endure to remain in Notre Dame de la Breche.

In the midst of this surge of reflections on his soul, on Paris, on the Eucharist, on music, on Chartres, Durtal was at last quite bewildered, not knowing where he was. Now and then, however, he recovered some tranquillity, and then he was astonished at himself, he could not understand himself.

“Why regret Paris—why, indeed?” he would ask himself. “Was the life I led there unlike that I lead here? Were not the churches there—Notre Dame de Paris, to name but one—just as much to be execrated for sacrilegious *bravuras* as Notre Dame de Chartres? On the other hand, I never went out there to lounge in the tiresome streets; I saw nobody but the Abbe Gevresin and Madame Bavoil, and I see them still, and oftener, in this town. I have even gained a friend by the move, a learned and agreeable companion, in the Abbe Plomb. So why?”

And then one morning, unexpectedly, every thing was plain to him. He saw quite clearly that he was on the wrong track, and without even seeking for it he found the right one.

To discover the unknown source of his flaccid longing for he knew not what, and his inexplicable dissatisfaction, he had only to look back a little way and pause at La Trappe. He saw now everything had begun there. Having reached that culminating point of his retrospect, he could, as it were, stand on a height and command a view of the declining years since he had left the monastery; and now, gazing at that descending panorama of his life, he discerned this:—

That from the time of his return to Paris a craving for the cloister had been incessantly permeating his being; he had unremittingly cherished the dream of retiring from the world, of living peacefully as a recluse near to God.

He had, to be sure, only thought of it definitely in the form of impossible longings and regrets, for he knew full well that neither was his body strong enough nor his soul staunch enough for him to bury himself as a Trappist. Still, once started from that spring-board, his imagination flew off at a tangent, overleaped every obstacle, floated in discursive reveries where he saw himself as a Friar in some easy-going convent under the rule of a merciful Order, devoted to liturgies and adoring art.

He could but shrug his shoulders, indeed, when he came back to himself, and smile at these dreams of the future which he indulged in hours of vacuous idleness; but this self-contempt of a man who catches himself in the very act of flagrant nonsense was

nevertheless succeeded by the hope of not losing all the advantages of an honest delusion; and he could remount on a chimera which he thought less wild, as leading to a *via media*, a compromise, fancying that by moderating his ideal he should find it more attainable.

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He assured himself that, in default of a really conventual life, he might perhaps achieve an illusory imitation of it by avoiding the turmoil of Paris and burying himself in a hole. And he now saw that he had completely cheated himself when, on discussing the question as to whether he should leave Paris and go to settle at Chartres, he had believed that he was yielding to the Abbe Gevresin's arguments and Madame Bavoil's urgency.

Certainly, without admitting it, without accounting for it, he had really acted on the prompting of this cherished dream. Would not Chartres be a sort of monastic haven, of open cloister, where he could enjoy his liberty and not have to give up his comforts? Would it not, at any rate, for lack of an unattainable hermitage, be a sop thrown to his desires; and supposing he could succeed in reducing his too exorbitant demands, give him the final repose and peace for which he had yearned ever since his return from La Trappe?

And nothing of all this had been realized. The unsettled feeling he had experienced in Paris had pursued him to Chartres. He was, as it were, on the march, or perched on a bough; he could not feel at home, but as a man lingering on in furnished rooms, whence he must presently depart.

In short, he had deluded himself when he had fancied that a man might make a cell of a solitary room in silent surroundings; the religious jog-trot in a provincial atmosphere had no resemblance to the life of a monastery. There was no illusion or suggestion of the convent.

This check, when he recognized it, added to the ardour or his regrets; and the distress which in Paris had lurked latent and ill-defined, developed at Chartres clear and unmistakable.

Then began an unremitting struggle with himself.

The Abbe Gevresin, whom he consulted, would only smile and treat him as in a novices' school or a seminary a youthful postulant is treated who confesses to deep melancholy and persistent weariness. His malady is not taken seriously; he is told that all his companions suffer the same temptations, the same qualms; he is sent away comforted, while his superiors seem to be laughing at him.

But at the end of a little time this method no longer succeeded. Then the Abbe was firm with Durtal, and one day, when his penitent was bemoaning himself, he replied,—

"It is an attack you must get over," and then he added lightly after a silence, "And it will not be the last or the worst."

At this Durtal turned restive; the Abbe, however, drove him to bay, wanting to make him confess how senseless his struggles were.

“The idea of the cloister haunts you,” said he. “Well, then, what is there to hinder you? Why do you not retire to a Trappist convent?”

“You know very well that I am not strong enough to endure the rule.”

“Then become an oblate; go to join Monsieur Bruno at Notre Dame de l’Atre.”

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“No, indeed, not that, at any rate. To be an oblate at La Trappe is the same thing as remaining at Chartres! It is a mere half-measure. Monsieur Bruno will always remain a boarder; he will never be a monk. He gets all the disadvantages of the cloister, and none of the benefits.”

“But there are other monasteries besides those of La Trappe,” replied the Abbe. “Be a Benedictine Father or oblate, a black Friar. Their rule seems to be mild; you will live in a world of learned men and writers; what more would you have?”

“I do not say—but—”

“But what?”

“I know nothing of them—”

“Nothing can be easier than to get to know them. The Abbe Plomb is a welcome friend at Solesmes. He can give all the introductions you can wish to that convent.”

“Good; that is worth thinking about. I will consult the Abbe,” said Durtal, rising to take leave of the old priest.

“The Black Dog is troubling you, our friend,” observed Madame Bavoil, who had overheard the two men’s conversation from the next room, the door between being open; and she came in, her breviary in her hand.

“Ah, ha!” she went on, looking at him over her spectacles, “do you suppose that by moving your soul from place to place you can change it? Your trouble is neither in the air nor outside you, but within you. On my word, to hear you talk, one might fancy that by travelling from one spot to another every discord could be avoided, that a man could escape from himself! Nothing can be more false. Ask the Father—”

And when Durtal, smiling awkwardly, was gone, Madame Bavoil questioned her master.

“What is really the matter with him?”

“He is being broken by the ordeal of dryness,” replied the priest. “He is enduring a painful but not dangerous operation. So long as he preserves a love of prayer, and neglects none of his religious exercises, all will be well. That is the touchstone which enables us to discern whether such an attack is sent from Heaven.”

“But, Father, he must at any rate be comforted.”

“I can do nothing but pray for him.”

“Another question: our friend is possessed by the notion of a monastic life; perhaps you ought to send him to a convent.”

The Abbe gave an evasive shrug.

“Dryness of spirit and the dreams to which it gives rise are not the sign of a vocation,” said he. “I might even say that they have a greater chance of thriving than of diminishing in the cloister. From that point of view conventual life might be bad for him. Still, that is not the only question to be considered—there is something else—and besides, who knows?” He was silent, and presently added: “Much may be possible. Give me my hat, Madame Bavoil. I will go and talk over Durtal with the Abbe Plomb.”

CHAPTER IX.

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This discussion had been of use to Durtal; it took him out of the generalities over which he had persistently mused since his arrival at Chartres. The Abbe had, in fact, shown him his bearings, and pointed out a navigable channel leading to a definite end, a haven familiar to all. The monastery which had lingered in Durtal's fancy as a mere confused picture, apart from time, without place or date, deriving nothing from his memories of La Trappe but the sense of discipline, and on to which he had at once engrafted the fancy of an abbey of a more literary and artistic stamp, governed by a conciliatory rule, in a milder atmosphere—that ideal retreat, half borrowed from reality and half the fabric of a dream—was taking shape. By speaking of an Order that existed, mentioning it by name and actually specifying a House under its rule, the Abbe had given Durtal substantial food instead of the argumentative wordiness of a mania; he had afforded him something better to chew than the empty air on which he had fed so long.

The state of uncertainty and indecision he had been living in was at end; his choice now lay between remaining at Chartres or retiring to Solesmes; and at once, without delay, he set to work to read and reconsider the works of Saint Benedict.

This rule, summed up more particularly in a series of paternal injunctions and affectionate advice, was a marvel of gentleness and tactfulness. Every craving of the soul was described, every misery of the body foreseen. It knew so precisely how to ask much and yet not to exact too much, that it had yielded without breaking, satisfied the movements of different ages, and remained, in the nineteenth century what it had been in mediaeval times.

Then how merciful, how wise it was when addressing itself to the feeble and infirm. "The sick shall be served as though they were Christ in person," says Saint Benedict; and his anxiety for his sons, his urgent recommendations to the Superiors to love and visit the younger brethren, to neglect nothing that may assuage their ills, reveals a maternal care that is truly touching on the patriarch's part.

"Yes, yes," muttered Durtal, "but there are in this rule other articles which seem less acceptable to miscreants of my stamp. This, for instance: 'No man shall dare to give or to receive anything without the Abbot's permission, or to have or hold anything as his own—absolutely nothing, neither book, nor tablets, nor pointer—in a word, nothing whatever, inasmuch as they are not allowed to call even their body or their will their own.'

"This is a terrible sentence of abnegation and obedience," he sighed, "only, is this law, which is binding on the Fathers and the Serving Brothers, equally strict for the Oblates, the aegrotant members of the Benedictine army, who are not mentioned in the text? This remains to be seen. It will be well too to ascertain how far it is applied, for the rule is on the whole so skilful, so elastic, so broad that it can be made at option very austere or very mild.

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“With the Trappists the ordinances are so closely drawn that they are stifling; with the Benedictines, on the contrary, they would be light and airy enough to allow the soul to breathe easily. One Fraternity clings scrupulously to the letter; the other, on the contrary, draws inspiration from the Spirit of the Saint.

“Before goading myself along this road I must consult the Abbe Plomb,” was Durtal’s conclusion. He went to call on the priest; but he was absent for some days.

As a precaution against indolence, a measure of spiritual discipline, he threw himself on the cathedral once more, and tried, now that he was less overpowered by speculation, to read its meaning.

The stone text which he was bent on understanding was puzzling, if not difficult to decipher, in consequence of the interpolated passages, repetitions, and parts eliminated or abridged; in fact, to say the truth, as the result of a certain incoherence, accounted for no doubt by the circumstance that the work had been carried on, altered or extended by successive artists during a lapse of two hundred years.

The image-makers of the thirteenth century had not always taken into account the ideas expressed by their precursors; they had repeated them, expressing them from their own point of view in their personal tongue; thus, for instance, they had introduced a second version of the signs of the seasons and of the zodiac. The sculptors of the twelfth century had made a calendar in stone on the western front; those of the thirteenth did the same in the right-hand doorway of the north porch, justifying this reduplication of the subject on the same church by the fact that the zodiac and the seasons may in symbolism have several interpretations.

According to Tertullian the death and new birth of the circling years afforded an image of the Resurrection at the end of the world. According to others the Sun, surrounded by the twelve Signs, was emblematic of the Sun of Justice surrounded by his twelve Apostles. The Abbe Bulteau sees in these stony calendars a rendering of the passage in which St. Paul declares to the Hebrews that “Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” while the Abbe Clerval gives this simple interpretation: that all times belong to Christ, and are bound to glorify Him.

“But this is a mere detail,” said Durtal to himself. “In the whole structure of the cathedral itself we can trace two-fold purposes.

“The architectural mass of Notre Dame de Chartres as a whole may be divided, externally, into three great parts, as indicated by the three grand porches. The western or royal portal, which is the ceremonial entrance to the sanctuary, between the two towers; the north porch on the side next the bishop’s palace, beyond the new spire; the south porch, flanked by the old spire.

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“Now, the subjects represented on the royal front and in the south porch are identical. Each glorifies the Triumph of the Incarnate Word, with this difference: that on the south porch Our Lord is not exalted alone as He is on the west front, but in the person also of the Elect and of His Saints. If to these two subjects, which may be considered as one —the Saviour glorified in Himself and in His Saints—we add the praises of the Virgin set forth in the north front we find this result: a poem in praise of the Mother and the Son as declaring the final cause of the Church itself.

“By studying the variations between the south and west fronts we perceive that, though in both Jesus is shown in the same act of blessing the earth, and though both are almost exclusively restricted to illustrating the Gospel, leaving the scenes of the Old Testament to the arches on the north, they differ greatly from each other, and are no less unlike the portals of all other cathedrals.

“In total disagreement with the mystic rituals observed almost everywhere else—at Notre Dame de Paris, at Bourges, at Amiens, to name but three churches—the Last Judgment, which is seen on the main entrance of those basilicas, is at Chartres relegated to the south porch.

“And in the same way the Tree of Jesse, which at Amiens and Reims and the cathedral at Rouen, is displayed on the royal porch, is at Chartres on the north side of the building; and many more similar changes might be noted,” said Durtal to himself. “But, which is yet more strange, the parallel so commonly to be observed between the subjects treated on the inner and outer surface of the same wall, in sculptured stone without and painted glass within, does not constantly exist at Chartres. This, for instance, is the case with regard to the genealogical Tree of Christ, which is seen inside in glass on the upper wall of the west front, and is carved outside on the north porch. At the same time, when the subjects do not entirely coincide on the front and back of the page, they are often complementary, or carry out the same idea. Thus the Last Judgment, which is not to be found on the outside of the north front, blazes out, within, from the great rose window above on the same side. This, then, is not cumulative but appropriate development—history begun in one dialect and finished in another.

“In short, it is the ruling idea of the poem which governs all these differences and harmonies; which comes out like a refrain after each of these three strophes in stone; the idea that this church belongs to Our Mother. The cathedral is faithful to its name, loyal to its dedication. The Virgin is Lady over all. She fills the whole interior, and appears outside even on the western and southern portals, which are not especially Hers, above a door, on a capital, high in air on a pediment. The angelic salutation of art has been repeated without intermission by the painters and sculptors of every age. The cathedral of Chartres is truly the Virgin’s fief.

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“And on the whole,” thought Durtal, “in spite of the discrepancies in some of its texts, the cathedral is legible.

“It contains a rendering of the Old and New Testaments; it also engrafts on the sacred Scriptures the Apocryphal traditions relating to the Virgin and St. Joseph, the lives of the saints preserved in the Golden Legend of Jacopo da Voragine and the special biographies of the aspiring recluses of the diocese of Chartres. It is a vast encyclopaedia of mediaeval learning as concerning God, the Virgin, and the Elect.

“Didron is almost justified in saying that it is a compendium of those great encyclopaedias composed in the thirteenth century; only the theory that he bases on this truthful observation wanders off and becomes faulty as soon as he tries to work it out.

“He concludes, in fact, by conceiving of this cathedral as no more than a rendering of the *Speculum Universale*, the *Mirror of the World* of Vincent of Beauvais; above all, like that work, as an epitome of practical life and a record of the human race throughout the ages. In point of fact,” said Durtal to himself, as he took the *Christian Iconography* of that writer down from the shelf, “in point of fact, according to him, our stone pages ought to follow in such succession that, beginning with the opening chapter on the north, they would end with the paragraphs on the south. Then we should find the narrative in the following order: First of all the genesis, the Biblical cosmogony, the creation of man and woman and Eden; and then, after the expulsion of the first pair, the tale of man’s redemption by suffering.

“‘Whereby,’ says he, ’the sculptor took occasion to teach the hinds of La Beauce how to work with their hands and their head. Here, to the right of Adam’s Fall, he carves under the eyes and for the perpetual edification of all men, a calendar of stone with all the labours of the field, and then a catechism of industry, showing the works done in the town; finally, for the labours of the mind, a manual of the liberal arts.”

“Then, thus instructed, man lives on from generation to generation, until the end of the world, set forth in the images on the south side.

“This treasury of sculpture would thus include a compendium of the history of nature and of science, a glossary of morality and art, a biography of humanity, a panorama of the whole world. Thus it would very really represent the *Mirror of the World*, and be an edition in stone of Vincent of Beauvais’ book.

“There is only one difficulty. The Dominican’s *Speculum Universale* dates from many years later than the erection of this cathedral; also, in developing his theory, Didron does not take into account the perspective and relations of the statuary. He assigns equal importance to a small figure half hidden in the moulding of an arch and to the large statues in the foreground supporting the picture in relief of Our Lord and His

Mother. Indeed, it might be said that these are the very figures he overlooks; and, in the same way, he takes no account of the western doors, which he could not force into his scheme.

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“This archaeologist’s ideas, in fact, cannot be maintained. He subordinates leading features to accessory details, and ends in a kind of rationalism entirely opposed to the mysticism of the period. He investigates the Middle Ages by levelling down the divine idea to the lowest earthly meaning, and referring to man what is intended to apply to God. The prayer of sculpture, chanted by the ages of faith, becomes, in the introduction to his work, nothing more than an encyclopaedia of industrial and moral teaching.

“Let us look closer at all this,” Durtal went on, and he went out to smoke a cigarette on the Place. “That royal doorway,” thought he, as he walked on, “is the entrance to the great front by which kings were admitted. It is likewise the first chapter of the book, and it sums up the whole of the building.

“But certainly these conclusions forestalling the premisses are very strange; this recapitulation, placed at the very beginning of the work, when it ought, in fact, to be placed at the end, in the apse!

“And yet,” he reflected, “putting this aside, the *facade* thus worked out fills the position in this basilica which the second of the Sapiential Books holds in the Bible. It answers to the Book of Psalms, which is in a certain sense an epitome of all the Books of the Old Testament, and consequently, at the same time, a prophetic memento of the whole of revealed religion.

“The western side of the cathedral is similar; only, it is a compendium not of the older but of the newer Scriptures; an epitome of the Gospels, an abridgment of the books of St. John and the synoptical Gospels.

“In building this, the twelfth century did more. It added more details to this glorification of Christ, following Him from before His birth, through the Bible story, till after His Death and to His Apotheosis as described in the Apocalypse; it completed the Scriptures by the Apocryphal writings, telling the tale of Saint Joachim and Saint Anna, recording many episodes of the marriage of the Virgin and Joseph derived from the Gospel of the Nativity of the Virgin and *pseudo*-Gospel of St. James the Less.

“But, indeed, in every early sanctuary such use was made of these legends, and no church is really intelligible when they are ignored.

“Nor is there anything to surprise us in this mixture of the authentic Gospels and mere fables. When the Church refused to recognize by canonical authority the divine origin of the Gospels of the Childhood, of the Nativity, the writings of St. Thomas the Israelite, of Nicodemus, of St. James the Less, and the History of Joseph, it had no intention of rejecting them altogether, and consigning them to the limbo of inventions and lies. In spite of certain anecdotes which are, to say the least of it, ridiculous, there may be found in these texts some accurate details and authentic narratives which the Evangelists, cautiously reticent, did not think proper to record. The Middle Ages by no

means lent themselves to heresy when they ascribed to these purely human Scriptures the value of probable legend and the interest of pious reminiscence.

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“As a whole,” thought Durtal, who was now standing in front of the doors between the two towers, the royal western front, “as a whole, this vast palimpsest, with its 719 figures, is easy to decipher if we avail ourselves of the key applied by the Abbe Bulteau in his monograph on this cathedral.

“Starting from the new belfry and working across the western front to the old belfry, we follow the history of Christ embodied in nearly two hundred statues lost in the capitals. It starts with Christ’s ancestors, beginning with the story of Anna and Joachim, and giving the legend in minute images. Out of deference perhaps to the Inspired Books, this history creeps along the wall, making itself small so as to be inconspicuous, and narrates, as if in secret, by artless mimicry, poor Joachim’s despair when a scribe of the Temple named Reuben reproves him for being childless, and rejects his offerings in the name of the Lord who has not blessed him; then Joachim, in sorrow, separates from his wife and goes away to bewail the curse that has lighted on him, till an angel appears to him and comforts him, and bids him return to his wife, who shall bear a daughter of his begetting.

“Then we see Anna, weeping alone over her barrenness and her widowhood; and the angel comes to her and bids her go forth to meet her husband, and she finds him at the golden gate. And they fall on each other’s neck and go home together. And Anna brings forth Mary, whom they dedicate to the Lord.

“Years then pass, till the time comes when the Virgin is to be betrothed. The High Priest bids all of the children of the House of David who are of age, and not yet married, to come to the altar with a rod in their hand; and to discern which of these shall be chosen to marry the Virgin, Abiathar, the High Priest, inquires of the Most High, who repeats the prophecy of Isaiah which declares that a flower shall come out of Jesse on which the Holy Spirit shall rest.

“And immediately the rod blossoms of one of those present, Joseph the Carpenter, and a dove descends from heaven to settle on it.

“So Mary is given to Joseph, and the marriage takes place; Messiah is born, and Herod massacres the Innocents; and there the gospel of the Nativity ends, and the story is taken up by the Holy Scriptures, which follow the Life of Jesus to the hour of His last appearance on earth after His death.

“These scenes, set forth in small simple imagery, serve as a border at the bottom of the vast presentment which extends from tower to tower over all three doors.

“Here the scenes are placed which are intended to attract the crowd by plainer and more visible images; here we see the general theme of this portal in all its splendour, recapitulating the Gospels and achieving the purpose of the Church itself.

“On the left we see the Ascension of Our Lord, soaring triumphant on clouds rendered by a waving scroll held on each side, in the Byzantine manner, by two angels; while below, the Apostles with uplifted faces, gaze at this ascension pointed out to them by other angels who have descended and hover over them, their fingers extended towards the sky.

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“The hollow moulding of the arch is filled up with a calendar and zodiac of stone.

“The right-hand side shows the Assumption of Our Lady, seated on a throne, sceptre in hand, and holding the Infant, who blesses the world. Beneath are the episodes of Her life: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the homage of the shepherds, and the presentation of Jesus to the High Priest; and the bend of the arch, rising to a point like a mitre above the Mother, has the mouldings enriched with two lines of figures, one of archangels bearing censers, with wings closely imbricated as if with tiles, the other of personifications of the seven liberal arts, each represented by two figures—one allegorical, and the other the presentment of the inventor, or of the paragon of that art in antiquity. This is the same scheme of expression as we see in the cathedral at Laon; the paraphrase in sculpture of scholastic theology, and a rendering in images of the text of Albertus Magnus, who, after rehearsing the perfections of the Virgin, declares that She possessed a perfect knowledge of the seven arts: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music—all the lore of the Middle Ages.

“Finally, in the middle, the great doorway illustrates the subject round which the storied carving of the other doors all centres: the Glorification of Our Lord, as Saint John beheld it at Patmos; the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, spread open on the forefront of the basilica, above the grand entrance to the church.

“Jesus is seated, on His head the cruciform nimbus, robed in the linen talaris and draped in a mantle which hangs in a fall of close pleats; His bare feet rest on a stool, emblematical of the earth, according to Isaiah. With one hand He blesses the world; in the other He holds the Book with the seven Seals. About him, in the oval glory or *Vesica*, we see the Tetramorph—the four evangelical emblems with closely fretted wings: the winged cherub, the lion, the eagle, and the ox, figuring St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. John, and St. Luke. Above are the twelve Apostles holding scrolls and books.

“And to complete the Apocalyptic vision, in the hollow mouldings of the arch are the twelve Angels and four and twenty Elders described by St. John, in white raiment and crowned with gold, playing on musical instruments, and singing in the perpetual adoration which some few souls, dwelling isolated in the midst of the indifference of this age, still carry on. They magnify the glory of the Most High, throwing themselves on their faces when the Evangelical Beasts, responding to the fervent and solemn prayers that go up from the earth, utter, in a voice that resounds above the roar of thunder, the word which in its four letters, its two syllables, sums up every duty of man to God—the humble, loving, obedient *Amen*.

“The text has been very closely followed by the image-maker, excepting with regard to the Beasts, for one detail is omitted; they are not represented with the eyes of which the prophet tells us they were ’full within.’

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“Thus, regarding this whole front as a triptych, we find that in the left doorway we have the Ascension framed in the signs of the zodiac; in the middle, the triumph of Jesus as described by the Seer; on the right, the triumph of Mary, surrounded by certain of Her attributes. The whole constitutes the scheme to be carried out by the architect: the Glorification of the Incarnate Word.

“In fact, as the Abbe Clerval says in his important work on the cathedral of Chartres, ’we have the scenes of His life which prepared the way for His glory; we have this actual entrance into glory; and then His eternal glorification by the Angels, the Saints, and the Blessed Virgin.’

“From the point of view of artistic execution the work in the grand subject is crisp and splendid; the smaller figures are obscure and mutilated. The panel representing the Virgin Mary has suffered severely, and both it and that representing the Ascension are strangely rough and barbarous, quite inferior to the central tympanum, which contains the most living, the most haunting, of many figures of Christ.

“Nowhere, indeed, in mediaeval sculpture does the Redeemer appear as more saddened or more pitiful, or under a more solemn aspect. Seen in profile, His hair flowing over His shoulders, smooth in front and divided down the middle, with a nose slightly turned up and a heavy mouth under a thick moustache, with a short, curling beard and a long neck, He suggests not so much a Byzantine Christ, such as the artists of that time were wont to paint and carve, but a pre-Raphaelite Christ designed by a Fleming, or even derived from the Dutch, showing indeed that slightly earthy taint which reappeared at a later time with a less pure type of head, at the end of the fifteenth century, in the picture by Cornelis Van Oostzaanen, in the gallery at Cassel.

“He rises enthroned, almost sorrowful in His triumph, unamazed as He blesses, with pathetic resignation, the generations of sinners who for seven centuries have gazed up at Him with inquisitive, unloving eyes as they cross the square; and all turn their back on Him, caring little enough for this Saviour unlike the head familiar to them, recognizing Him only with sheep-like features and a pleasing expression; such, in short, as the foppish image at the cathedral at Amiens before which the lovers of a softer type go into ecstasies.

“Above this Christ are the three windows invisible from outside, and over them again the huge dead rose window, looking like a blind eye, and lighting up, like the windows, only when seen from within, when they glow with clear flame and pale sapphires set in stone; then, higher yet, above the rose, is the gallery of French kings, under the great triangular gable between the towers.

“And the two belfries fling up their spires; the old one carved in soft limestone, imbricated with scales, rising in one bold flight to end in a point, and send up a vapour of prayer among the clouds; the new one, pierced like lace, chiselled like a jewel,

wreathed with foliage and crockets of vine, rises with coquettish dalliance, trying to make up for lack of the inspired flight and humble entreaty of its senior by babbling prayer and ingratiating smiles; to persuade the Father by childlike lisping.

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“But to return to the west portal,” Durtal went on, “in spite of the importance of its grand decoration, displaying the Eternal Triumph of the Word, the interest of artists is irresistibly attracted to the ground storey of the building, where nineteen colossal stone statues stand in the space that extends from tower to tower; part against the wall, and part in the recesses of the door-bays.

“The finest sculpture in the world is certainly that we find here. There are seven kings, seven saints or prophets, and five queens. There were originally twenty-four of these statues, but five have disappeared and left no trace.

“They all wear glories excepting the three first, nearest to the new belfry, and all stand under canopies of pierced work, representing roofs or tabernacles, palaces, bridges—a whole town in little, Sion for children, a dwarfed New Jerusalem.

“They all are standing, each on a column with a guilloche pattern; on plinths carved over with lozenges, diamond points, fir-cone scales, with chain patterns, fretwork, billets, chequers like a chess-board of which the alternate squares are hollowed out; and paved with a sort of mosaic, inlaid patterns which, like the borders of the church windows, suggest a reminiscence of Mussulman goldsmith’s work, and show the origin of the style brought from the East by the Crusaders.

“The three first statues in the recess to the left, nearest the new spire, do not stand on any pattern borrowed from the heathen; they are trampling on indescribable monsters. One, a king whose head having been lost, has been fitted with the head of a queen, treads on a man entangled by serpents; another king stands on a woman who holds a reptile by the tail with one hand, and with the other strokes the plait of her own hair; the third, a queen, her head crowned with a plain gold fillet and her shape that of a woman with child, while her face is smiling but commonplace, has at her feet two dragons, a monkey, a toad, a dog, and a snake with an ape’s head. What is the meaning of these enigmas? No one knows—no more, indeed, than we know the names of the sixteen other statues placed along the porch.

“Some believe that they represent the ancestry of the Messiah, but this assertion has no evidence to support it; others find here a mixed assemblage of the heroes of the Old Testament and the benefactors to the Church, but this hypothesis is no less illusory. The truth is that, though all these personages have had sceptres in their hands, scrolls, ribands, and breviaries, not one of them displays the attributes which would serve to identify them in accordance with the religious symbolism of the Middle Ages. At most might we venture to give the name of Daniel to a headless figure because a formless dragon writhes under his feet, emblematical of the Devil conquered by the prophet at Babylon.

“The most striking and the strangest of these figures are the queens.

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“The first, the royal virago with the prominent stomach, is ordinary enough; the last, opposite to this princess at the furthest end of the front near the old tower, has lost half her face, and the remaining portion is not attractive; but the three others, standing in the principal doorway, are matchless.

“The first, tall, slender, and very straight, wears a crown on her brow, a veil, hair banded on each side of a middle parting, and falling in plaits on her shoulders; her nose turns up a little, is somewhat common; her lips firm and judicious; her chin square. The face is not very young. The body is swathed, and rigid, in a large cloak with wide sleeves, and the richly-jewelled sheath of a gown that betrays no feminine outline of figure. She is upright, sexless, shapeless; her waist slight and bound with a girdle of cord, like a Franciscan Sister. She stands looking, with her head slightly bent, attentive to one knows not what, seeing nothing. Has she attained to the perfect negation of all things? Is she living the life of Union with God beyond the worlds, where time is no more? It might be thought so, since it is noteworthy that, in spite of her royal insignia and the magnificence of her costume, she has the self-centred look, the austere demeanour of a nun. She seems more of the cloister than of the Court. Then we wonder who can have placed her on guard by this door, and why, faithful to a charge known to none but herself, she watches, day and night, with her far-away gaze across the square, waiting motionless for some one who for seven hundred years has failed to come.

“She might be an embodiment of Advent, stooping a little to listen to the woeful supplications of man as they rise from earth; in that case, she must be an Old Testament queen, dead long before the birth of the Messiah she perhaps may have prophesied.

“As she holds a book, the Abbe Bulteau thinks it may be a full-length statue of Saint Radegonde. But other princesses have been canonized, and, like her, hold books. At the same time, the monastic aspect of this queen, her emaciated figure, her eye vaguely fixed on the region of internal dreams, would well befit Clotaire’s wife, who retired to a cloister.

“But for what can she be watching? The dreaded arrival of the king bent on tearing her from her Abbey at Poitiers to replace her on the throne? For lack of any information every conjecture must be futile.

“The second statue again represents a king’s wife holding a book. She is younger; she wears neither cloak nor veil; her bosom is full and closely fitted in a clinging dress, tightly drawn over the bust like wet linen; a bodice resembling the Carlovingian *rokette*, fastened on one side. Her hair lies flat in two bands on her forehead, covering her ears and falling in long tresses plaited with ribbon, and ending in loose tufts.

“Her face is wilful and alert, and rather haughty. She is looking out of herself; her beauty is of a more human type, and she knows it. Saint Clotilde, is the Abbe Bulteau’s guess.

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“It is very certain that this Elect lady was not always a pattern of amiability—not what could be called easy to get on with. Before being reproved and chastened we see her in history, as vindictive, unrelenting to pity, eager for retaliation. She would be Clotilde before her repentance—the Queen, before she became a saint.

“But is it really she? The name was given her because a statue of the same period and very like this, which was formerly at Notre Dame de Corbeil, was dubbed with this name. It was, however, subsequently admitted that it represented the Queen of Sheba. Are we then in the presence of that sovereign? And why, if her name is not in the Book of Life, has she a glory?

“It is highly probable that she is neither the wife of Clovis, nor Solomon’s friend—this strange princess who stands before us, at once so earthly and yet more spectral than her sisters; for time has marred her features, injured her skin, dotted her chin with hail-specks, vulgarized her mouth, injured her nose, making it look like the ace of clubs, and put the stamp of death on that living countenance.

“As to the third, she is tall and slender, a fragile spindle, a slim, sylph-like creature, suggesting a taper with the lower portion patterned, embossed, brocaded in the wax itself; she stands magnificently arrayed in a stiff-pleated robe channelled lengthwise, like a stick of celery. The bodice is richly trimmed and stitched; below her waist hangs a cord with loose jewelled knots; on her head is a crown. Both arms are broken; one hand rested on her bosom; in the other she held a sceptre, of which a small portion remains.

“This queen is smiling, artless, and engaging—quite charming. She looks down on all comers with wide open eyes under high-arched brows. Never, at any period, has a more expressive face been formed by the genius of man; it is a masterpiece of childlike grace and saintly innocence.

“Here, amid the pensive architecture of the twelfth century, one of a crowd of devout statues, symbolical to some extent of simple love in an age when men were in perpetual dread of everlasting hell, she seems to stand at the Gate of the Lord as the exorable image of forgiveness. To the terrified souls of habitual sinners who after perseverance in guilt no longer dare cross the threshold of the Sanctuary, she stands kindly reproving such reticence, conquering regrets and soothing terrors by her familiar smile.

“She is the elder sister of the prodigal son, of whom St. Luke indeed makes no mention, but who, if she ever existed, would have pleaded for the absent wanderer, and have insisted with her father on the killing of the fatted calf when the son returned.

“Chartres, to be sure, does not see her in this indulgent aspect; local tradition names her Berthe of the broad foot; but while there is no argument to support this hypothesis, it is in fact quite absurd, as the statue is graced with a nimbus. This mark of holiness

would not have been given to Charlemagne’s mother, whose name is not on the list of the saints of the Church Triumphant.

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“According to the notions of those archaeologists who believe that the sculptured dignitaries of this porch represent the ancestry of Christ, she must be a queen of the Old Testament. But which? As Hello very truly remarks, tears abound in the Scriptures, but laughter is so rare that Sarah’s, when she could not help mocking at the angel who announced that she should bear a son in her old age, has remained on record. So it is in vain that we inquire to what personage of the ancient books this queen’s innocent joy may be ascribed.

“The truth is that she must remain a perennial mystery; she is an angelic, limpid creature, who has attained, no doubt, to the purest joy in the Lord; and withal so attractive, so helpful, that she leaves in us an impression of a healing gesture, the illusion of a blessing made visible to all who crave it. Her right arm indeed is broken at the wrist, and her hand is gone; but we can fancy it there still when we look for it; as a shade, a reflection; it is very plainly seen in the slight fulness of the bosom, as though it were the palm; in the folds of the bodice, which distinctly show the four taper fingers and raised thumb to make the sign of the cross over us.

“How exquisite a forerunner of the Blessed Mother is this royal guardian of the threshold, this sovereign, inviting wanderers to come back to the Church, to enter the door over which She keeps watch, and which is itself one of the symbols of Her Son!” exclaimed Durtal, as he glanced at the opposite figures—such different women! one a nun rather than a queen, her head a little bowed; another, every inch a queen, holding hers aloft; the third saucy, though saintly, her neck neither bent nor assertive, holding herself in a natural attitude, and moderating the august mien of a sovereign by the humble, smiling expression of a saint.

“And perhaps,” said he to himself, “we may see in the first an image of the contemplative life, and in the second the embodied idea of the active life; while the third, like Ruth in the Scriptures, symbolizes both!”

As to the other statues—prophets wearing the Jewish cap with ears, and kings holding missals or sceptres, they too are impossible to identify. One in the middle arch, divided from the so-called Berthe by a king, was more especially interesting to Durtal because it was like Verlaine. The statue had indeed thicker hair, but just as strange a head, a skull with curious bumps, a flattish face, a curling beard, and the same common but kindly look.

Tradition gives this statue the name of St. Jude, and this resemblance is suggestive between the saint whom Christians most neglected, and who for several centuries found so few devotees that suddenly, one day, on the theory that he, less than the others, would have exhausted his credit with God, people took to imploring him for desperate cases, lost souls, and the poet so utterly ignored or so stupidly condemned by the very Catholics to whom he has given the only mystical verses produced since the Middle Ages.

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“They were ill-starred, one as a saint and the other as a poet,” Durtal concluded, as he drew back to get a better view of the front.

It was indeed incredible, with the chasing of silvery flowers wrought on the panes by frost; with its church-drapery, its lace rochets, its fine pierced work, as light as gossamer, running up to the level of the second storey, and forming a fretted frame for the great stone-carvings of the porch. And above that it rose in hermit-like sobriety, unadorned, Cyclopean, with the colossal eye of its dull rose-window between the two towers, one full of windows and richly wrought like the doorway, the other as bare as the facade above the porch.

But after all, what absorbed and possessed Durtal’s mind was still those statues of queens.

He finally thought no more of the rest, listened to nothing but the divine eloquence of their lean slenderness, regarding them only under the semblance of tall flower-stems deep in carved stone tubes and expanding into faces of ingenuous fragrance, of innocent perfume, while Christ, touched and saddened, blessing the world, seemed to bend from His throne above them to inhale the delicate aroma that rose from these up-soaring chalices full of soul. Durtal was wondering—what potent necromancer could evoke the spirits of these royal doorkeepers, compel them to speak, and enable us to overhear the colloquy they perhaps hold when in the evening they seem to withdraw behind the curtain of shadow?

What have they to say to each other—they who have seen Saint Bernard, Saint Louis, Saint Ferdinand, Saint Fulbert, Saint Yves, Blanche of Castille—so many of the Elect walking past on their way into the starry gloom of the nave? Did they cause the death of their companions, the five other statues that have vanished for ever from the little assembly? Do they listen, through the closed doors, to the wailing breath of heart-broken psalms, and the roaring tide of the organ? Can they hear the inane exclamations of the tourists who laugh to see them so stiff and so lengthy? Do they, as many saints have done, smell the fetor of sin, the foul reek of evil in the souls that pass by them? Why, then, who would dare to look at them?

And still Durtal looked at them, for he could not tear himself away; they held him fast by the undying fascination of their mystery; in short, he concluded, they are supra-terrestrial under the semblance of humanity. They have no bodies; it is the soul alone that dwells in the wrought sheath of their raiment; they are in perfect harmony with the cathedral, which, divesting itself of its stones, soars in ecstatic flight above the earth.

The crowning achievement of mystical architecture and statuary are here, at Chartres; the most rapturous, the most superhuman art which ever flourished in the flat plains of La Beauce.

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And now, having contemplated the whole effect of this facade, he went close to it again to examine its minutest accessories and details, to study more closely the robes of these sovereigns; then he observed that no two were alike in their drapery. Some flowed without any broken folds, in ridge and furrow like the fall of rippling water; others hung closely gathered in parallel flutings like the ribs on stems of angelica, and the stern material lent itself to the needs of the dressers, was soft in the figured crape and fustian and fine linen, heavy in the brocade and gold tissue. Every texture was distinct; the necklaces were chased bead by bead; the knots of the girdles might be untied, so naturally were the strands entwined; the bracelets and crowns were pierced and hammered and adorned with gems, each in its setting, as if by practised goldsmiths.

And in many cases the pedestal, the statue, and the canopy were all carved out of one block, in one piece. What were the men who executed such work?

It is probable that they lived in convents, for art was not at that time cultivated or practised but in the precincts of God. And just then they were in their glory in the Ile de France, the Orleans country, the provinces of Maine, Anjou, and Berry, for we find statues of this type in all; still, it must be said that they are not equal to these at Chartres.

At Bourges, for instance, analogous prophets and very similar queens stand meditative in, one of the extraordinary side bays where the Arab trefoil is so conspicuous. At Angers the statues are weather-beaten, almost ruined, but it can be seen that they were less stately, merely human; they are no longer chastely slender, fit for Heaven, but earthly queens. At Le Mans, where they are in better preservation, they vainly strive to soar above their narrow weed; they lack spring, they are nerveless, feeble, almost common.

Nowhere do we find a soul clothed in stone as at Chartres; and if at Le Mans we study the front, of which the scheme is the same as at Chartres, with Christ enthroned and benedictory between the winged beasts of the Tetramorph, what a descent we note in the divine ideal! Everything is pinched and airless. The Christ, too roughly wrought, looks savage. The pupils only of the supreme masters of Chartres evidently adorned these portals.

Was there a guild, a brotherhood of these image-makers, devoted to the holy work, who went from place to place to be employed by monks as helpers of the masons and labourers, builders for God? Did they first come from the Benedictine Abbey of Tiron founded at Chartres near the market, by that Abbot Saint Bernard whose name figures on the list of benefactors to the church, in the necrology of the cathedral? None may know. They worked humbly, anonymously.

And what souls these artists had! For this we know: they laboured only in a state of grace. To raise this glorious temple, purity was required even of the workmen.

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This would seem incredible if it were not proved by authentic documents and undoubted evidence.

We possess letters of the period preserved in the Benedictine annals, a letter from an Abbot of Saint-Pierre-sur-Dive, found by Monsieur Leopold Delisle, in MS. 929 of the French collection in the Bibliotheque Nationale, and a Latin volume of the Miracles of Our Lady, discovered in the Vatican Library, and translated into French by Jehan le Marchant, a poet of the thirteenth century. And these all relate the way in which the Sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin was rebuilt after destruction by fire.

What then occurred was indeed sublime. This was a crusade, if ever there was one. It was here no question of snatching the Holy Sepulchre from the power of the infidels, of meeting armies on the field of battle, and fighting with men; the Lord Himself was to be attacked in His entrenchments, Heaven was besieged, and conquered by love and repentance! And Heaven confessed itself beaten; the angels smiled and yielded; God capitulated, and in the gladness of defeat He threw open the treasury of His grace to be plundered of men.

Then, under the guidance of the Spirit, came a battle in every workshop with brute matter, the struggle of a nation vowing, cost what it might, to save a Virgin, homeless now as on the day when Her Son was born.

The manger of Bethlehem was a mere heap of cinders. Mary would be left to wander, lashed by bitter winds, across the icy plains of La Beauce. Should the same tale be repeated, twelve hundred years later, of pitiless households, inhospitable inns, and crowded rooms?

Madonna was loved then in France—loved as a natural parent, a real mother. On hearing that she was turned adrift by fire, seeking woefully for a home, everyone grieved and wept; and that, not only in the country about Chartres; in the Orleans country, in Normandy, Brittany, the Ile de France, in the far north, whole populations stopped their regular work, left their homes to fly to Her help, the rich giving money and jewels, and helping the poor to drag their barrows and carry corn and oil, wine, wood and lime, everything that could serve to feed labouring men or help in building a church.

It was a constant stream of immigration, the spontaneous exodus of a people. Every road was crowded with pilgrims, all, men and women alike, dragging whole trees, pushing loads of sawn beams, and cartfuls of the moaning sick and aged forming the sacred phalanx, the veterans of suffering, the unconquerable legions of sorrow, all to help in the siege of the heavenly Jerusalem, forming the outer guard to support the attack by the reinforcement of prayer.

Nothing—neither sloughs, nor bogs, nor pathless forests, nor fordless rivers, could check the advancing tide of the marching throng; and one morning, from every point of the compass, lo! they took possession of Chartres.

The investment began; while the sick opened the first parallels of prayer, the sound pitched the tents; the camp extended for leagues on all sides; tapers were kept burning on the carts, and at night La Beauce was a champaign of stars.

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What still seems incredible, and is nevertheless attested by every chronicle of the time, is that this horde of old folks and children, of women and men, were at once amenable to discipline; and yet they belonged to every class of society, for there were among them knights and ladies of high degree; but divine love was so powerful that it annihilated distinctions and abolished caste; the nobles harnessed themselves with the villeins to drag the trucks, piously fulfilling their task as beasts of burthen; patrician dames helped the peasant women to stir the mortar, and to cook the food; all lived together in an undreamed surrender of prejudice; all were alike ready to be mere labourers, machines, loins and arms, and to toil without a murmur under the orders of the architects who had come out of the cloister to direct the work.

Nothing was ever more simply or more efficiently organized; the convent cellarers, forming a sort of commissariat for this army, superintended the distribution of food, and saw to the sanitation of the huts and the health of the camp. Men and women were no more than docile instruments in the hands of the chiefs they themselves had chosen, and who in their turn obeyed gangs of monks. These again were under the orders of the wonderful man, the nameless genius, who, after conceiving the plan of this cathedral, directed the whole work.

To achieve such results the spirit of the multitude must really have been admirable, for the humble and laborious work of plasterers and barrow-men was accepted by all, noble or base-born, as an act of mortification and penance, and at the same time as an honour; and no man was so audacious as to lay hand on the materials belonging to the Virgin till he had made peace with his enemies and confessed his sins. Those who were reluctant to repair the ill they had done, or to frequent the Sacraments, were dismissed from the traces, rejected as reprobates by their comrades, and even by their own families.

At daybreak every morning the work decided on by the foremen was begun. Some dug the foundations, cleared away the ruins, carried off the rubbish; others, going in parties to the quarries of Berchere-l'Eveque, at about five miles from Chartres, cut out enormous blocks of stone, so heavy that in some cases a thousand workmen were not many enough to hoist them from their bed to the top of the hill where the church was presently to rise.

And when these silent toilers paused, exhausted and broken, the sound went up of prayers and psalms; some would groan over their sins, imploring Our Lady's mercy, beating their breast and sobbing in the arms of priests who bade them be comforted.

On Sundays long processions formed with banners at their head, and the shout of canticles filled the streets that blazed from afar with tapers; the canonical services were attended by a whole people on their knees; relics were carried with much pomp to visit the sick.

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And all the time the walls of the Celestial City were being shaken by battering-rams of supplication, catapults of prayer; the living forces of the whole army combining to make a breach and take the place by storm.

Then it was that Jesus surrendered at discretion, conquered by so much humility and so much love; He placed His powers in His Mother's hands, and miracles began to abound.

All the tribe of the sick and crippled are on their feet; the blind see, the dropsical dry up, the lame walk, the weak-hearted run.

The tale of these miracles, which were repeated day after day, sometimes being produced even before the pilgrim had reached Chartres, has been preserved in the Latin manuscript in the Vatican.

The natives of Chateau Landon are dragging a cart-load of wheat. On reaching Chantereine they discover that the food they had taken for the journey is all gone, and they beg for bread from some unhappy creatures who are themselves in the greatest want. The Virgin intercedes for them and the bread of the poor is multiplied. Again, some men set out from the Gatinais with a load of stone. Ready to drop, they pause near Le Puiset, and some villagers coming out to meet them, invite them to rest while they themselves take a turn at the load; but this they refuse. Then the natives of Le Puiset offer them a cask of wine, and pour it into a barrel hoisted on to the truck. This the pilgrims accept, and, feeling less weary, they go on their way. But they are called back to see that the empty vat has refilled itself with excellent wine. Of this all drink, and it heals the sick.

Again, a man of Corbeville-sur-Eure employed in loading a cart with timber has three fingers chopped across by an axe and shrieks in agony. His comrades advise him to have the fingers completely severed, as they hold only by a strip of flesh, but the priest who is conducting them to Chartres disapproves. They all pray to Mary, and the wound vanishes, the hand is whole as before.

Some men of Brittany have lost their way at night in the open country, and are suddenly guided aright by flames of fire; it is the Virgin in person descending that Saturday after Complines into Her church when it is almost finished, and filling it with dazzling glory.

And there are pages and pages of such incidents.

"Ah, it is easy to understand," thought Durtal, "why this Sanctuary is so full of Her. Her gratitude for the love of our forefathers is still felt here—even now She is fain not to seem too much disgusted, not to look too closely.

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“Well, well! we build sanctuaries in another way nowadays. When I think of the Sacred Heart in Paris, that gloomy, ponderous erection raised by men who have written their names in red on every stone! How can God consent to dwell in a church of which the walls are blocks of vanity joined by a cement of pride; walls where you may read the names of well-known tradesmen exhibited in a good place, as if they were an advertisement? It would have been so easy to build a less magnificent and less hideous church, and not to lodge the Redeemer in a monument of sin! Think of the throng of good souls who so long ago dragged their load of stones, praying as they went! It would never have occurred to them to turn their love to account and make it serve their craving for display, their hunger for lucre.”

An arm was laid on his, and Durtal recognized the Abbe Gevresin, who had come up while he stood dreaming in front of the cathedral.

“I am going on at once, they are waiting for me,” said the priest. “I only took advantage of our meeting to tell you that I had a letter this morning from the Abbe Plomb.”

“Indeed! And where is he?”

“At Solesmes; but he comes home the day after to-morrow. Our friend seems greatly taken with the Benedictine life.”

And the Abbe smiled, while Durtal, a little startled, watched him turn the corner by the new belfry.

CHAPTER X.

One morning Durtal went out to seek the Abbe Plomb. He could not find him in his own house, nor in the cathedral; but at last, directed by the beadle, he made his way to the house at the corner of the Rue de l’Acacia, where the choir-school was lodged.

He went in by a gate that stood half open, into a yard littered with broken pails and other rubbish. The house, beyond this courtyard, was suffering from the cutaneous disease that affects plaster, eaten with leprosy and spotted with blisters, with zig-zag rifts from top to bottom, and a crackled surface like the glaze of an old jar. The dead stock of a vine stretched its gnarled black arms along the wall.

Durtal, looking in at a window, saw a dormitory with rows of white beds, and he was amused, for never had he seen beds so tiny.

A lad was in the room, whom he called, by tapping on the pane, and asked whether the Abbe Plomb were still about the place. The boy nodded an affirmative, and showed Durtal into a waiting-room.

This room was like the office of an exceedingly inferior and pious hotel. The furniture consisted of a mahogany table of a sort of salmon pink colour, on which stood a pot-stand bereft of flowers; arm-chairs with circular backs fit for a gatekeeper's room, a chimney-piece adorned with statues of saints much fly-bitten, and a chimney board covered with paper representing the Vision of Lourdes. On the walls hung a black board with rows of numbered keys; opposite, a chromo-lithograph of Christ, displaying, with an amiable smile, an underdone heart bleeding amid streams of yellow sauce.

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But what was chiefly characteristic of this bedizened porter's lodge was a horribly sickening smell, the smell of lukewarm castor oil.

Durtal, nauseated by this odour, was on the point of making his escape, when the Abbe Plomb came in and took his arm. They went out together.

"Then you have just come back from Solesmes?" said Durtal.

"As you see."

"And were you satisfied with your visit?"

"Enchanted," and the Abbe smiled at the impatience he could detect in Durtal's accents.

"What do you think of the monastery?"

"I think it most interesting to visit, both from the monastic and from the artistic point of view. Solesmes is a great convent, the parent House of the Benedictine Order in France, and it has a flourishing school of novices. What is it that you want to know, exactly?"

"Why, everything you can tell me."

"Well, then, I may tell you that ecclesiastical art, brought to its very highest expression, is fascinating in that monastery. No one can conceive of the magnificence of the liturgy and of plain-song who has not heard them at Solesmes. If Notre Dame des Arts had a special sanctuary, it undoubtedly would be there."

"Is the chapel ancient?"

"A part of the old church remains, and the famous Solesmes sculpture, dating from the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, there are some quite disastrous windows in the apse: the Virgin between Saint Peter and Saint Paul; modern glass in its most piercing atrocity. But, then, where is decent glass to be had?"

"Nowhere. We have only to look at the transparent pictures let into the walls of our new churches to appreciate the incurable idiocy of painters who insist on treating window panes from cartoons, as they do subject pictures—and such subjects! and such pictures! All turned out by the gross from cheap glass melters, whose thin material dots the pavement of the church with spots like confetti, strewing lollipops of colour wherever the light falls.

"Would it not be far better to accept the colourless scheme of window-glass used at Citeaux, where a decorative effect was produced by a design in the lead lines; or to

imitate the fine grisailles, iridescent from age, which may still be seen at Bourges, at Reims, and even here, in our cathedral?"

"Certainly," said the Abbe. "But to return to our monastery. Nowhere, I repeat, are the services performed with so much pomp. You should see it on the occasion of some high festival! Picture to yourself above the altar, where commonly the tabernacle shines, a Dove suspended from a golden crozier, its wings outspread amid clouds of incense; then a whole army of monks deploying in a solemn rhythmic march, and the Abbot standing, on his brow a mitre thickly set with jewels, his green and white ivory crozier in his hand, his train carried by a lay-brother when he moves, while the gold of many copes blazes in the light of the tapers, and a torrent of sound from the organ bears the voices up, carrying to the very vault the cry of repentance or the joy of the Psalms.

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“It is glorious. It is not the penitential austerity of the liturgy as it is used by the Franciscans or at La Trappe: it is luxury offered to God, the beauty He created dedicated to His service, and in itself praise and prayer. But if you wish to hear the music of the Church in its utmost perfection you must go to the neighbouring Abbey: that of the Sisters of Saint Cecilia.”

The Abbe paused, whispering to himself, thinking over his reminiscences; and then he slowly spoke again,—

“Wherever you go, the voice of a nun preserves, merely by reason of her sex, a sort of emotion, a tendency to the cooing tone, and, it must be owned, a certain satisfaction in hearing herself when she knows that others can hear her; so that the Gregorian chant is never perfectly executed by nuns.

“But with the Benedictine Sisters of Sainte-Cecile all the graces of earthly sentimentality have vanished. These nuns have ceased to have women’s voices; the quality is at once seraphic and manly. In their church you are either thrown back I know not how far into the depth of past ages, or shot forward into time to come, as they sing. They have outpourings of soul and tragical pauses, pathetic murmurs and ecstasies of passion, and sometimes they seem to rush to the assault, and storm certain Psalms at the bayonet’s point. And they do assuredly achieve the most vehement leap that can be imagined from this world into the infinite.”

“Then it is a very different thing from the Benedictine service of nuns in the Rue Monsieur in Paris?”

“No comparison is possible. Without wishing to reflect on the musical sincerity of those good Sisters, who sing quite suitably but humanly, as women, it may be asserted that they have neither such knowledge, nor such soul-felt aspiration, nor such voices. As a monk remarked, ’when you have heard the Sisters of Solesmes, those of Paris sound provincial.’”

“And you saw the Abbess of Saint Cecilia. Why, when I think of it, is not she the writer of a Treatise on Prayer (*Traite de l’Oraison*) which I read when I was at La Trappe, and which was not, I believe, regarded with favour at the Vatican?”

“Yes, she it is. But you are making the greatest mistake in imagining that her book was not approved at Rome. It was examined there, like every book of the kind, through a magnifying glass, strained through a sieve, picked over line by line, turned inside out and upside down; but the theologians employed in this pious custom-house service acknowledged and certified that this work, based on the soundest principles of mysticism, was learnedly, impeccably, desperately orthodox.

“I may add that the volume was printed privately by the Abbess herself, helped by some of the nuns, in a little hand-press belonging to the convent, and has never been in circulation. It is, in fact, an epitome of doctrine, the essential extract of her teaching, and was more especially intended for those of her daughters who are unable to have the benefit of her instruction and lectures, because they live away from Solesmes, in other convents that she has founded.

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“Why in these days, when for ten years past the Benedictine Sisters have made a study of Latin, when many of them translate from Hebrew and Greek and are skilled in exegesis, when others draw and paint the pages of missals, reviving the art of the illuminators of the Middle Ages, when others again—as, for instance, Mother Hildegarde—are organists of the highest attainment, you may easily understand that the woman who directs them all, the woman who has created in her Sisterhoods a school of practical mysticism and of religious art, is a very remarkable person; nay, in these days of frivolous devotions and ignorant piety, quite unique.”

“Why, she is one of the great Abbesses of the Middle Ages,” cried Durtal.

“She is the crowning work of Dom Gueranger, who took her in hand almost as a child and kneaded and mollified her soul with long patience; then he transplanted her into a special greenhouse, watching her growth in the Lord day after day; and you see the result of this forcing and high culture.”

“Yes, and even this does not hinder some persons from regarding convents as the homes of idleness and reservoirs of folly. When you think that obscure idiots write to the papers to say that nuns know nothing of the Latin they repeat! It would be well for them if they knew as much Latin as those women!”

The Abbe smiled.

“And the secret of the Gregorian chant dwells with them,” he went on. “It is necessary not only to understand the language of the Psalms as they are sung, but to appreciate meanings which are often doubtful in the Vulgate, in order to express them properly. Without fervent feeling and knowledge, the voice is nothing.

“It may be beautiful in secular music, but it is null and void when it attempts the venerable sequences of plain-song.”

“And how are the Fathers employed?”

“They also began by restoring the liturgy and Church singing; then they discovered certain lost texts of the subtle symbolists and learned saints, and collected them in a *Spicilegium* and *Analectae*. Now they are editing and printing a musical Palaeography, one of the most learned and abstruse of modern publications.

“Still, I would not have you believe that the whole mission of the Benedictine Order consists in overhauling ancient manuscripts and reproducing ancient Antiphonals and curious chronicles. The Brother who has a talent for any art devotes himself to it, no doubt, if the Superior permits; on this point the rule knows no exception; but the real and true aim of the Son of Saint Benedict is to sing Psalms and praise the Lord, to serve his apprenticeship here for his task in Heaven: namely, to glorify the Redeemer in words

inspired by Himself, and in the language He spoke by the voice of David and the Prophets.

“Seven times a day the Benedictines do the homage required of the Elders in Heaven, as described by Saint John in the Apocalypse, and represented by sculptors as playing on instruments here at Chartres.

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“In point of fact, their particular function is not at all to bury themselves under the accumulated dust of ages, nor even to accept in substitution the sins and woes of others as the Orders of pure mortification do—the Carmelites and the Poor Clares. Their vocation is to fill the office of the Angels; it is a task of joy and peace, an anticipation of their inheritance of gladness beyond the grave; in fact, the work which is nearest to that of purified spirits, the highest on earth.

“To fulfil their duty fittingly, besides ardent piety, a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures is required, and a refined feeling for art. Thus a true Benedictine must be at once a saint, a learned man, and an artist.”

“And what is the daily life of Solesmes?” asked Durtal.

“Very methodical and very simple: Matins and Lauds at four in the morning; at nine o’clock tierce, mass for the brethren, and sext; at noon dinner; at four nones and vespers; at seven supper; at half-past eight compline and deep silence. As you see, there is time for meditation and work in the intervals between the canonical hours and meals.”

“And the oblates?”

“What oblates? I saw none at Solesmes.”

“Indeed—then if there are any, do they lead the same life as the Fathers?”

“Evidently; excepting, perhaps, some dispensations depending on the Abbot’s favour. I can tell you this much: that in some other Benedictine Houses that I have visited the general system is that the oblate shall follow as much of the rule as he is able for.”

“Still, he is, I suppose, free to come and go—his actions are free?”

“When once he has taken the oath of obedience to his Superior, and, after his term of probation, has adopted the monastic habit, he is as much a monk as the rest, and consequently can do nothing without the Father Superior’s leave.”

“The deuce!” muttered Durtal. “Of course, if the ridiculous metaphor so familiar to the world were accurate, if the cloister were rightly compared to a tomb, the condition of the oblate would also be tomb-like, only its walls would be less air-tight, and the stone, a little tilted, would admit a ray of daylight.”

“If you like!” said the Abbe, laughing.

As they walked, they had reached the Bishop’s palace.

They went into the forecourt, and saw the Abbe Gevresin making his way to the gardens; they joined him, and the old priest asked them to go with him to the kitchen garden, where, to oblige his housekeeper, he was to inspect the seeds she had sown.

“Aye, and I too promised long ago to look at the vegetables,” exclaimed Durtal.

They went down the ancient paths and reached the orchard on the slope; and as soon as Madame Bavoil caught sight of them she grounded arms, so to speak, setting her foot in gardener fashion on the spade she had stuck into the soil.

She proudly pointed to her rows of cabbages and carrots, onions and peas, announced that she intended to make an attempt on the gourd tribe, expatiated on cucumbers and pumpkins, and to conclude, declared that at the bottom of the kitchen garden she meant to have a flower-bed.

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Then they sat down on a mound that formed a sort of seat.

The Abbe Plomb, in a mood for teasing, gave his spectacles a push, settling the arch above his nose, and rubbing his hands, remarked, very seriously,—

“Madame Bavoil, flowers and vegetables are but of trivial importance from the decorative and culinary point of view; the only rule that should guide you in your selection is the symbolical meaning, the virtues and vices ascribed to plants. Now, I am sorry to observe that your favourites are for the most part of evil augury.”

“I do not understand you, Monsieur l’Abbe.”

“Why, you have only to consider that these vegetables which you take such care of mean many evil things. Lentils, for instance—you grow lentils?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the seeds of the lentils are very cunning and mysterious. Artemidorus, in his ‘Interpretation of Dreams,’ tells us that if we dream of them it is a sign of mourning; it is the same with lettuce and onion: they forecast misfortune. Peas are less ill-famed; but, above all, beware of coriander, with its leaves smelling like bugs, for it gives rise to all manner of evils.

“Thyme, on the contrary, according to Macer Floridus, cures snake-bites, fennel is a stimulant wholesome for women, and garlic taken fasting is a preservative against the ills we may contract from drinking strange waters, or changing from place to place. So plant whole fields of garlic, Madame Bavoil.”

“The Father does not like it!”

“And then,” the Abbe Plomb added, very seriously, “you must fill your mind from the books of Albertus Magnus, the Master of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who in the treatises ascribed to him on the Virtues of Herbs, the Wonders of the World, and the Secrets of Women, puts forth certain ideas, which, as I may hope, will not have been written in vain.

“He tells us that the plantain-root is a cure for headache and for ulcers; that mistletoe grown on an oak opens all locks; that celandine laid on a sick man’s head sings if he will die; that the juice of the house-leek will enable you to hold a hot iron without being burnt; that leaves of myrtle twisted into a ring will reduce an abscess; that lily powdered and eaten by a young maiden is an effectual test of her virginity, for if she should not be innocent it takes instantaneous effect as a diuretic!”

“I did not know of that property in the lily,” said Durtal, laughing, “but I knew that Albertus Magnus assigned the same peculiarity to the mallow; only the patient need not swallow the plant; she has only to stoop over it.”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed the old priest.

His housekeeper, quite scared, stood looking at the ground.

“Do not listen to him, Madame Bavoil,” cried Durtal. “I have a less medical, and more religious, idea: cultivate a liturgical garden and emblematic vegetables; make a kitchen and flower garden that may set forth the glory of God and carry up our prayers in their language; and, in short, imitate the purpose of the Song of the Three Holy Children in the fiery furnace, when they called on all Nature, from the breath of the storm to the seed buried in the field, to Bless the Lord!”

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“Very good!” exclaimed the Abbe Plomb; “but you must have a wide space at your disposal, for not less than one hundred and thirty plants are mentioned in the Scriptures; and the number of those to which mediaeval writers give a meaning is immense.”

“To say nothing of the fact,” observed the Abbe Gevresin, “that a garden dependent on our cathedral ought also to reproduce the botany of its architecture.”

“Is it known?”

“A list has not indeed been written for Chartres as it has been for Reims of its sculptured flora: the botany in stone of the church of Notre Dame there, has been carefully classified and labelled by Monsieur Saubinet; still, you will observe that the posies of the capitals are much the same everywhere. In all the churches of the thirteenth century you will find the leaves of the vine, the oak, the rose-tree, the ivy, the willow, the laurel, and the bracken, with strawberry and buttercup leaves. Indeed, as a rule, the image-makers selected native plants characteristic of the region where they were employed.”

“Did they intend to express any particular idea by the capitals and corbels of the columns?—At Amiens, for instance, there is a wreath of flowers and foliage forming the string-course above the arches of the nave for its whole length and continued over the cornice of the pillars. Apart from the probable purpose of dividing the height into two equal parts in order to rest the eye, has this string-course any other meaning? Does it embody any particular idea? Is it the expression of some phrase relating to the Virgin, in whose name the cathedral is dedicated?”

“I do not think so,” said the Abbe. “I believe that the artist who carved those wreaths simply aimed at a decorative effect, and made no attempt to give us in symbolical language a compendium of our Mother’s virtues.

“Moreover, if we admit that the sculptors of the thirteenth century introduced the acanthus on account of its emollient qualities, the oak because it is emblematic of strength, and the water-lily because its broad leaves are accepted as a figure of charity, we ought no less to conclude that at the end of the fifteenth century, when the mystery of symbolism was not as yet altogether lost, the toothed bunches of curled cabbage, of thistles and other deeply-cut leaves mingling with true-love-knots, as in the church at Brou, might have had some meaning. But it is perfectly certain that these vegetable forms were chosen only for their elaborately elegant growth, and the fragile and mannered grace of their outline. Otherwise we might assert that this later ornament has a different tale to tell from that set forth in the flora of Reims and Amiens, Rouen and Chartres.

“In point of fact, the natural form which most frequently occurs in the capitals of our cathedral—by no means a remarkably flowery one—is the episcopal crozier as seen in the young shoots of the fern.”

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“No doubt. But does not the fern bear a symbolical meaning?”

“In a general sense, it is emblematic of humility, evidently in allusion to its habit of growing as much as possible far from the high road, in the depths of woods. But by consulting the Treatise of St. Hildegarde we learn that the plant she calls *Fern*, or bracken, has magical properties.

“Just as sunshine disperses darkness, says the Abbess of Rupertsberg, the *Fern* puts nightmares to flight. The devil hates and flees from it, and thunder and hail rarely fall on spots where it takes shelter; also the man who wears it about him escapes witchcraft and spells.”

“Then St. Hildegarde made a study of natural history in its relations to medicine and magic?”

“Yes; but the book remains unknown because it has never yet been translated.

“She sometimes assigns very singular talismanic virtues to certain flowers. Would you like some instances?

“According to her, the plantain cures anyone who has eaten or drunk poison, and the pimpernel has the same virtue when hung round the neck. Myrrh must be warmed against the body till it is quite soft, and then it nullifies the wizard’s malignant arts, delivers the mind from phantoms, and is an antidote to philtres. It also puts to flight all lascivious dreaming, if worn on the breast or the stomach; only, as it eliminates every carnal suggestion it depresses the spirit and makes it ‘arid’; and for this reason, adds the saint, it should never be eaten but under great necessity.

“It is true that as a remedy against the dejection caused by myrrh we may apply the ‘hymelsloszel’ (Himmelschluessel), which is—or appears to be—*Primula officinalis*, the cowslip, whose bunches of fragrant yellow blossoms are to be seen in moist woods and meadows. This plant is ‘warm,’ and imbibes its qualities from the light. Hence it can drive away melancholy, which, says St. Hildegarde, spoils men’s good manners, making them utter speech contrary to God, on hearing which words the spirits of the air gather about him who has spoken them, and finally drive him mad.

“I may also tell you of the mandragora, a plant ‘warm and watery,’ that may symbolize the human being it resembles; and it is more susceptible than all other plants to the suggestion of the devil; but I would rather quote a recipe that you might perhaps think useful.

“Here is our Abbess’s prescription *a propos* to the iris or lily: Take the tip of the root, bruise it in rancid fat, heat this ointment and rub it on any who are afflicted with red or white leprosy, and they will soon be healed.

“But enough of these old-world recipes and counter-charms; we will study the symbolism of plants.

“Flowers in general are emblematic of what is good. According to Durand of Mende, both flowers and trees represent good works, of which the virtues are the roots; according to Honorius, the hermit, green herbs are for wisdom; those in flower are for progress; those in fruit are the perfect souls; finally, we are told by old treatises on symbolical theology that all plants embody the allegory of the Resurrection, while the idea of eternity attaches more particularly to the vine, the cedar and the palm.”

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“And you may add,” the Abbe Gevresin put in, “that in the Psalms the palm figures the righteous man, while according to the interpretation of Gregory the Great its rugged bark and the golden strings of dates are emblematical of the wood of the Cross, hard to the touch, but bearing fruit that is sweet to those who are worthy to taste them.”

“Well,” said Durtal, “but supposing that Madame Bavoil should wish to plant a liturgical garden, what should she select for it?

“Can we, to begin with, compose a dictionary of plants representing the capital sins and their antithetical virtues, sketch a basis of operations, and pick out by certain rules the materials at the command of the mystic gardener?”

“I do not know,” said the Abbe Plomb. “At the same time, I should think it might be possible; only we should have to remember the names of the plants more or less exactly symbolizing those qualities and defects. In short, what you need is a sort of language of flowers as applied to the catechism. Let us try.

“For pride we have the pumpkin, which was worshipped of old as a divinity in Sicyon. It bears indifferently the character of pride or of fertility; of fertility by reason of its multitude of seeds and its rapid growth, of which the monk Walafrid Strabo wrote in noble hexameters a whole chapter of his poem; and of pride by reason of its huge hollow head and its bulk; and then we also have the cedar, which Peter of Capua and Saint Melito agree in accusing of pride.

“Avarice? I confess I know of no plant which represents it; we will come back to that.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the Abbe Gevresin; “Saint Eucher and Raban Maur speak of thorns as emblematical of riches which accumulate to the detriment of the soul; and Saint Melito says that the sycamore means greed of money.”

“The poor sycamore!” cried the younger priest. “It has been served with every sauce! Raban Maur and the Anonymous monk of Clairvaux also call it a misbelieving Jew; Peter of Capua compares it to the Cross; Saint Eucher calls it wisdom, and there are other meanings. But meanwhile I forget how far we had gone. Oh! lasciviousness; we here have ample choice. Besides certain trees there is cyclamen, or sow-bread, which, according to an ancient dictum of Theophrastus, is symbolical of this sin because it was used in the preparation of love-philtres; the nettle, which Peter of Capua says is emblematic of the unruly instincts of the flesh; and the tuberose, a more modern introduction, but known as far back as the sixteenth century, when a Minorite Father brought it to France. Its heady perfume, which disturbs the nerves, also, it is said, excites the senses.

“For envy there are the bramble and the aconite, which, to be sure, is more exactly assigned to calumny and scandal; and, again, the nettle, which, however, is also interpreted by Albertus Magnus as figuring courage and expelling fear.

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“Greediness?” The Abbe paused to think. “Carnivorous plants, perhaps, as the fly-trap and the bog sundew.”

“And why not the humbler *cuscuta*, the dodder, the cuttlefish of the vegetable kingdom, which shoots out the antennae of its stems as fine as thread, attaching itself to other plants by tiny suckers and feeding greedily on their juices?” asked the Abbe Gevresin.

“Anger,” the Abbe Plomb went on, “is symbolized by a shrub with pinkish flowers, a kind of bitter-sweet, as it is popularly called, and by Herb Basil, which ever since the Middle Ages has had the same character ascribed to it of cruelty and rage as to its namesake, the basilisk, in the animal world.”

“Oh!” cried Madame Bavoil, “and we use it to season dishes and flavour certain sauces.”

“That is a serious culinary error and a spiritual danger,” said the priest, smiling. He then went on:—

“Anger may also be figured by the balsam, which especially symbolizes impatience by reason of the irritability of its seed-vessels, which fly at a touch and explode, sending them to some distance....

“Sloth finally has the whole tribe of poppies, which give sleep.

“As to the opposite virtues, the explanation they need is childish. For humility you have the bracken, the hyssop, the knotweed, and the violet, which, says Peter of Capua, is, by that same token, emblematical of Christ.”

“And likewise, according to Saint Melito, of the Confessors; or, according to Saint Mechtildis, of widows,” added the Abbe Gevresin.

“For indifference to the things of this world we find the lichen symbolizing solitude; for chastity, the orange-flower and the lily; for charity, the water-lily, the rose, and the saffron flower—so say Raban Maur and the Anonymous monk of Clairvaux; for temperance, the lettuce, which also stands for fasting; for meekness, mignonette; for watchfulness, the elder, signifying zeal; and thyme, which, with its sharp, pungent aroma, symbolizes activity.

“You may dispense with the sins, which have no place in the precincts of Our Lady, and lay out your plots with the devout flowers.”

“How is that to be done?” asked the Abbe Gevresin.

“Why,” said Durtal, “there are two plans. One would be to sketch the plan of a real church and supply the place of its statues with plants, which would be the better way

from the point of view of art; or else to compose a whole sanctuary with trees and shrubs."

He rose, and went to pick up a stick that was lying in the field.

"There," said he, tracing the cruciform outline of a church on the ground, "there you have the plan of our cathedral. Supposing now we build it, beginning at the end, the apse; there we naturally place the Lady chapel, as we find it in most cathedrals.

"Plants emblematic of Our Lady's attributes are abundant."

"The mystical rose of the Litanies!" exclaimed Madame Bavoil.

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“H’m!” said Durtal; “the rose has been much bedraggled. Not only was it the erotic blossom of Paganism, but in the Middle Ages Jews and prostitutes were compelled in many places to wear a rose as a distinctive mark of infamy.”

“True,” said the Abbe Plomb, “and yet Peter of Capua uses it, with an interpretation of love and charity, to figure the Virgin; Saint Mechtildis, again, says that roses are symbolical of martyrs, and in another passage of her work on ‘Specific Grace,’ she compares this flower to the virtue of patience.”

“Walafrid Strabo, in his ‘*Hortulus*,’ also speaks of the rose as the blood of the martyred saints,” the Abbe Gevresin murmured.

“‘*Rosae martyres, rubore sanguinis*,’ according to the key of Saint Melito,” the other priest added, in confirmation.

“We will admit that shrub,” cried Durtal. “Now for the lily—”

“Here I must interrupt you,” exclaimed the Abbe Plomb, “for it must be at once understood that the lily of the Scriptures has nothing to do with the flower we know by that name.

“The common white lily which grows in Europe, and which even before the Middle Ages was regarded by the Church as emblematic of virginity, does not seem to have existed in Palestine; and when, in the Song of Songs, the mouth of the Beloved is compared to a lily, it is evidently not in praise of white, but of red lips. The plant spoken of in the Bible as the lily of the valleys, or the lily of the fields, is neither more nor less than the anemone.

“This is proved by the Abbe Vigouroux. It abounds in Syria, round Jerusalem, in Galilee, on the Mount of Olives; rising from a tuft of deeply-cut, alternate leaves of a rich, dull green, the flower cup is like a delicate and refined poppy; it has the air of a patrician among flowers, of a little Infanta, fresh and innocent in her gorgeous attire.”

“It is certainly the fact,” observed Durtal, “that the innocence of the lily is far from obvious, for its scent, when you think of it, is anything rather than chaste. It is a mingling of honey and pepper, at once acrid and mawkish, pallid but piercing; it is suggestive rather of the aphrodisiac conserves of the East and the erotic sweetmeats of the Indies.”

“But, after all,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “granting that there never were lilies in the Holy Land—but is it so?—it is none the less certain that a whole series of symbols were derived from this plant both by the ancients and in mediaeval times.

“Look, for instance, at Origen; to him the lily is Christ, for Our Lord alluded to Himself when He said, ’I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley;’ and in these words,

the field, meaning tilled land, represents the Hebrew people, taught by God Himself, while the valleys or fallow land are the ignorant, or, in other words, the heathen.

“Again, turn to Peter Cantor. According to him, the lily is the Virgin, by reason of its whiteness, of its perfume delectable above all others, of its healing virtues; and finally, because it grows in uncultivated ground, as the Virgin was born of Jewish parents.”

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“As regards the therapeutic virtues mentioned by Petrus Cantor,” said the Abbe Plomb, “I may add that the Anonymous English writer of the thirteenth century tells us that the lily is a sovereign remedy for burns, and for this cause is an image of the Virgin, who heals sinners of their burns—that is to say, of their vices.”

“You may further consult Saint Methodus, Saint Mechtildis, Peter of Capua, and the English monk of whom you spoke, and you will find that the lily is the attribute, not only of the Virgin Mary, but of virginity in general and of all virgins.

“And here is a posy of meanings culled from Saint Eucher, who compares the whiteness of the lily to the purity of the angels; from Saint Gregory the Great, who says its fragrance is like the works of the saints; and again from Raban Maur, who speaks of the lily as emblematic of celestial beatitude, of the beauty of holiness, of the Church, of perfection, of chastity in the flesh.”

“Not to forget that, according to the translation of Origen, the Lily among Thorns is the Church in the midst of its enemies,” the Abbe Plomb put in.

“Then it is Jesus, His Mother, the Angels, the Church, the Virgins, everything at once!” exclaimed Durtal. “We cannot but wonder how these mystic gardeners could discern so many meanings in one and the same plant!”

“Why, you can see: the symbolists not only considered the analogies and resemblances they discovered between the form, scent, and colour of a flower and the being with whom they compared it; they also studied the Bible, especially the passages wherein a tree or flower was named, and they then ascribed to it such qualities as were mentioned or could be inferred from the text. They did the same with regard to animals, colours, gems, everything to which they could attribute a meaning. It is simple enough.”

“It is complicated enough!” said Durtal. “And now where was I?”

“In the Lady chapel, planting roses and anemones. Now add to these a shrub which is the emblem of Mary according to the Anonymous monk of Clairvaux, or of the Incarnation according to the Anonymous writer of Troyes, the walnut, of which the fruit is interpreted in the same sense by the Bishop of Sardis.”

“And also mignonette,” cried Durtal, “for Sister Emmerich speaks of it frequently and with much mystery. She says that this flower is very dear to Mary, who planted it and made much use of it.

“Then there is another plant which seems to me no less appropriate: the bracken—not by reason of the qualities ascribed to it by Saint Hildegarde, but because it symbolizes the most secret and retiring humility. Take one of the stoutest stems and cut it aslant, like the mouthpiece of a whistle, and you will find very distinctly imprinted in black the

form of a heraldic *fleur de lys*, as if stamped with a hot iron. The scent being absent, we may here accept it as the symbol of humility—a humility so perfect that it is undiscoverable but in death."

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“Aha! our friend is not so ignorant of country lore as I had fancied,” exclaimed Madame Bavoil.

“Oh, I wandered in the woods a little, as a child.”

“For the choir no discussion is possible, I believe,” said the Abbe Gevresin. “The eucharistic plants, the vine and corn are self-evidently appropriate.

“The vine, of which the Lord said ‘*Ego vitis sum*,’ is also the emblem of communion and the image of the eighth beatitude; corn, which, as the Sacramental element, was the object of peculiar care and respect in the Middle Ages.

“You have only to recall the solemn ceremonial observed in certain convents when the wafer was to be prepared.

“At Saint Etienne, Caen, the monks washed their face and hands, and kneeling before the altar of Saint Benedict, said Lauds, the seven penitential Psalms, and the Litanies of the Saints. Then a lay brother presented the mould in which the wafers were to be baked, two at a time; and on the day when this unleavened bread was prepared those who had taken part in the ceremony dined together, and their table was served exactly like the Abbot’s.

“At Cluny, again, three priests or three deacons, fasting after the above-mentioned services of prayer, put on albs and invited the aid of certain lay brethren. They mixed the flour of wheat that had been sifted by the novices, grain by grain, with a due quantity of water; and a monk wearing gloves baked the wafers one by one over a large fire of brushwood, in an iron mould stamped with the proper symbols.”

“That reminds me,” said Durtal, as he lighted a cigarette, “of the mill for grinding the wheat for the offering.”

“I am familiar with the mystical wine-press which was often represented by the glass-workers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,” said the Abbe Gevresin. “That was practically a paraphrase of Isaiah’s prophetic verse: ’I have trodden the wine-press alone, and there was no man with me’; but the mystic mill is, I own, unknown to me.”

“I have seen it once at Berne, in a window of the fifteenth century,” said the Abbe Plomb.

“I also saw it in the cathedral at Erfurt, painted, not on glass, but on a panel. The picture is by no known painter, and dated 1534. I can see it now: Above, God the Father, a good old man with a snowy beard, solemn and thoughtful; and the mill, like a coffee mill, fixed on the edge of a table, with the drawer open below. The evangelical beasts are emptying into the hopper, skins full of scrolls on which are written the effective Sacramental words. These scrolls are swallowed in the body of the machine,

and come out into the drawer, thence falling into a chalice held by a Cardinal and Bishop kneeling at the table.

“And the texts are changed into a little Child in the act of blessing while the four Evangelists turn a long silver crank in the right-hand corner of the panel.”

“What seems strange,” remarked the Abbe Gevresin, “is that it should be the formula of Transubstantiation and not the substance that is changed, and that the Evangelists, twice represented—under their animal and their human aspect—pour into the mill and grind. And also that the sacred oblation should be represented by the living flesh.

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“Still, it is correct; since the consecrating words are uttered, the bread has ceased to be. This scheme of implied meaning, though somewhat strange, in a literal presentment, a scene of actual grinding—the wheat in the grain, in flour, and in the Host—this obvious intention of ignoring the species, the appearances, and substituting the reality which is invisible to sense, must have been adopted by the painter in order to appeal to the masses, to bear witness to the certainty of the Miracle and to make the mystery evident to the people. But let us return to the construction of our church. Where were we?”

“Here,” said Durtal, pointing with his stick to the side aisles as traced in the sand. “Now, to represent the side chapels we have a choice. One we shall dedicate, of course, to Saint John the Baptist. To distinguish it from the others we have the gilliflower and the ground-ivy to which he has given his name, and more especially the St. John’s wort, which if gathered on the eve of his festival and placed in a room, destroys malignant spells and charms, is a protection against thunder, and hinders the walking of ghosts.

“It may be added that this plant, famous in the Middle Ages, was used as a remedy for epilepsy and St. Vitus’ dance, two maladies for which the intercession of the Precursor is most efficacious.

“We will dedicate another to Saint Peter. On his altar we may lay a posy of the herbs dedicated to his service by our forefathers: the primrose, the wild honeysuckle, the gentian and soap-wort, pellitory and bindweed, with others whose names escape me.

“But, first, will it not be our bounden duty to erect a tower for Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, such as we find in many churches?

“The flower obviously indicated is the passion-flower; that unique blossom, of a purplish blue, its seed-vessel simulating the Cross, its styles and stigma the Nails; its stamens mimicking the Hammer, its thread-like fringe the Crown of thorns—in short, it represents all the instruments of the Passion. Add to this, if you will, a bunch of hyssop, plant a cypress, of which Saint Melito speaks as emblematical of the Saviour, and which Monsieur Olier regards as symbolical of death; a myrtle, signifying compassion, according to a passage by Saint Gregory the Great; and, above all, do not omit the buckthorn, or *Rhamnus*—for of that shrub the Jews twined the stems that formed Christ’s crown—and your chapel is complete.”

“The buckthorn,” said the Abbe Gevresin; “yes, Rohant de Fleury says that its thorny branches were used to crown the Son’s head; but this leaves us wondering, when we remember that in the Old Testament, in the ninth chapter of the Book of Judges, all the tall trees of Judaea bow down before the Royalty prophetically prefigured by this humble shrub.”

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“Very true,” replied the Abbe Plomb. “But what is most curious is the number of absolutely dissimilar senses which the oldest symbolists attribute to the buckthorn. Saint Methodus uses it for virginity; Theodoret for sin; Saint Jerome ascribes it to the devil; and Saint Bernard takes it as symbolizing humility. Again, in the ’*Theologia Symbolica*’ of Maximilian Sandaeus, this shrub is made to signify the worldly prelacy, while the olive, vine, and fig, with which the author contrasts it, are the contemplative Orders. In this, no doubt, we may see an allusion to the thorns which Bishops were not always unready to thrust on the long-suffering Heads of monasteries.

“You have forgotten, too, in the blazonry of your chapel, the reed which formed the sceptre of mockery forced into the Son’s hands. But the reed, like the buckthorn, is a sort of Jack-of-all-trades. Saint Melito defines it as the Incarnation and the Scriptures; Raban Maur as the Preacher, the hypocrite, and the Gentiles; Saint Eucher as the sinner; the Anonymous monk of Clairvaux as Christ; and others which I have forgotten.”

“These are many meanings for a single plant,” observed Durtal. “But now if we want to specialize some chapels as dedicated to saints, nothing can be easier; at any rate, for such as have lent their names to plants.

“For instance, the Valerian, known as Herb Saint George, the white flower with a hollow stem, which grows in moist, places, and its popular name is quite intelligible since it was used in treating nervous diseases, for which the saint’s intercession was invoked.

“Then we have the plant or plants dedicated to Saint Roch: the pennyroyal, and two species of *Inula*, one with bright yellow flowers, a purgative that cures the itch. Formerly on Saint Roch’s day branches of this herb were blessed and hung in the cow-houses to preserve the cattle from epidemics.

“Saint Anne’s wort, a humble creeper, the samphire—an emblem of poverty.

“Herb Barbara, the winter-cress, a cruciferous plant, anti-scorbutic—a poverty-stricken flower, creeping along the wayside like a beggar.

“To Saint Fiacre is dedicated the mullein, with its emollient leaves; boiled to make a poultice, it relieves colic, which this saint has a reputation for curing.

“Saint Stephen’s wort is the enchanter’s nightshade, a beneficent plant with red berries on a hairy stem. And there are many others.

“For the crypt, supposing we dig one out, it must certainly be filled with the trees mentioned in the Old Testament, of which this portion of the building is itself an allegory. In spite of climate we must grow the vine and the palm, emblems of eternity; the cedar, which by reason of its incorruptible wood is sometimes thought to symbolize the angels; the olive and the fig, emblems of the Holy Trinity and of the Word; frankincense, cassia

and *balsamodendron Myrrha*, a symbol of the perfect humanity of Our Lord; the terebinth—meaning exactly what?”

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“According to Peter of Capua, the Cross and the Church; but Saint Melito says the saints. According to the monk of Clairvaux, it is the false doctrine of the Jews and heretics; and as to the drops of resin, they are Christ’s tears, if we may believe Saint Ambrose,” replied the Abbe Plomb.

“And even so, our cathedral remains incomplete. We are but feeling our way, without logical sequence. I admit that at the entrance we must plant the purifying hyssop in the place of the holy-water vessel; but with what can we build the walls unless we accept the alternative of a real church having walls but unfinished?”

“Take the figurative sense of the walls and translate that; the great walls are representative of the four Evangelists, Can you find plants for them?”

Durtal shook his head. “The Evangelists are, of course, symbolized in the fauna of mysticism by the animals of the Tetramorph; the twelve apostles have their synonyms in the category of gems, and two of the Evangelists are naturally to be found there: Saint John is associated with the emerald, the emblem of purity and faith; Saint Matthew with the chrysolite, the emblem of wisdom and watchfulness; but none, so far as I know, has found a representative among either trees or flowers. And yet, to be sure, Saint John has the sun-flower, signifying divine inspiration; for he is represented in a window in the church of Saint Remy at Reims, his head crowned with a nimbus surmounted by two of these flowers.”

“Saint Mark, too, has a plant—the tansy, so named in the Middle Ages.”

“The tansy?”

“Yes; a bitter, aromatic plant with yellow flowers, which grows in stony ground, and is used in medicine as an anti-spasmodic. Like Saint George’s herb, it is used in nervous maladies, the intercession of Saint Mark being, it would seem, of sovereign efficacy.

“As to Saint Luke, he may be represented by clumps of mignonette, for Sister Emmerich tells us that while he was a physician it was his favourite remedy. He macerated mignonette in palm oil, and after blessing it, applied the unction in the form of a cross on the brow and mouth of his patients; in other cases he used the dried plant in an infusion.

“Only Saint Matthew remains; but here I give in, for I know of no vegetable species that can reasonably be assigned to him.”

“Nay, do not think it hopeless,” cried the Abbe Plomb. “A mediaeval legend tells us that balms exuded from his tomb; hence he was represented as holding a branch of cinnamon, symbolical of the fragrance of virtue, says Saint Melito.”

“Well, it would be better to accept the real walls of a church, making use of the structure, and limiting ourselves to completing the idea by details borrowed from the symbolism of flowers.”

“And the sacristy?” suggested the Abbe Gevresin.

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“Since, according to the *Rationale* of Durand of Mende, the sacristy is the very bosom of the Virgin, we will represent it by virginal plants such as the anemone, and trees such as the cedar, which Saint Ildefonso compares to Our Mother. And now, if we are to furnish the instruments of worship, we shall find in the ritual of the liturgy and in the very form of certain plants almost precise guidance. Thus, flax, of which the cornice and altar napery is to be woven, is indispensable; the olive and the *balsamum*, from which oil and balm are extracted, and frankincense, which sheds the drops of gum for the incense, are no less indicated. For the chalice we may choose from among the flowers which goldsmiths take as their models: the white convolvulus, the frail campanula, and even the tulip, though, having some repute as connected with magic, that flower is in ill odour. For the shape of the monstrance there is the sun-flower.”

“Yes,” interrupted the Abbe Plomb, wiping his spectacles, “but these are fancies borrowed simply from superficial resemblance; it is modern symbolism, which is really not symbolism at all. And is not this the case to a great extent with the various interpretations that you accept from Sister Emmerich? She died in 1824.”

“What does that matter?” said Durtal. “Sister Emmerich was a primitive saint, a seer, whose body indeed lived in our day, but whose soul was far away; she dwelt more in the Middle Ages than in ours. It might be said indeed that she was more ancient still, for, in fact, she was contemporary with Christ, whose life she follows step by step through her pages.

“Hence her ideas of symbolism cannot be set aside. To me they are of equal authority with those of Saint Mechtildis, who was born in the early part of the thirteenth century.

“In point of fact, the source whence they both alike derived them is the same. And what is time, or past or present, when we speak of God?

“These women were the sieves through which His grace was poured, and what need I care whether the instruments were of yesterday or to-day? The word of the Lord is supreme over the ages; His inspiration blows when and where it lists. Is not that true?”

“I quite agree.”

“And all this time,” said the housekeeper, “you do not think of making use in your building of the iris, which my good Jeanne de Matel regards as an emblem of peace.”

“Oh, we will find a place for it, Madame Bavoil, never fear. And there is yet another plant which we must not omit; the trefoil, for sculptors have strewn it broadcast in their stony gardens, and the trefoil, like the fruit of the almond tree, which shows the elongated nimbus, is an emblem of the Holy Trinity.

“Suppose we recapitulate:

“At the end of the nave, in the shell of the apse, in front of a semicircle of tall bracken turned brown by autumn, we see a flaming assumption of climbing roses hedging a bed of red and white anemones, edged with the sober green of mignonette. And to give variety by adding symbols of humility—the knotweed, the violet, and the hyssop—we may form a posy of which the meaning will represent the perfect virtues of Our Mother.

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“Now,” said he, pointing with his stick to the plan of the nave he had traced, “here is the altar, overgrown with red-leaved vines, purple or pearly grapes, sheaves of golden corn. Ah! but we must have a cross over the altar.”

“That will not be difficult,” replied the Abbe Gevresin. “From the grain of mustard seed, which all the symbolists accept in a figurative sense as representing Christ, to the sycamore and the terebinth, you have a wide range; you can at pleasure have a tiny cross, a mere nothing, or a gigantic crucifix.”

“Here,” Durtal went on, “along the bays where trefoils flourish, different flowers rise from the ground, corresponding to the saints of their ascription; here is the chapel of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, recognizable by the passion-flower full blown on its creeping stem, with its many tendrils; and the background is a hedge of reeds and rhamnus, full of sad meaning, mitigated by the compassionate myrtle.

“Here, again, is the sacristy, where smiles the soft blue flax on its light stem, the abundant flowers of the convolvulus and campanula, tall sun-flowers, and, if you choose, a palm, for I recollect that Sister Emmerich speaks of this tree as a paragon of chastity, because, she says, the male and female flowers are separate, and both kept modestly hidden. Another interpretation to the credit of the palm!”

“But after all, you are absurd, our friend!” cried Madame Bavoil. “All this will not hold together. Your plants are the growth of different climates, and in any case they could not all be in bloom at the same time; consequently, by the time you have planted this, that will be dead. You can never grow them side by side.”

“That is symbolical of many unfinished cathedrals, where the building is carried across from century to century,” said Durtal, snapping his stick. “But listen, fancy apart, there is something which may be done, and has not been done, for celestial botany and pious posies.

“That is, to make a liturgical garden, a true Benedictine garden, where flowers may be grown in succession for the sake of their relations to the Scriptures and hagiology. Would it not be delightful to follow out the liturgy of prayer with that of plants, to place them side by side in the sanctuary, to deck the altars with flowers all having their meanings according to the days and festivals; in short, to associate nature in its most exquisite manifestation—that is, its flowers—with the ceremonies of divine worship?”

“Yes, indeed!” exclaimed both the priests with one accord.

“Meanwhile, till these fine things are accomplished, I will be content to dig in my little kitchen garden with an eye to the savoury stews in which you shall share,” said Madame Bavoil. “There I am in my element; I do not lose my footing as I do in your imitation churches.”

“And I, on my part, will meditate on the symbolism of eatables,” said Durtal, taking out his watch. “It is near breakfast time.”

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As he was going off, the Abbe Plomb called him back and said, laughing,—

“In your future cathedral you have forgotten to reserve a nook for Saint Columba, if, indeed, we can find some ascetic plant native, or at any rate common, to Ireland, the land where this Father was born.”

“The thistle, figurative of mortification and penance and a memento of asceticism, is conspicuous as the badge of Scotland,” replied Durtal. “But why Saint Columba?”

“Because of all saints he is the most neglected, the least invoked by those of our contemporaries who ought to be most assiduous; since he is regarded in the attributions of special virtues as the patron saint of idiots.”

“Pooh!” cried the Abbe Gevresin. “Why, if ever a man revealed a magnificent comprehension of things human and divine, it was that great Abbot and founder of monasteries!”

“Oh! there is no suggestion implied that Saint Columba was feeble of brain; and as to why the mission was trusted to him rather than another of protecting the greater part of the human race, I do not know.”

“Perhaps he may have cured lunatics and healed those possessed?” the Abbe Gevresin suggested.

“At any rate,” said Durtal, “it would be vain to erect a chapel to him, since it would always be empty; no one would come to entreat him, poor saint! for the essential mark of an idiot is not to think himself one!”

“A saint out of work!” remarked Madame Bavoil.

“And who is not likely to find any,” said Durtal, as he left them.

CHAPTER XI.

Durtal had begged his housekeeper, Madame Mesurat, to serve his coffee in his study. He thus hoped to escape having her constantly standing in front of him, as she did all through his meal, asking him if his mutton-cutlet were good.

And though that meat had a taste of flannel, Durtal had nodded a sketchy affirmative, knowing full well that if he ventured on the least comment he would have to endure an incoherent harangue on all the butchers in the town.

As soon as this woman, at once servile, despotic, and obsequious, had placed his cup on the table, he buried his nose in a book, and by his repellent attitude compelled her to fly.

He knew the book he was turning over almost by heart, for he had often read it between the hours of service at the cathedral. It was so entirely sympathetic to him, with its artless faith and ingenuous enthusiasm, that it was to him like the familiar speech of the Church itself.

The little volume contained the prayers composed in the fourteenth century by Gaston Phoebus, Comte de Foix. Durtal had it in two editions, one printed in the original form of his authentic words and antiquated spelling, by the Abbe de Madaune; the other modernized, but with great skill and taste, by Monsieur de la Briere.

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Durtal, as he turned the pages, came on such lamentable and humble prayers as these: "Thou who hast shapened me in my mother's womb, let me not perish.... Lord, I confess my poverty.... My conscience gnaws me and shows me the secrets of my heart. Avarice constrains me, concupiscence befouls me, gluttony disgraces me, anger torments me, inconstancy crushes me, indolence oppresses me, hypocrisy beguiles me.... and these, Lord, are the companions with whom I have spent my youth, these are the friends I have known, these are the masters I have served." And further on he exclaims, "Sin have I heaped upon sin, and the sins which I could not commit in very deed yet have I committed by evil desire."

Durtal closed the volume, regretting that it should be so entirely unknown to Catholics. They were all busy chewing the cud of the old hay left at the heading or end of the "Christian's Day" or "The Eucologia," or meditating on the pompous prayers elaborated in the ponderous phraseology of the seventeenth century, in which there is no accent of sincerity to be found—nothing, not an appeal that comes from the heart, not even a pious cry!

How far were these rhapsodies all cast in the same mould from this penitent and simple language, from this easy and candid communion of the soul with God?

Then Durtal dipped again here and there, and read:—

"My God and my Mercy, I am ashamed to pray to Thee for very shame of my evil conscience; give a fountain of tears to my eyes, and my hands largess of alms and charity; give me a seemly faith, and hope, and abiding charity. Lord, Thou holdest no man in horror save the fool that denies Thee. Oh, my God, the Giver of My Redemption and Receiver of my soul, I have sinned and Thou hast suffered me!"

Then, turning over a few more pages, he came at the end of the volume to a few passages collected by Monsieur de la Briere, among them these reflections on the Eucharist culled from a manuscript of the fifteenth century:—

"Not every man can assimilate this meat; some there be who eat it not, but swallow it down in haste. It should be chewed as much as possible with the teeth of the understanding, to the end that the sweet of its savour be pressed out of it, and may come forth from it. Ye have heard it said that in nature, that which is most crushed is most nourishing; now the crushing of the teeth is our deep and keen meditation on the Sacrament itself."

Then, after having elucidated the individual use of each tooth, the author adds, in speaking of the fifteenth, "the Sacrament on the altar is not merely as meat to fill and refill us; but, which is more, to make us divine."

“Lord!” murmured Durtal, laying down the book. “O Lord! If we allowed ourselves nowadays to use such materialistic comparisons and make use of such homely terms in speaking of Thy supremely adorable Body, what a clamour would arise from the ‘respectable’ among the worshippers and the blessed legion of the good women who have comfortable praying-chairs and reserved places near the altar—like front seats in a theatre—in the House where all are equal.”

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And Durtal pondered over these reflections which assailed him every time he happened to take up a clerical journal or one of the Manuals introduced by some prelate's note of approval, like a clean bill of health.

He could never get over his amazement at the incredible ignorance, the instinctive aversion for art, the type of ideas, the terror of words, peculiar to Catholics. Why was this? For after all there was no reason why believers should be more ignorant and stupid than any other folks. Indeed, the contrary ought to be the truth.

Whence did this inferiority proceed? And Durtal could answer himself. It was due to the system of education, to the training in intellectual timidity, to the lessons in fear, given in a cellar, far from a vital atmosphere and the light of day. It really seemed as if there were some intention of emasculating souls by nourishing them on dried-up fragments, literary white-meat; some set purpose of destroying all independence and initiative in the disciples by levelling them, crushing them all under the same roller, and restricting the sphere of thought by maintaining a deliberate ignorance of art and literature.

And all merely to avert the temptation of forbidden fruit, of which the idea was suggested under the pretext of inspiring dread of it. By this method curiosity with regard to the veiled unknown tormented their young brains and excited their senses, for it was always in the background, and in a form all the more dangerous because it had the effect of a more or less transparent gauze. The imagination could not fail to exasperate itself by cogitating its desire to know and its fear of knowing, and it was ready to fly off at the least word.

Under these circumstances the most anodyne book was a source of danger from the simple fact that love was alluded to, and woman depicted as an attractive creature; and this was enough to account for all—for the inherent ignorance of Catholics, since it was proclaimed as the preventive cure for temptations—for the instinctive horror of art, since to these craven souls every written and studied work was in its nature a vehicle of sin and an incitement to fall.

Would it not really be far more sensible and judicious to open the windows, to air the rooms, to treat these souls as manly beings, to teach them not to be so much afraid of their own flesh, to inculcate the firmness and courage needed for resistance? For really it is rather like a dog which barks at your heels and snaps at your legs if you are afraid of him, but who beats a retreat if you turn on him boldly and drive him off.

The fact remains that these schemes of education have resulted, on the one hand, in the triumph of the flesh in the greater number of men who have been thus brought up and then thrown into a worldly life, and on the other, in a wide diffusion of folly and fear, an abandonment of the possessions of the intellect and the capitulation of the Catholic army surrendering without a blow to the inroads of profane literature, which takes possession of territory that it has not even had the trouble of conquering.

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This really was madness! The Church had created art, had cherished it for centuries; and now by the effeteness of her sons she was cast into a corner. All the great movements of our day, one after the other—romanticism, naturalism—had been effected independently of her, or even against her will.

If a book were not restricted to the simplest tales, or pleasing fiction ending in virtue rewarded and vice punished, that was enough; the propriety of beadledom was at once ready to bray.

As soon as the most modern form of art, the most malleable and the broadest—the Novel—touched on scenes of real life, depicted passion, became a psychological study, an effort of analysis, the army of bigots fell back all along the line. The Catholic force, which might have been thought better prepared than any others to contest the ground which theology had long since explored, retired in good order, satisfied to cover its retreat by firing from a safe distance, with its old-fashioned match-lock blunderbusses, on works it had neither inspired nor written.

The Church party, centuries behind the time, and having made no attempt to follow the evolution of style in the course of ages, now turned to the rustic who can scarcely read; it did not understand more than half of the words used by modern writers, and had become, it must be said, a camp of the illiterate. Incapable of distinguishing the good from the bad, it included in one condemnation the filth of pornography and real works of art; in short, it ended by emitting such folly and talking such preposterous nonsense, that it fell into utter discredit and ceased to count at all.

And it would have been so easy for it to work on a little way, to try to keep up with the times, and to understand, to convince itself whether in any given work the author was writing up the Flesh, glorifying it, praising it, and nothing more, or whether, on the contrary, he depicted it merely to buffet it—hating it. And, again, it would have done well to convince itself that there is a chaste as well as a prurient nude, and that it should not cry shame on every picture in which the nude is shown. Above all, it ought to have recognized that vices may well be depicted and studied with a view to exciting disgust of them and showing their horrors.

For, after all, this was the great theory of the Middle Ages, the theological method in sculpture, the literary dogma of the monks of that time; and this is the meaning and purpose of certain groups which even now shock the propriety of our methodistical purists. These unseemly subjects and images of indecency are very numerous at Saint Benoit on the Loire, in the cathedral of Reims, at le Mans, in the crypt at Bourges, everywhere in our churches; for in those where they do not occur, it is because the prudery which was most rife in the most immoral times, broke them by stoning them in the name of a morality very unlike that which was inculcated by the mediaeval saints.

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These subjects have for many years been the delight of Freethinkers and the despair of Catholics; those see in them a scathing satire on the manners of the monks and bishops, these lament that such turpitude should ever have fouled the walls of the Temple. And yet it would have been so easy to explain the purpose of these scenes; far from seeking to apologize for the tolerance of the Church that allowed them, her honesty and breadth should have been held up to admiration. By acting thus, the Church manifested her determination to inure her sons by showing them the ridiculous side of the temptations which assail them. It was, so to speak, an object lesson or demonstration, and at the same time a bidding to self-examination before venturing into the sanctuary which was thus prefaced by a catalogue of sins as a reminder to confession.

This was part of her plan of education, for she aimed at moulding manly souls and not crippled creatures such as are turned out by the spiritual orthopedists of our day; she dragged out vice and lashed it wherever it lurked, and did not hesitate to preach the equality of men before God, insisting that bishops and monks should, when guilty, be placed in the pillory of its doorways; nay, she gibbeted them more willingly than others, to set an example.

These scenes were practically a comment of the Sixth (Seventh) Commandment, a sculptured paraphrase of the Catechism; the Church's accusation and teaching plainly expressed so as to be understood of all men.

And Our Mother did not restrict herself to one mode only of expressing Her warnings and reproofs; to reiterate them she borrowed the language of other arts. Literature and the pulpit were inevitably the interpreters that she employed to vituperate the sins of the people.

And they were not a whit more prudish or less audacious than sculpture. We have only to open the books of the Church to convince ourselves of the violent language in which she was wont to lash the sins of the flesh. Beginning with the Scriptures, the Bible itself —which no one dares read now but in mawkish French versions—what priest, for instance, would venture to recommend to the nerveless spirit of his flock the study of the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel or of the Song of Songs, that Epithalamium of Jesus and the Soul—down to the Fathers and the Doctors?

How our modern Pharisees would reprove the uncompromising language of Saint Gregory the Great when he exclaims, "Speak the truth! A scandal is better than a lie;" or Saint Epiphanius' plain speaking in discussing the Gnostics and describing in detail the abominations of that sect, quietly adding in the face of the congregation, "Why should I shrink from speaking of the things you do not fear to do? By speaking thus, I hope to fill you with horror of the turpitude you commit."

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Or what would they think of Saint Bernard expatiating in his third meditation on horrible physiological details to demonstrate the baseness of our carnal ambition and the foulness of our pleasures? Or of Saint Hildegarde, who placidly discusses the various factors of such pleasures, Saint Vincent Ferrier freely dealing in his sermons with the sins of Onan and of Sodom, using the simplest language, and comparing confession to a purgative, and asserting that the priest, like a doctor, should examine the excreta of the soul and prescribe for it?

What reprobation would be poured on the splendid passage by Odo of Cluny quoted by Remy de Gourmont in his “Latin Mystique,” the passage where that terrible monk analyzes the attractions of woman, turns them over, eviscerates them, and flings them aside like a drawn rabbit on a butcher’s stall; and again on Clement of Alexandria, who sums the whole matter up in two sentences:—

“I am not ashamed to name the parts of the body wherein the foetus is formed and nourished; and why indeed should I be, since God was not ashamed to create them?”

None of the great writers of the Church were prudish. This mock-modesty which has so long stultified us dates actually from the ages of impiety, the period of paganism, the return on threadbare classicism which was known as the Renaissance; and see how it has developed since! Its hot-bed and nursery ground lay in the lewd and gorgeous years of the so-called *Grand-siecle*; the virus of Jansenism, the old Protestant taint mingled with the blood of Catholics, and pollutes it still.

“It is very true! And pretty results have come of this infection of decency!” Durtal burst out laughing as he thought of the cathedral at Chartres.

“Here,” said he to himself, “we reach the climax; pious imbecility can go no further. Among the subjects in sculpture in the ambulatory of the choir there is a group representing the Circumcision, Saint Joseph holding the Infant while the Virgin has a napkin ready and the High Priest is preparing to operate. And there has been a priest so modest, a divine so decorous as to regard this scene as licentious and to paste a piece of paper over the Child’s nakedness!

“The indecency of God, the obscenity of a new-born Babe is too much!

“Bah!” said he. “The time has slipped away in all this meditation, and the Abbe will be waiting.”

He ran quickly downstairs and hurried across to the cathedral, where the Abbe Plomb was pacing to and fro in front of the northern porch, reciting his Breviary.

“The side where sinners and demons are figured is especially that of the Virgin, who saves those and crushes these,” said the Abbe. “The northern porch of a church is

usually the most lively of all; here, however, the Satanic incidents are on the southern side, because they form part of the Last Judgment represented over the south door. Otherwise Chartres, unlike her sister cathedrals, would have no scenes of that kind."

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“Then the rule in the thirteenth century was to place the Virgin in the northern portion?”

“Yes. To the men of that time the north meant the gloom of winter, the dejection of darkness, the misery of cold; the ice-bound chant of the winds was to them the very blast of evil; to the north was the home of the devil, the hell of nature, as the south was its Eden.”

“But that is absurd!” cried Durtal, “the greatest blunder ever introduced into the symbolism of the elements. The medieval sages were mistaken, for snow is pure and cold is chastity. It is the sun, on the contrary, that is the active agent in developing the germs of rottenness, the ferment of vice!

“They forget that the third Psalm of Compline speaks of the hot hour of noon as the most harassing and dangerous of all; they must have overlooked the horrors of sweat and unwholesome heat, the risks of relaxed nerves, of loosened dresses, all the abominations of leaden clouds and hard blue skies!

“There are diabolical effluvia in the storm, and in weather when the air stirs like the vapours from a furnace, rousing evil instincts and bringing about us the raging swarm of evil angels.”

“But remember the passages in which Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of Lucifer as dwelling in the blast of the north wind; and recollect that the great cathedrals did not originate in the south but in the middle and north of France; consequently, after having adopted this symbolism of seasons and weather, the pious architects dreamed of the horror of men buried in snow, and longing for a gleam of sunshine and a bright day. Naturally they thought of the east as the region of the original Paradise, and of those lands as milder and less inclement than their own.”

“That does not hinder the fact that this theory was controverted by Our Lord Himself.”

“Where do you find that?” asked the Abbe Plomb.

“On Calvary; Jesus died” turning His back to the south, which had crucified Him, and extending His arms on the Cross to bless and embrace the north. He seemed to be withdrawing His favours from the east, ’to bestow them on the west. Hence, if any region is accurst and inhabited by Satan, it is the south and not the north.”

“You abominate the south and its races, that is evident,” said the Abbe, laughing.

“I do not love them. Their scenery, vulgarized by crude daylight, their dusty trees standing out against a sky of washerwoman’s blue, have no charm for me; as to the natives, hairy and noisy, with a blue bar under their nostrils if they shave, I flee from them!”

“Here, in short, we are face to face with a fact which no discussions can alter. This side of the church is dedicated to the Virgin. Shall we now examine it, first as a whole, and then in detail?

“This portal, brought forward like an open porch, a sort of verandah in front of the doors, is an allegory of the Saviour showing the way into the heavenly Jerusalem. It was begun in the year 1215 under Philip Augustus, and finished by about 1275, under Philip the Bold; thus it was nearly sixty years in building, the greater part of the thirteenth century. It is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three doors behind it; there are more than seven hundred statues grouped here, large and small, representing, for the most part, personages from the Old Testament.

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“It forms, in fact, three deep bays or gulfs.

“The central portal, before which we are standing, and which leads to the middle door, has for its subject the Glorification of the Virgin.

“The left-hand bay contains the life and virtues of the Virgin.

“The right-hand bay is devoted to images of Mary Herself.

“According to another interpretation, put forward by Canon Davin, this porch, which was built at the time when Saint Dominic instituted the Rosary, is a reproduction in images of its mysteries.”

“On that theory, the left-hand arch, containing the scenes of the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity, answers to the Joyful Mysteries; the central bay, containing the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, to the Glorious Mysteries; and that to the right, where we find a presentment of Job, precursor of the Crucifixion under the ancient law, to the Sorrowful Mysteries.”

“There is a third interpretation,” said Durtal, “but it is ridiculous. That of Didron, who regards this front as the first page of the Book of Chartres. He opens it at this porch, and asserts that the sculptors began to render the Encyclopedia of Vincent de Beauvais by representing the creation of the world. But if so, where are those wonderful representations of Genesis hidden?”

“There,” said the Abbe, pointing to a row of statuettes lost in a hollow moulding at the very edge of the porch.

“But to ascribe so much importance to tiny figures which, after all, are there merely to fill up, as stop-gaps—it is preposterous!” cried Durtal.

“No doubt. But now let us examine the work.

“You will observe in the first place that, in opposition to the ritual observed in most of the great churches of the time—those of Amiens, Reims, and Paris, to name but three—it is not the Virgin who stands on the pillar between the two halves of the door, but Her Mother, Saint Anne; and inside, in the windows, we find the same thing: Saint Anne, as a negress, her head bound in a blue kerchief, holds Mary in her arms, as brown as a half-caste.”

“Why is this?”

“No doubt because the Emperor Beaudouin, after the sack of Constantinople, bestowed that Saint’s head on this cathedral.

“The ten colossal statues placed on each side of Her in the niches of the porch are familiar to you, for they attend Our Lady in every sanctuary of the thirteenth century—in Paris, at Amiens, at Rouen, Reims, Bourges, and Sens. The five to the left are a series figurative of the Son; the five on the right symbolize Our Lord Himself. They stand in chronological order: the prototypes of the Messiah, or the Prophets who foretold His birth, death, resurrection, and everlasting priesthood.

“To the left, Melchizedec, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and David; to the right, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Simeon, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Peter.”

“But why,” remarked Durtal, “is the son of Jonas in the midst of the Old Testament? His place is not there, but in the Gospels.”

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“Yes, but you will observe that Saint Peter here stands next to Saint John the Baptist; the two statues are side by side and touch each other. Then do you not perceive the meaning of this juxtaposition? One was the Precursor and the other the Successor of Christ; the first anticipated Him, the second carried out His mission. It was quite natural to place them together, and that the Chief of the Apostles should figure as the conclusion to the premisses set forth by the other statues of this portal.

“Finally, in addition to this series of patriarchs and prophets, you may see there, in the hollow between the pilasters, a pair of statues, one on each side of the door: Elijah the Tishbite, and Elisha his disciple.

“The first prefigures the Saviour’s Ascension by his being carried up alive to Heaven in a chariot of fire; the second typifies Jesus saving and preserving mankind in the person of the Shunammite’s son.

“Argument is vain,” murmured Durtal, who was meditative. “The Messianic prophecies are irresistible. All the logic of the Rabbins, the Protestants, the Freethinkers, all the ingenuity of the Germans, have failed to find a crack or to undermine the old rock of the Church. There is such a body of evidence, such certainty, such demonstration of the truth, such an indestructible foundation, that a man must be stricken with spiritual blindness to dare deny it.”

“Yes: and to the end that there should be no mistake, no possibility of alleging that the inspired Scriptures were written subsequent to the arrival of the Messiah they prophesy, to prove that they were neither invented nor added to after the event, it was God’s pleasure that they should be translated into Greek in the Septuagint version and known to the whole world more than two hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ.”

“To imagine the impossible—supposing the Gospels were to be annihilated, they could, I suppose, be restored, and a brief history written of the Saviour’s life as they relate it merely by studying the Messianic announcements in the books of the Prophets?”

“No doubt; for, after all, and it cannot be too often repeated, the Old Testament is the story before the event of the Son of Man and the founding of His Church; as Saint Augustine bears witness, ’the whole history of the Jewish people was a perpetual prophecy of the expected King.’

“You will see, apart from personages prefiguring the Redeemer which you may find in every page of the Bible: Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, Jonah, to name five taken at random; apart, too, from the animals and objects that symbolized Him under the Old Laws, as, for instance, the Paschal Lamb, the Manna, the Brazen Serpent, and others, we can, if you please, simply by quoting the Prophets, trace the broad outlines of Emmanuel’s life and epitomize the Gospels in a few words. Listen!”

The Abbe paused for thought, his hand over his eyes.

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“That he should be born of a Virgin is foretold by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—that this Advent should be preceded by a special messenger, Saint John, is noted by Malachi, whom Isaiah confirms, adding for greater certainty that he should be as ’the voice of one crying in the Wilderness.’

“The place of His birth, Bethlehem, is mentioned by Micah; the adoration of the Magi, offering gold, myrrh and frankincense, is announced by Isaiah and the Psalm ascribed to Solomon.

“His youth and His calling are clearly suggested by Ezekiel, who speaks of Him as seeking the lost sheep, and by Isaiah, who tells beforehand of the miracles He would perform on the blind and the deaf and dumb, and who finally declares that He will be ‘a stone of stumbling’ to the Jews.

“But it is when they speak of His Passion and Death that the prophecies become mathematically exact, incredibly precise. The offering of palm branches, the betrayal by Judas, and the price of thirty pieces of silver appear in Zechariah; and Isaiah takes up the parable to describe the rejection and opprobrium of Calvary: ’He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.... The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.... He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb.’

“David expatiates on the dreadful scene: ’He was a worm and no man, a very scorn of men and the outcast of the people.’

“Details are multiplied. The wounds in His hands are spoken of by Zechariah; David enumerates the circumstances of the Passion, word for word: the pierced hands, the division of His raiment, casting lots for the robe. The hooting of the Jews, bidding Him to save Himself if He be the Son of God, is mentioned in chapter ii. of the Book of Wisdom, and again by David; the gall and the vinegar offered Him on the Cross and the very words of Jesus giving up the ghost are to be found in the Psalms.

“Nor is this the last of the prophecies to be found in the Old Testament.

“Its prophetic mission is carried out to the end. The establishment of the Church in the place of the Synagogue is foretold by Ezekiel, Isaiah, Joel, and Micah; and the Mass, the Eucharistic Sacrament, is plainly adumbrated by Malachi, who declared that for the offerings of the Old Law offered only in the Temple at Jerusalem shall be substituted ’a pure offering to be offered in every place and by all nations’—by priests chosen from among all people, Isaiah adds, and David says after the order of Melchizedec.

“Pascal very truly remarks that ’the fulfilment of the prophecies is a perpetual miracle, and that no other proof is needed to show the divine origin of the Christian Religion.’”

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Durtal had gone closer to the statues, standing by Saint Anne, and was looking at one on the left wearing a pointed cap, a sort of papal tiara with a crown round the edge, robed in an alb girt round the middle with knotted cord, and a large cope with a fringe; the features were grave, almost anxious, and the eye fixed with an absorbed gaze into the distance. This figure held a censer in one hand, and in the other a chalice covered with a paten on which there was a loaf; and this image of Melchizedec, the King of Salem, threw Durtal into a deep reverie.

He was, in fact, one of the most mysterious types of the Holy Scriptures—this monarch mentioned in Genesis as the Priest of the Most High God. He consummates the sacrifice of bread and wine, blesses Abram, receives tithes from him, and then vanishes into the darkness of history. And suddenly his name is found in a psalm of David's, who declares that the Messiah is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec, and again he is lost without leaving a trace.

Then quite unexpectedly he reappears in the New Testament, and what Saint Paul says of him in the Epistle to the Hebrews makes him more enigmatical than ever. The apostle speaks of him as "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually." Saint Paul is explicit to show how great a person he was—and the dim light he casts on this figure goes out.

"You must confess that this King of Salem is a puzzle. What do the commentators think of him?" asked Durtal.

"They say but little. Only Saint Jerome observes that when Saint Paul speaks of him as without parents, without descent, without beginning, and without end, he does not mean to convey that Melchizedec came down from Heaven or was created *ab initio* like the first man, by the Ancient of Days. The phrase simply means that he is introduced into the history of Abraham without our knowing whence he came, who he was, when he was born, or at what time he died.

"In fact, the inscrutable part played by this prototype of Jesus in the canonical Scriptures has led to the most grotesque legends and heresies.

"Some have asserted that he was Shem, the son of Noah; others have thought that he was Ham. Simon Logothetes considers him an Egyptian; Suidas believes him to have belonged to the accursed race of Canaanites, and that this is why the Bible says nothing of his ancestry.

"The gnostics revered him as an Eon superior to Jesus; and in the third century Theodore le Changeur also asserted that he was not a man, but a virtue transcending Christ, because Christ's priesthood was but a copy of Melchizedec's.

“According to another sect, he was neither more nor less than the Paraclete. But come, in the absence of early Scriptures what do the seers say? Does Sister Emmerich speak of him?”

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“She tells us nothing precise,” replied Durtal. “To her he was a sort of priestly angel charged with the preparation for the great Act of Redemption.”

“That is very much the view held by Origen and Didymus, who also ascribed to him the angelic nature.”

“Thus she perceives him long before the advent of Abram in various desert spots of Palestine; he unlocks the springs of Jordan, and in another passage of the life of Christ she adds that it was he who taught the Hebrews the culture of wheat and of the vine. In fact, she throws no light on this insoluble enigma.”

“From the artist’s point of view,” Durtal went on, “Melchizedec is one of the best statues in this porch. But what a strange face is that of his neighbour Abraham, seen only three-quarters full, with hair like rolled grass, a beard like a river god, and a long nose straight from the forehead, coming down between the eyes without a bridge, like the proboscis of a tapir, with cheeks that seem swollen with cold, and a look—how shall I describe it?—of a conjuror who has made away with his son’s head.”

“In point of fact, he is listening to the commands of the angel, whom he cannot see; observe, below on the pedestal the ram caught in the thicket, and the symbolism is evident.

“This is the Father sacrificing his Son, and Isaac is the very image of the Son—Isaac bearing the wood to fire the altar, as Jesus bore the Cross; then the ram becomes figurative of the Saviour, and the bush in which he is caught by the horns is symbolical of the Crown of Thorns.

“To do full justice to this subject and to the teaching by figures that it contains, we ought also to have had the Patriarch’s two wives carved on the supporting pillar or plinth, and his other son Ishmael. For, as you know, these two women are emblems, Hagar of the Old Dispensation, and Sarah of the New; the former disappears to make way for the second, the Old Law being merely the preparation for the New; and the two sons born of these two mothers are by analogy the children of the Books, and thus Ishmael represents the Israelites, and Isaac the Christians.

“Next to Abraham, the father of believers, stands Moses, as a symbol of Christ; for the deliverance of Israel is an image of the Redemption of Man snatched by the Saviour from the devil, just as the passage of the Red Sea is an image of Baptism. He holds the Table of the Law and the staff round which the Brazen Serpent is twined. Then comes Samuel, in many ways typical of Christ, the founder of the Royal Priesthood and of Pontifical Kingship; and last of all, David holding the Lamb and Crown of Calvary.

“I need hardly remind you that this Prophet-King, more than any other personage, prefigured the sorrows of the Messiah, and that he too, to make the resemblance more

perfect, had his Judas in the person of Achitophel, who, like the later traitor, hanged himself."

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“You must admit,” said Durtal, “that these statues, before which the historians of this cathedral go into ecstasies, declaring in chorus they are the highest achievement of thirteenth-century sculpture, are far inferior to those of the twelfth century that adorn the great north porch. How evident is the lowering of the divine standard! Their action is freer, no doubt, and the play of drapery is broader. The rhubarb-stem plaits of the robes are fuller, and have some movement, but where is the grace as of a sculptured soul that we see in the royal porch? All these statues, with their massive heads, are thick-set and mute, devoid of communicative life. This is pious work—fine work, if you will—but devoid of the ‘beyond’; here is art indeed, but it has ceased to be mysticism.

“Look at St. Anne with her gloomy expression, either cross or suffering—how far she is from the so-called Radegonde and Berthe!

“With the exception of two, St. John and St. Joseph over there in the innermost part of the arch, these are familiar figures. They also occur at Reims and at Amiens. And do you remember the Simeon, the Virgin, and the St. Anne at Reims? The Virgin so guilelessly charming, so exquisitely chaste, holding out the Infant to Simeon, who stands mild and devout in his solemn garb as High Priest. St. Anne—a head of the same type as St. Joseph’s, and as those of two angels on the same frontal, standing by St. Nicasius, with his head cut off at the brows—St. Anne with a smiling, arch expression and yet elderly—a sharp little chin, large eyes, a thin, long, pointed nose, the look of a youthful duena, kindly but knowing.

“But, indeed, those image-makers excelled in creating these singular, indefinable countenances. Do you recall Our Lady of Paris, later, I believe, by a century? She is scarcely pretty, but so expressive, with the smile of happiness parting such melancholy lips. Seen from one side She is smiling at Jesus, watchful, almost sportive; it would seem as though she were waiting for the Child to say some merry word before laughing out; She is a girl-mother, not yet accustomed to her Child’s caress. Seen from another angle, this smile, apparently in the bud, has vanished. The mouth is puckered in sorrow, and promises tears.

“Perhaps when he succeeded in stamping on the face of Our Lady two such opposite expressions of peace and of fear, the sculptor intended to suggest at once the joy of the Nativity and the anticipated anguish of Calvary. Thus he has portrayed in one and the same image, the Mother of Sorrows and the Mother of Joy—has, without knowing it, embodied the prototypes of the Virgin of La Salette and the Virgin of Lourdes.

“And yet all this is inferior to the living and dignified art, so full of individuality and mystery, that we see in the royal porch of Chartres!”

“I will not contradict you,” said the Abbe Plomb. “Now that we have studied the series of types placed on St. Anne’s left hand, let us consider the prophetic series on her right.

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“First we see Isaiah; the pedestal on which he stands represents Jesse sleeping. The familiar stem, rooted in him, passes between the prophet’s feet, and the branches of the Virgin’s ancestry according to the flesh and the spirit, as they rise, fill the four courses of moulding in the central arch. By his side is Jeremiah, who, meditating on the Passion of Christ, wrote this lamentable passage which is read in the fifth lesson of the second Nocturn on Easter Eve: ’All ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.’ Next Simeon holding the Infant whose Birth he had foreseen, at the same time with the sorrows of the Virgin and the anguish of Golgotha; Saint John the Baptist, and finally Saint Peter, whose dress is an interesting study since it is copied from that of the thirteenth-century Popes.

“With what care is every detail wrought! Admire the treatment of the sandals, the gloves, the broidered amice, the alb, the maniple, the dalmatic, the pallium marked with six crosses, the triple crown, the conical tiara of brocaded silk, the pontifical breastplate, everything is chiselled, pierced, and patterned as if by a goldsmith.”

“Very true. But how superior altogether is the Saint John to his fellows on this front. What mastery we discern in that hollow, emaciated face, as expressive as the others are dull. He is apart from the conventional and hackneyed type. He stands upright, savage but mild, with his beard in curling prongs, his lean frame, his raiment of camel-skin; we can hear him speaking as he points to the Lamb carrying the hastate cross surrounded by a nimbus, pressing it to his bosom with both hands. That statue is sublime, and it is most certainly not by the same hand that carved the Abraham, nor even his immediate neighbour, Samuel. This prophet appears to be offering to David, who cares not, a lamb he is feeling, head downwards. He is a butcher pricing his goods, weighing the meat, inviting you to feel it, and hesitating to sell till he gets the best price. How different from the Saint John!”

“The tympanum of the door will have no charm for us,” the Abbe went on. “The death of the Virgin, Her assumption and coronation are more curious to read of in the Golden Legend than to study in those has-reliefs which are but an epitome.

“We will proceed to the left-hand doorway.

“It is much mutilated, in a lamentable state of ruin. Most of the large statues have disappeared. There were once, it would seem, as on the royal porch of Notre Dame at Paris and the southern porch at Reims, the figures of the Synagogue and the Church; also Leah and Rachel, typifying the active and the contemplative life, of which we shall decipher the details recorded in the archivolt.

“Of the large figures that remain, three are regarded as masterpieces: the Virgin, Saint Elizabeth, and Daniel.

“That is saying a great deal,” cried Durtal. “They are stupid-looking and the drapery is cold; the arrangement of their robes recalls the Greek peplum; they have a prophetic savour of the Renaissance.”

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“I will not contradict you; but what is really attractive is the scheme of ideas expressed by the figures in the hollow mouldings of the arch of this portal, based on an equilateral triangle. As to the tympanum, which displays the Nativity, the calling of the Shepherds of Bethlehem, the dream and adoration of the Kings, it is marred and worn by time; nor is it in a style of art that can move us deeply.

“Study the mouldings of the arch with the four rows of images that adorn them. First the inner one, with its ten torch-bearing angels; the second, illustrating the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; the third, representing the *Psychomachia*, or struggle between the Virtues and the Vices; the fourth, a row of twelve queens embodying the twelve fruits of the Spirit; and linger over the enchanting series of statues in the moulding at the very edge of the archway of the porch, representing the occupations of the active and the contemplative life.

“The active life, on the left, is imagined in accordance with the picture of the virtuous woman in the last chapter of Proverbs. She is seen washing wool in a bowl, carding it, stripping the flax, beating it, spinning it on a distaff, and winding it into hanks.

“On the right is seen the contemplative life; a woman praying, holding a closed book, opening it, reading it; she shuts it to meditate on it, teaches others, and falls into an ecstasy.

“Finally, in the outermost hollow of the moulding of the arch, the nearest to us and the most visible, there are fourteen statues of queens, leaning on shields with coats-of-arms, and formerly holding banners. The meaning of these statuettes has been much discussed, especially of the second figure on the left, which is named ‘*Libertas*’ the word being carved in the stone. Didron believed them to represent the domestic and social virtues; but the question has been finally and definitively settled by the most erudite and clearsighted symbolist of our day, Madame Felicie d’Ayzac, who, in a very edifying pamphlet published in 1843 on these statues and on the animals of the Tetramorph, has proved to demonstration that these fourteen queens are none else than the fourteen heavenly Beatitudes as enumerated by Saint Anselm: Beauty, Liberty, Honour, Joy, Pleasure, Agility, Strength, Concord, Friendship, Length of Days, Power, Health, Safety, and Wisdom.

“Is not this porch, as a whole, so closely set with imagery, one of the most ingenious and interesting doorways known, from the points of view of theology and of mysticism alike?”

“And no less from the point of view of art. You are perfectly right; these toiling and meditative women are so delicate and so loving, that we can but regret that they should be hidden in the shadow of a cavern. What artists must those have been who worked thus for the glory of God and for their own satisfaction, creating marvels while knowing that no man would see them!”

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“And they had not even the vanity to sign them; they were always anonymous.”

“Ah! they were men of a different mould from us. Prouder souls, and humbler.”

“And holier,” added the Abbe. “Shall we now inquire into the iconography of the right-hand portal? It has suffered less, and may be explained in a few words.

“This sculptured vault is, as you know, dedicated to types of Mary; but we might more accurately say that it is devoted to prototypes of Christ, for in this doorway, as in the other two, indeed, the image-makers of the thirteenth century have made it their task to identity the Son with the Mother.”

“In fact, most of the personages we have already studied relate more especially to Christ. What, then, are those in the Old Testament, which are more essentially proper to the daughter of Joachim, and transferred in images of stone to be deciphered here?”

“The allegories of the Virgin in the Scriptures are numberless. Whole books, as the Song of Songs and the Book of Wisdom, allude in every verse to Her beauty and wisdom. As to the non-human emblems that may be applied to Her, you know them well: Noah’s Ark, in which the Redeemer dwells; the Dove, the Rainbow, as a sign of alliance between the Lord and the earth; the burning bush whence came out the name of God; the cloud of fire guiding Israel in the desert; the Rod of Aaron which alone blossomed of those of the twelve tribes taken by Moses; the Ark of the Covenant; Gideon’s fleece; and a whole series, if possible, more obviously representative; David’s tower; Solomon’s throne; the garden enclosed and the fountain sealed of the Canticle; the dial of Ahaz; Elijah’s saving cloud; Ezekiel’s doorway—and I mention none but those of which the interpretation has received the seal and sanction of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

“As to the living beings that prefigured Her on earth, instances abound; the greater part of the famous women of the Old Testament are but anticipatory images of Her graces. Sarah, to whom an angel foretells the birth of a son who is himself a type of the Son; Miriam, the sister of Moses, who, by saving her brother from the river, freed the Jews; Jephthah’s daughter; Deborah, the prophetess; Jael, who, like the Virgin, was called Blessed among women; Hannah, the mother of Samuel, whose song of praise seems like a forecast of the *Magnificat*; Jehosheba preserving Joash from the fury of Athaliah, as the Virgin afterwards saved Jesus from the wrath of Herod; Ruth personifying both the contemplative and the active life; Rebecca, Rachel, Abigail, Solomon’s mother, the mother of the Maccabees, who witnessed the death of her sons; and again those whose names are inscribed under these arches; Judith and Esther, the first representative of courageous chastity, and the second of mercy and justice.”

“However, to avoid confusion, we will follow the statues in order as they stand in this porch, three on each side.

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“On the left Balaam, the Queen of Sheba and Solomon.

“On the right, Jesus the son of Sirach, Judith or Esther, and Joseph.”

“Balaam is this statue of a worthy peasant, smug and friendly, smiling in his beard, a stick in his hand and a hat like a pie-dish; and the Queen of Sheba, the woman who bends forward a little, looking as if she were cross-questioning and arguing over some deed she condemned. But what have these two persons to do with the life of the Virgin?”

“Balaam is a type of the Messiah. It was he who prophesied that a star should come out of Jacob and a sceptre rise out of Israel. As to the Queen of Sheba, according to the teaching of the Fathers, she is an image of the Church; Solomon’s spouse, as the Church is the spouse of Christ.”

“Well, well,” muttered Durtal to himself. “The thirteenth century could not give a fitting presentment of that queen, whom we picture to ourselves as dressed with foolish magnificence, rocking on a camel across the desert at the head of a caravan under the blazing sky across the furnace of sand. Her charms have appealed to writers, and not the smallest of them; Flaubert for one—this Queen Balkis, Mekida or Nicaule. But in the ‘*Tentation de Saint Antoine*’ she has failed to assume any form but that of a puerile and flimsy creature, a skipping and lisping puppet. In fact, no one but Gustave Moreau, the painter of Salome, could represent the woman, a virgin and a courtesan, a casuist and a coquette. He only could give life, under the flowered panoply of dress and the blazing gorget of jewels, to the crowned foreign face, with its smile as of an artless sphinx, come from so far to ask enigmas. Such a woman is too complicated for the spirit and the ingenuous art of the Middle Ages.

“Indeed, the sculptured image is neither mysterious nor suggestive. She is hardly pretty, and stands in the obsequious attitude of an advocate. Solomon looks like a jovial good fellow. The two effigies on the other side of the door might perhaps invite attention if they were not so completely crushed by the third. Again a question. By what right does the author of that admirable book ‘Ecclesiastes’ find a place in these ranks of honour?”

“Jesus the son of Sirach prefigures the Messiah as a Prophet and a Doctor. As to the figure next to him, it may equally well be Judith or Esther: her identity is doubtful; there is nothing that can help us to determine it.

“At any rate, as I told you but now, each is a harbinger of the Virgin. As to Joseph persecuted and sold, a slave raised almost to the throne, the merciful protector of his people, he is the prototype of Christ.”

Durtal paused to gaze up at the beardless face, with curling hair cut close round. The youth wore a tunic under a surcoat embroidered round the neck, and he stood motionless, a sceptre in his hand. He might be a very young monk, humble, simple, and so far advanced in the mystic road that he was unconscious of it. This statue was undoubtedly a portrait, and it seemed certain that some refined and innocent novice had served as a model to the artist. It was the work of a chastened and happy soul superior to the crowd. “This one, even more than the St. John, is a perfect dream,” said Durtal to the Abbe, who assented with a nod, and went on,—

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“The sculptures over the arches are practically invisible, for you must dislocate your neck to see them. Nor is the art they display exciting. Only the subjects are interesting. Besides a row of angels bearing stars and torches, they represent the achievements of Gideon; the story of Samson, who, when a prisoner, rose in the night, and carrying away the gates of Gaza, escaped from the town, as Christ broke the gates of death, and escaped alive from His sepulchre; the history of Tobit, as a divine paragon of mercy and patience; and finally, in the corner we find a replica of the grand porch, the signs of the zodiac, and a calendar in sculptured stone.

“The tympanum, as you see, is divided into two portions.

“In the upper part we see the Judgment of Solomon, as figuring the Sun of Justice, Christ Himself.

“In the lower half Job lies stretched on his dunghill, and the Messiah, of whom he is a prototype, comes, supported by two angels, to give him a palm-branch.

“To complete the elucidation of the symbolism of these doorways, it now only remains to glance at the three arches of the porch that precedes them. Here we see chiefly the benefactors of the cathedral and the saints of the See; also, mingled with these, certain prophets for whom there was not room in the arches of the doors. This vestibule is, so to speak, a postscript, a supplement added to the work.

“Here, where we stand in the right-hand arch are Saint Potentien, the first apostle of Chartres, and Saint Modesta, the daughter of Quirinus, the Governor of the city, who killed her because she would not deny Christ. Here you see Ferdinand of Castille. He presented certain windows distinguished by his arms, *gules, three castles or*, side by side with the azure shield and fleur-de-lys of France, in the principal window of this front. Next to him that shrewd and severe face is probably that of Baruch, the judge, and here, barefoot and burthened with a penitent’s satchel, you see Saint Louis, who loaded the cathedral with gifts and inaugurated its use.

“Under the porch of the middle door are two vacant pedestals, on which formerly stood the effigies of Philip Augustus and Richard Coeur de Lion, two of the most liberal donors to the church. On the other plinths stand the Comte and Comtesse de Boulogne, a buxom dame with masculine features, wearing a biretta; a prophet who is nameless, but no doubt Ezekiel, for he is missing from the series in this porch; Louis VIII., Saint Louis’ father; and, finally, that king’s sister Isabella, who founded the Abbey of Longchamps under the rule of Saint Clare. She is dressed as a nun, and next her in the shadow is a personage of the Old Dispensation carrying a censer, like Melchizedec. Remark, too, the firm and solemn mien of that priest, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, whose canticle ‘*Benedictus*’ foretells the blessings of Christ.

“Thus ends our review of this wonderful text-book of the Old Testament types, and the historical memorial of those benefactors whose gifts endowed the church with this sculptured imagery of the Ancient Word.”

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Durtal lighted a cigarette, and they walked up and down in front of the palace railing.

“Setting aside the question of art,” said Durtal, “in this long array of Christ’s ancestors there is one—David—who really confounds me, for he is the most complex of all; at once so august and so small! he is quite puzzling!”

“Why?”

“Well, only think of the life of the man who was by turns shepherd, warrior, and outlaw chief, an omnipotent king and a fugitive without either hearth or home; who was a wonderful poet and an exact prophet and seer! And is not the monarch’s character even more enigmatical than his career?

“He was mild and indulgent, devoid of rancour and hatred, and yet he was ferocious. Remember the punishments he inflicted on the Ammonites; his vengeance was appalling. He had them sawn asunder, cut them with harrows of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln.

“He was loyal, wholly devoted to the Lord, and just; but he committed the crime of adultery, and ordered the death of the husband he had betrayed. What contradictions!”

“To understand David,” said the Abbe Plomb, “you must not think of him apart from his surroundings, nor take him out of the age in which he lived, otherwise you measure him by the ideas of our own time, and that is absurd. In the Asiatic conception of royalty, adultery was almost permitted to a being whom his subjects regarded as superior to the common run of humanity; besides, women were then as a species of cattle belonging almost absolutely to him as the despot and supreme master. It was but the exercise of his regal power, as has been plainly shown by Monsieur Dieulafoy in his study of that king. And, on the other hand, if he is accused of tortures and bloodshed, why, the whole of the Old Testament is full of them! Jehovah Himself pours out blood like water, and exterminates men as if they were flies. It is well not to forget that the world then still lived under the Law of Fear. So it is not very surprising that, with a view to terrifying his enemies, whose manners and customs were not indeed any milder than his own, he should have tortured the inhabitants of Rabbah and baked the Ammonites.

“But in contrast to these acts of violence and the sins which he expiated, see how generous he was to Saul, and admire the magnanimity and charity of the man whom the followers of Renan would have us regard as a bandit chief and outlaw. Remember, too, that he taught the world, as yet ignorant, the virtues which at a later time Christ was to preach—humility in its most touching form, and repentance in its bitterest shape. When the prophet Nathan reproved him for the murder of Uriah, he confessed his sin with tears, fell on his face before God, bravely accepted the most terrible punishment: incest and murder in his family, the rebellion and death of his son, treason, misery, and a

desperate flight in the woods; and with what urgency he implores for pardon in the ‘*Miserere*,’ with what love and contrition he cries to the God he had offended!

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“He was a man whose vices were small and few if compared with those of the kings of his time—of admirable and exceptional virtues if compared with those of sovereigns of any time of every age. Why, then, fail to understand that God should have chosen him as a precursor? Besides, Jesus came to ransom sinners, He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. Was it not natural, then, that He should take to prefigure Him, a man who, like others, had sinned?”

“Yes; that is true, no doubt.”

And that evening, when he was away from the Abbe Plomb, from whom he parted on the church steps, as Durtal stretched himself on his bed, he recapitulated in his memory this theory of the Old Testament personages and the sculpture in the porch.

“To epitomize this north front,” said he to himself, “it must be regarded as an abridged history of the Redemption prepared so long beforehand, a table of sacred history, a compendium of the Mosaic Law, and at the same time foreshadowing the Christian law.

“The vocation of the Jewish nation is set forth in these three doorways, their whole mission from Abraham to Moses; from Moses to the Babylonian Captivity; from the Captivity till the death of Christ, comprehending three phases of its history: the making of Israel, its independent existence, its life among the Gentiles.

“And how slowly, with what difficulty, was this fusion of tribes achieved! With what waste and what ejection of dross! What massacres were needed to discipline those rapacious wanderers, to quell the greed and licentiousness of the race!”

And in a succession of bewildering images he beheld the irruption into Judaea of the headlong and indignant prophets, hurling imprecations against the crimes of the kings and the atrocities of that unstable race perpetually tempted by the voluptuous worships of Asia, always rebelling and complaining, and ready to break the iron bit with which Moses had subdued them.

And prominent in this group of declaiming judges, towering above the masses, he saw Samuel, the man of contradictions, going whither the Lord drove him, achieving work which he was destined to overthrow, creating the monarchy which he reprobated, consecrating a fanatic king—a sort of madman, who passes across behind the transparent sheet of history with frantic and threatening gestures; and then Samuel has to overwhelm this extraordinary Saul under the burthen of his curses, to anoint David king—David, whom another prophet is to accuse of his crimes. And these inspired men succeed each other, continuing from year to year their task of guardians of the public soul, watching over the consciences of judges and kings, expectant of the Divine word, and ready to proclaim it over the head of the crowd; announcing disasters, ending often as martyrs, prominent from beginning to end of the sacred annals till they disappear in John beheaded by an Herodias!

Then came Elijah, cursing the worship of Baal, contending with the dreadful Jezebel; Elijah founding the first society of monks, the only man of the Old Testament history except Enoch who did not die; and Elisha, his disciple; the greater prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and the groups of minor prophets announcing the advent of the Son, rising up in commination or lamentation, threatening or comforting the people.

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The whole history of Israel flowed along in a torrent of curses, rivers of blood, oceans of tears!

This dismal procession at last oppressed Durtal. With closed eyes he suddenly beheld a patriarch who stood before him, and he recognized with awe that this was Moses, an old man with a beard like a cataract, hair sweeping his shoulders, a master workman whose powerful hands had kneaded those rough Hebrews and coagulated their medley hordes. He was indeed father and lawgiver to this people.

Facing the scene on Calvary there rose before him the scene on Sinai, the close and the opening of the great chronicle of the nation that was dispersed by its own crime, enclosing the whole purpose of its existence in the space between those two hills.

A terrific spectacle! Moses alone on the smoking height, while lightnings rend the clouds and the mountain trembles at the sound of the invisible trumpet. Below, the awe-stricken people fly; and Moses, unmoved amid the roar of thunder and the repeated fires of lightning, listens to Him who Is, and who dictates the terms of His protection of Israel; and then Moses, with shining face, descends from the Mount, which, according to St. John Damascene, is the type of the Virgin's Womb, as the smoke that rises from it is that of the desires and flames of the Holy Spirit.

Suddenly this picture vanished; the Patriarch remained, and by his side appeared the first High Priest of the worship of Jehovah, whom the sculptors had omitted to represent on the exterior of the porch, but whose image the glass-workers have portrayed in a window of the same front; Aaron, the great Pontiff, anointed by Moses.

And this ceremony, during which Moses conferred the order of priesthood on the person and the descendants of his elder brother, arose before Durtal's fancy as a terrific scene. The details he had formerly read of this ordination, the ceremonies lasting seven days, recurred to his mind. After ablution and the anointing with oil, the holocaust of victims began. Flesh sputtered on the walls, mingling the black stench of burnt fat with the blue vapour of incense; the Patriarch anointed the right ear and thumb and foot of Aaron and his sons with blood; then, taking up the flesh of the sacrifice, he placed them in the hands of the new-made priests, who rocked first on one foot and then on the other, thus waving the offerings above the altar.

Then all bowed their heads under a shower of oil mingled with blood with which the Consecrator inundated them. They looked like slaughterers from the shambles and lamp trimmers, all sprinkled as they were with clots of red mire, on which glistened yellow eyes.

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And then, as in the swift change of magic-lantern slides, this savage scene, this worn-out symbol of a splendid and subtle liturgy, stammered out in a hoarse voice, disappeared, giving way to the solemn array of Levites and priests marching in procession under the guidance of Aaron, resplendent in his turban with the crown of gold above it, in his purple robe, on its hem the open pomegranates of scarlet and blue, with tinkling bells of gold; and he wore the linen ephod, girt with a girdle, blue and purple and scarlet, and kept in its place by shoulder-pieces fastened with onyx stones, his breastplate in a blaze, flashing sparks that lighted up as he moved in the twelve gems of the breastplate.

Again the scene changed. He beheld an amazing palace; under the shade of its domes of giddy height, tropical trees and flowers were planted by tepid pools; monkeys sported there, hanging in bunches to the boughs, while long-drawn, insinuating melodies were scraped on stringed instruments, and the rattle of tambourines made the eyed plumes quiver in the peacocks' outspread tails.

In this strange hot-bed, filled with clumps of flowers and of women, this immense harem where his seven hundred princesses and his three hundred concubines disported themselves, Solomon watched the whirl of dances, gazed at the living hedge of women, seen against the background of gold-plated walls, their bodies clothed only in the transparent veil of vapour rising from resins burning on tripods.

He appeared as a typical Eastern monarch, a sort of Khalif or Sultan, or fairy-tale Rajah —the prodigious king at once polygamous, unbridled, insatiable by luxury, and learned, artistic, peace-loving, the wisest among men. In advance of the ideas of his time, he was the great builder in Israel, and the commerce of the country was of his making. He left such a reputation for wisdom and justice that he came at last to be regarded as an enchanter and wizard. Even Josephus tells us that he wrote a book of Magic, of incantations for laying evil spirits; in the Middle Ages he was said to have owned a magic ring, charms, forms of evocation, secrets for exorcism; and in all these legends the image of the king becomes confused.

And he would remain to this day a figure out of the Thousand and One Nights, were it not that in the decline of his glory we see him as a grandiose image of the mournfulness of life, the vanity of joy, the nothingness of man.

His old age was melancholy. Exhausted and governed by women, he denied God and sacrificed to idols. We discern in him wide gaps, vast clearings in the soul. Weary of everything, sick of enjoyment, and drunken with sin, he wrote some admirable reflections and anticipated the blackest pessimism of our day, summing up the misery of him who endures the condemnation of living, in phrases that are its final expression. What distress is that of the Preacher: All the days of man are sorrow, and his travail grief; better is the day of death than the day of birth; all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

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After his death, too, the old king remains a mystery. Had he expiated his apostacy and his fall? Was he, like his fathers, received into Abraham's bosom? And the greatest writers of the Church have not agreed about it.

According to St. Irenaeus, St. Hilary, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ambrose, and St. Jerome, his penance was accomplished, and he is saved.

According to Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory the Great, he did not repent to amendment, and so he is damned.

Durtal turned over in his bed and tried to lose consciousness. Everything was in confusion in his brain, and at last he fell into disturbed slumbers mingled with hideous nightmares, in which he saw Madame Mesurat standing in the place of the queen on a pedestal in the porch; and Durtal fumed at her ugliness, raging against the Canons, to whom he vainly appealed to remove his housekeeper and replace the queen.

CHAPTER XII.

This church symbolism, this psychology of the cathedral, this study of the soul of the sanctuary, so entirely overlooked since mediaeval times by those professors of monumental physiology called archaeologists and architects, so much interested Durtal that he was able by its help to forget for some hours the turmoil and struggles of his soul; but the moment he ceased to ponder on the inner sense of things seen, he was as bad as ever.

The sort of requisition he had laid before the Abbe Gevresin, to put an end to his tossing and decide for him one way or the other, was distracting while it terrified him.

The cloister! He must reflect a long time before making up his mind to imprison himself. And the *pros* and *cons* tormented him in endless alternation.

"Here I am just where I was before I set out for La Trappe!" said he to himself, "and the decision to be taken is even more serious; for Notre Dame de l'Atre was but a temporary refuge. I knew when I went there that I should not stay; it was a painful time to be endured, but it was only a short time; whereas at this moment I have to come to a determination from which there is no turning back, to go to a place where, if I once shut myself in, I must stay till I die. It is imprisonment for life, with no mitigation of the penalty, no pardon and release; and the Abbe talks as if it were the simplest thing!

"What am I to do? Renounce all freedom, be nothing but a machine, a chattel, in the hands of a man I do not know—God knows I am willing! But there are other and more pressing questions from my point of view; in the first place, this matter of literature—to write no more, to give up what has been the occupation and aim of my life; that would be painful; still, it is a sacrifice I could make. But to write and then see my language

stripped and washed in pump-water, all the colour taken out by another man, who may be a learned man or a saint,

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but have no more idea of art than St. John of the Cross! That is too hard. That one's ideas should be picked over and weeded, from the theological point of view, I quite understand, nothing could be more just; but one's style! And in a monastery, so far as I can learn, nothing is printed till the Prior has read it; and he has the right to revise everything, alter it—suppress it if he chooses. It would evidently be better not to write at all, but this again is not a matter of choice, since under the rule of obedience each one must submit to orders, and treat of any subject in any way the Abbot commands.

"And unless the master were very exceptional, what a stone of stumbling!

"And then, besides this, which is to me the most important question of all, there are others worth considering. From the little I have been told by my two priests, the blessed silence of the Cistercians is not the rule with the black-frocked Orders. Now, however perfect these cenobites may be, they remain none the less men; or, to express it otherwise, sympathy and antipathy live in constant and compulsory friction; with very restricted subjects of discussion, living in complete ignorance of all that is going on outside, conversation must degenerate into chatter; at last the only interest of life centres in trivialities, in petty questions which in such an atmosphere assume the importance of events.

"A man becomes an old maid, and how infinitely wearisome must this talk be, unvaried by the unforeseen.

"Finally, there is the question of health. In the convent nothing but stews and salads! A disordered stomach before long, broken sleep, crushing fatigue in an ill-treated frame—-ah, all that is neither attractive nor amusing! Who knows whether, after a few months of this mental and physical rule, I should not have sunk into bottomless dejection, whether the sloth of those monastic gaols would not have crushed me and left me absolutely incapable of thought or action?"

And he concluded:—

"It is madness to think of a cloistered life; I should do better to remain at Chartres."

But hardly had he made up his mind not to move, when the reverse of the medal forced itself upon him.

A convent! Why, it was the only logical existence, the only right life! All these fears he suggested to himself were imaginary. In the first place, as to his health. Had he forgotten La Trappe, where the food was far more innutritious and the rule far stricter? Why be alarmed beforehand?

And, on the other hand, could he fail to perceive the need for conversation, the wisdom of speech, relieving the solitude of the cloister just when weariness might supervene? It was a remedy against constant introspection, and exercise taken with others secured health to the soul and gave tone to the body; and as for saying that these monastic dialogues would be trivial, were the conversations he might hear in any other society more edifying? In short, was not the company of the Brethren far superior to that of men of any profession, condition, or sort, whom he would be obliged to meet in the world outside?

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And what, after all, were these trifles, these minor details in the splendid completeness of the cloister? What were these petty matters—mere nothings—in the scale as against peace, the cheerfulness of the soul in the joy of the services and the fulfilment of the task of praise? Would not the tide of worship cleanse everything, and wash away the small defects of men, like straws in a stream? Was it not the case of the mote and the beam, with the parts reversed—imperfections discerned in others, when he was so far their inferior?

“Constantly, at the end of every argument, I find my own lack of humility,” said he to himself. “What efforts are needed to remove the mire of my sins! In a convent perhaps I might rub the rust off,” and he dreamed of a purer life, a soul soaked in prayer, expanding in communion with Christ, who might perhaps, without too much soiling Himself, come down to dwell in him. “It is the only life desirable,” cried he. “It is settled!”

But then, like a douche of cold water, a reflection overwhelmed him. It would in any case be the life in common, school-life, which would begin again for him; it would be the garrison-rule of a convent!

This floored him. Then he tried to fight against it, and lost patience.

“Come, come!” he growled, “a man does not shut himself up in an abbey to take his ease there; a convent is not a pious Sainte-Perine; he retires there, I suppose, to expiate his sins and prepare for death. What, then, is the use of expatiating on the kind of punishments to be endured? A determination to accept them is all, to endure them and be strong!”

Did he, then, sincerely long for suffering and penance? He dared not answer himself. In the depth of his soul a hesitating “Yes” rose up, smothered at once by the clamour of cowardice and fear. Why then go?

He was only bewildering himself, and when the worst of this turmoil was over he thought of a respite, or of some half-measure, some mild mortification quite endurable, some repentance so slight as to be none at all.

“I am an idiot,” he concluded; “I am fighting with the air; I am puzzling myself with words, about habits of which I have no knowledge. The first thing to be done is to visit some Benedictine monastery—nay, several—to compare them, and to see for myself what the life is that is led there. Then the matter as to the oblates must be cleared up; if the Abbe Plomb is well informed, their fate depends on the caprice of the Abbot, who can tighten or loosen the halter according to his more or less domineering character. But is that quite certain? There were always oblates throughout the Middle Ages; consequently they are controlled by the secular law!

“And all this is so human, so vile! For it is not a matter of disputing texts and more or less accommodating clauses. It is a case of subjection without reserve, of leaping boldly into the water; of giving oneself up entirely to God. Any other view of the cloister is to regard it as a citizen’s home, and that is absurd. My apprehensions, my antagonism, my compromises, are disgraceful!

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“Yes; but where can I find the necessary strength to brush myself clean from this dust of the soul?”

And at last, when he felt himself bruised by these alternating desires and fears, he took refuge with Notre Dame de Sous-Terre.

The crypt was closed in the afternoon, but he found his way in by a small door in the sacristy inside the cathedral, and descended into utter darkness.

Having reached the crypt in front of the altar, he round once more the doubtful but soothing odour of that vault, smoked by burning tapers, and went forward in the soft, warm atmosphere of frankincense and a cellar. It was even darker than in the early morning, for the lamps were out; floating wicks only, shining through what looked like very thin orange-peel, threw gleams of tarnished gold on the sooty walls.

As he turned, with his back to the altar, he could see the low aisle in retreating perspective, and at the end, as in a tunnel, the light of day—unluckily, for it allowed him to discern certain hideous paintings of scenes commemorating the ecclesiastical glories of Chartres: the visit paid to the cathedral by Mary de’ Medici and Henri IV.; Louis XIII. and his mother; Monsieur Olier offering to the Virgin the keys of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice with a dress of gold brocade; Louis XIV. at the feet of Notre Dame de Sous-Terre; by the grace of heaven, the remaining frescoes seemed extinct; at any rate, they lay in shadow.

What was really blissful was to be alone with the Virgin, who looked down, her dark face gleaming dimly in the gloom when a wick happened to flicker with short flashes of brighter light.

Durtal, kneeling before Her, determined to address Her, to say to Her,—

“I am afraid of the future and of its cloudy sky, and I am afraid of myself, for I am wasting in depression and bewilderment. Thou hast hitherto led me by the hand. Do not desert me; finish Thy work. I know that it is folly thus to take care for the future, for Thy Son has said, ‘Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.’ Still, that depends on temperament. What is easy to some is so hard for others. Mine is a restless spirit, always astir, always on the alert. Do what I will, it wanders, feeling its way about the world, and gets lost! Bring it home, keep it near Thee in a leash, kind Mother, and after so much weariness, grant me to find rest!

“Oh! to be no longer thus torn in sunder, to be of one mind! Oh! to have a soul so quenched that it should know no sorrows, no joys, but those of the liturgy, that it might only be claimed, day by day, by Jesus or by Thee, and follow Your lives as they are unfolded in the annual cycle of the Church services! To rejoice at the Nativity, to laugh on Palm Sunday, to weep in Holy Week, and be indifferent to all else, to cease to hold

oneself as of any account, to care not at all for one's individual self! What a dream! How easy it then would be to take refuge in a cloister!

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“But is this possible to any but a saint? What a stripping of the soul it presupposes; what an emptying out of every profane idea, of every earthly image; what a taming of the subjugated imagination, never venturing forth but on one track, instead of wandering haphazard as mine does!

“And yet how foolish is every other care—for all that does not tend to Heaven is vain on earth. Aye, but as soon as I try to put these thoughts into, practice, my jade of a soul plunges and rears; do what I will, it only bucks and makes no advance.

“Alas! Blessed Virgin, I do not seek to excuse myself and my sins. And still I dare confess to Thee that it is discouraging, heart-breaking, to understand nothing and see nothing! Is this Chartres where I am vegetating a waiting-place, a halting-place between two monasteries, a bridge leading from Notre Dame de l’Atre to Solesmes or some other Abbey? Or is it, on the contrary, the final stage where it is Thy will that I should remain fixed? But then my life has no further meaning! It is purposeless, built and overthrown with the shifting of sands. To what end, if this be the case, are these monastic yearnings, these calls to another life, this all but conviction that I have stopped at a station, and am not yet at the place whither I am to travel?

“If only it might be now, as on other occasions when I have felt Thee near me, when in response to my questions Thou hast answered me, if only it might be here as at La Trappe, much as I suffered there! But no. I hear Thee not—Thou dost not heed me.”

Durtal was silent. Then he went on,—

“I am wrong to address Thee thus,” he said. “Thou dost not carry us in Thine arms unless we be unable to walk; Thou hast care and caresses for the poor soul born anew by conversion; but when it can stand it is set down on the ground, and Thou lookest on while it makes trial of its strength.

“This is meet and right; but it does alter the fact that the memory of those celestial alleviations, those first, lost joys is crushing to the soul.

“O Holy Virgin, Holy Virgin, have pity on the rickety souls that struggle on so painfully when they are no longer upheld by Thee! Have pity on the bruised souls to whom every effort is painful; on the souls whom nothing can console, to whom everything is affliction! Take pity on the homeless, outcast souls, the wandering souls, unable to settle and dwell with their kind, the tender, budding souls! Take pity on all souls such as mine! Have pity on me!”

And before quitting the Mother he would often visit Her in those depths where, since the Middle Ages, the faithful no longer seek her; he would light an end of taper, and, turning aside from the nave of the crypt, follow the curved line of the wall along the entrance

passage as far as the sacristy of this underground church, where in the ponderous stone-work was a door strengthened with iron-work.

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Through and down a little flight of steps, he reached a cellar which was the ancient martyrium where, of old, in time of war the ciborium was concealed. An altar stood in the middle of this well, dedicated in the name of Saint Lubin. In the crypt the distant hum of the bells, the sounds of life in the cathedral above, could still be heard; here, nothing! It was like being in the tomb. Unfortunately, some squalid, square columns whitened with lime-wash, built on the altar to give support to Bridan's group in the choir above, spoilt the barbaric simplicity of this *oubliette*, forgotten, lost in the night of ages, and underground.

He went up again comforted nevertheless, accusing himself of ingratitude, and asking himself how he could dream of leaving Chartres and going away from the Virgin, with whom he could thus so easily converse in solitude whenever he would.

On other days, when it was fine, he would take for the object of his walk a convent whose existence had been revealed to him by Madame Bavoil. One afternoon he had met her in the square, and she had said to him,—

"I am going to see the little Jesus of Prague at the Carmelite convent here. Will you come with me, our friend?"

Durtal had no liking for these petty pilgrimages made by good women; but the idea of going to the Carmelite chapel, which was unknown to him, tempted him to accompany her, and she led the way to the Rue des Jubelines, behind the railway line and beyond the station. They had to cross a bridge that groaned under the weight of rolling trains, and turned to the right down a path winding between the embankment on one side, and on the other thatched huts, and old sheds, and other houses less poverty-stricken, indeed, but closed and impenetrable after daybreak. Madame Bavoil led him to where this alley ended under the arch of another bridge. Overhead was a siding, with its signals round and square, red and yellow, and posts with cast-iron ladders; and there always in the same place an engine was being fired, or, with shrill whistling, was moving out backwards.

Madame Bavoil stopped at a door under a round arch in an immense wall, which not far off ran against the embankment, forming an impassable angle; it was built of millstone grit of the colour of burnt almonds, like that used for the Paris reservoirs; here dwelt the nuns of Saint Theresa.

Madame Bavoil, as being used to convent ways, pushed open the door which stood ajar, and Durtal saw before him a paved walk between strips of river pebbles, dividing a garden stocked with fruit-trees and geraniums. Two yews, clipped into spheres, with a cross on the top of each, gave this priestly close a graveyard flavour.

The path led upwards, cut into steps. When they reached the top Durtal saw a building of brick and plaster pierced with windows guarded by iron bars, and a grey door with a

wicket bearing these words painted in white, “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who put our trust in Thee.”

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He looked about him, surprised at seeing nobody, hearing nothing; but Madame Bavoil beckoned to him, made her way round the house, and led the way into a sort of vestibule along which clambered a vine wrapped in swathing, and she turned into a little chapel, where she knelt down on the flagstones.

Durtal, amazed, seemed to breathe the melancholy that weighed on this naked sanctuary.

He was in a building of the end of the eighteenth century; in the middle, raised on eight steps, stood an altar of wax-polished wood in the shape of a tomb; above it was a shrine covered with a curtain of white brocade and surmounted by a picture of the Annunciation, a washy painting mounted in a gilt frame. To the right and left were two medallions in relief, on one side Saint Joseph and on the other Saint Theresa, and above the picture, close to the ceiling, were the arms of the Carmelites, also in relief: a shield with a cross and stars beneath a marquis's coronet, from which an arm emerges wielding a sword. This was held up by fat little angels, the swollen infants of the sculptors of that period, and floating in the air was a scroll bearing the motto of the order: "*Zelo, zelatus sum, pro Domino Deo Exercituum*."

Finally, to the right of the altar, the iron grating of the nunnery was seen in an arch in the wall; and on the steps of the altar, inside the railing for the communicants, an annoying statue was emerging from under a gilt canopy—the Infant Christ holding a globe in one hand, and raising the other as if to command attention; a statue of painted plaster as of some precocious mountebank, with homage offered in this deserted chapel, of two pots of hydrangea and a floating wick in a crimson glass.

"How cold and dismal is such *rococo*!" thought Durtal. He knelt down on a chair, and by degrees his impressions underwent a change. This holy place, saturated with prayer, seemed to let its ice melt and grow balmy. It was as though visions percolated through the gate of the cloister and shed warm puffs of air in the place. A sense of warmth of soul stole over him, of being at home in this solitude.

The only astonishing thing was to hear, in such remote seclusion, the whistling of trains and the rumbling of engines.

Durtal went out before Madame Bavoil had finished the rosary. Standing in the doorway, he saw, just opposite, the cathedral in profile, but with only one spire, the old belfry being hidden by the new. Under a cloudy sky it stood massively solid, green and grey, with its roof of oxidized copper, and the pumice-stone hue of the tower.

"It is stupendous!" said Durtal to himself, recalling the various aspects it could assume according to the season and the hour, as the colour of its complexion varied. "The whole effect under a clear sky is silvery grey, and if the sun lights it up it turns pale golden yellow; seen from near, its skin is like a nibbled biscuit, a siliceous limestone

eaten into holes; at other times, when the sun is setting, it turns crimson and appears like some vast and exquisite shrine, all rose colour and green; and in the twilight it is blue, and seems to evaporate into violet.

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“And those porches!” he went on. “That of the royal front is the least variable; it remains of a cinnamon-brown half-way up, of a dull pumice-grey as it rises; that on the south side, more eaten into by lichens, is wearing green, while the arches on the north, with their stones like concrete full of shells, suggest to the fancy a sea-grotto left high and dry.”

“Well, our friend, are you dreaming?” said Madame Bavoil, tapping him on the shoulder.

“This Carmelite convent you see is a very austere house,” said she, “and as you may suppose, grace abounds;” and when Durtal murmured,—

“What a contrast between this dead spot and the railway that runs past it, always in a stir!” she exclaimed,—

“Do you suppose that anywhere else you will find, side by side, such an image of the contemplative life and the active life?”

“And what must the nuns think as they hear these continual departures for the outer world? Those who have grown old in the convent would, of course, despise these calls, these invitations to live; the quietude of their spirits must increase as they find themselves protected for ever from the perils which the noisy rush of the trains must bring before them every hour of the day and night; they will feel more drawn to pray, for those whom the chances of life carry away to Paris, or bring back to the country, outcasts from the city. But the postulants—the novices? In the hours of desertion, of doubt as to their vocation, which must come over them, is it not appalling to think of the constantly revived memories of home, of friends, of all that they have left to shut themselves up for ever in a convent?

“As each asks herself whether she can endure watching and fasting, must it not be a permanent temptation to rebel against being buried alive in a tomb?

“And I cannot help thinking of the appearance as of a reservoir that the style of building gives to this Carmel. The image is precise, for the convent is indeed a reservoir into which God dips to draw forth the good works of love and tears, and restore the balance of the scales in which the sins of the world are so heavy!”

Madame Bavoil smiled.

“A very old Carmelite nun,” said she, “who had gone into this House before railways were invented, died here hardly three months ago. She had never been outside the walls, and never saw an engine or a railway carriage. Under what form could she picture to herself the trains she heard thundering and shrieking?”

“As some diabolical invention, no doubt, since these conveyances carry us to the wicked but delightful sins of towns,” replied Durtal, smiling. “But it is a curious case, nevertheless.”

He was silent; then, changing the subject, he said,—

“And do you still hold communion with Heaven, Madame Bavoil?”

“No,” she answered, sadly. “I no longer have any converse or any visions. I am deaf and blind. God is silent to me.”

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She shook her head, and, after a pause, she added, speaking to herself,—

“Such a little thing is enough to displease Him. If He detects a trace of vanity in the soul on which He shines, He departs. And as the Father tells me, the mere fact of having spoken of the special graces vouchsafed to me by Jesus, proves that I am not humble. In short, His will be done!—And you, our friend, do you still think of taking shelter in a cloister?”

“I—my spirit still craves a truce; my soul is but shifting ballast.”

“Because, no doubt, you are not honest in your dealings. You behave as if you meant to strike a bargain with Him; that is not the way to set to work.”

“What would you do in my place?”

“I should be generous; I should say to Him, ’Here I am, do with me as Thou wilt. I give myself unconditionally to Thee. I ask but one thing: Help me to love Thee.’”

“And do you suppose that I have not blamed myself for my cowardice of heart?”

They walked on in silence. When they reached the cathedral, Madame Bavoil proposed that they should pay a visit to Notre Dame du Pilier.

They seated themselves in the gloom of the side aisle of the choir, where the dark-toned windows were still further obscured by a poorly executed wooden niche, in which the Virgin, as dark as her namesake in the crypt, Notre Dame de Sous-Terre, stood on a pillar, hung round with bunches of metal hearts and little lamps on coronas, from the roof. Frames of tapers on each side shot up little tongues of flame, and prostrate women were praying, their faces hidden in their hands or upturned to the dark countenance, on which the light did not fall.

It struck Durtal that the woes repressed in the morning hours were poured out in the twilight; the faithful did not now come for Her alone, but for themselves; each one brought a load of sorrows and opened it before Her. What anguish of soul was poured out on the stones by these women, leaning prostrate against the railing that protected the pillar which each kissed as she rose.

And the swarthy image, carved in the early part of the sixteenth century, had listened, Her face invisible, to the same sighs, the same complaints, from succeeding generations, had heard the same cries, echoing down the ages, for ever lamenting the bitterness of life, for ever expressing the desire, all the same, for length of days!

Durtal looked at Madame Bavoil. She was praying with closed eyes, kneeling on the stones and sitting on her heels, her arms hanging, her hands clasped. How happy was she to be able thus to abstract herself.

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And he tried to force himself to say a prayer, quite a short one, in the hope that he might succeed in getting to the end without letting his mind wander. He began "*Sub tuum*"—-"Under Thy protection do we take refuge; Holy Mother of God, despise not us." What it was really indispensable that he should obtain from the Father Superior was permission to take his books with him into the monastery, and to have at least a few pious toys in his cell. Ah—but how could he explain that any profane literature was necessary in a convent, that, from an artist's point of view, it was requisite to refresh one's memory of the prose of Hugo, of Baudelaire, of Flaubert—"I am at sea again!" said Durtal suddenly to himself.

He tried to brush away these distractions, and went on: "Despise not the prayers we put up to Thee in our needs—" And he was off again at a gallop in his dreams—"Even supposing that no difficulty were made about this request, the question would still remain as to submitting manuscripts for revision, obtaining the *imprimatur*; and how would that be arranged?"

Madame Bavoil interrupted his wanderings by rising from her knees. Recalled to himself, he hastily finished his prayer—"but deliver us from all perils, glorious and blessed Virgin; Amen." And he parted from the housekeeper on the steps of the church, going home much vexed by his dissipation of mind.

He there found a note from the Editor of the *Review*, which had published his paper on the Fra Angelico in the Louvre, asking him for another article.

This diversion made him glad; he thought that this task might perhaps preserve him from vain thoughts of his discomfiture at Chartres and his fancy for the cloister.

"What can I send to the *Review*?" said he to himself. "Since what they chiefly ask for is criticism of religious art, I might write some short study of the early German painters. I have ample notes, made on the spot in the galleries there; let us see!"

He turned them over, lingering to read a note-book containing his impressions of travel. A summing up of his remarks on the School of Cologne arrested his attention.

At every page he gave vent to his surprise in more and more vehement exclamations, at the false ideas and absurd theories put forward for so many years with regard to these pictures.

Every writer, without exception, had expatiated, each more enthusiastically than the last, on the pure and religious art of these early painters, speaking of them as seraphic artists who had depicted superhuman beauty, white and sylph-like Virgins all soul, standing out like celestial visions, against backgrounds of gold.

Durtal, prejudiced by the unanimity of this universal praise, expected to find almost impalpably fair angels, Flemish Madonnas, etherealized in some sort, having shed their husk of flesh, rapturous Memlings with eyes full of heaven, and bodies that had almost ceased to be—and he remembered his dismay on entering the galleries of the Cologne Museum.

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In point of fact his disenchantment had begun as soon as he stepped out of the train. Carried in the course of a night from Paris to that city, he had made his way through narrow streets where every basement window exhaled the fragrance of *sauerkraut*, and he had reached the cathedral square, beautified by Farina's shop-signs, where in front of the famous Dom he had been obliged to confess that this facade, this exterior, was a huge piece of patchwork—a delusion. Every part of it was furbished up, and the church sheltered no sculpture under its portals; it was symmetrical, built by peg and line; its rigid forms, its hard outlines were an offence.

The interior was better, in spite of the vulgar blaze, the cheap fireworks, of ignoble modern glass. And there, in a chapel near the choir, might be seen, for a consideration, the most famous picture of the German school, the *Dombild*, by Stephan Lochner, a triptych representing the Adoration of the Magi on the centre panel, with St. Ursula on the left hand shutter and St. Gereon on the right.

Durtal's consternation had risen to the highest pitch. The work was thus arranged. Against a gold background, a Virgin, crowned, red-haired, bullet-headed, dressed in blue, held on her knees an Infant blessing the Kings, two kneeling on each side of the throne. One, an old fellow with a short beard like a retired officer, and hair curled like shavings over his ears, was sumptuously arrayed in crimson velvet brocaded with gold, his hands clasped; the other, a dandy with long hair and a large beard, dressed in green shot with gold and trimmed with fur, held up a golden cup. And behind each, other figures were standing, flourishing their swords and standards, in cavalier attitudes, and posing for the public, thinking much more of the visitors than of the Virgin.

This, then, was the type of Madonna, of the supersensual and sublimated Virgins of Cologne! This one was puffy, redundant, chubby; she had the neck of a heifer, and flesh like cream, or hasty pudding, that quivers when it is touched. Jesus, whose expression was the only interesting feature of the picture, a certain manly gravity that was shown without any disfigurement of the character of childhood, was also round and well-fed, and the scene took place on a lawn strewn with flowers—primroses, violets, and strawberries painted in fine stipple with the touch of a miniaturist.

You might call this picture what you pleased, the execution, smooth and wavy, and cold in spite of the brilliant colours, was a finished piece of work, brilliant, dexterous—but not religious; it betrayed a decadence; the work was laboured, complicated, pretty, but it was in no sense that of an early master.

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This common, squat Virgin, fat and pudgy, was simply a good German girl, well-dressed and squarely seated, but she could never have been the ecstatic Mother of God! Then these kneeling and standing men were not in prayer; there was no devotion in this picture; the personages were all thinking of something else, folding their hands and looking round at the painter who was depicting them. As to the wings, it were better to say nothing about them. What was to be thought of the Saint Ursula with a prominent forehead like a cupping-glass and a burly stomach, surrounded by other creatures as shapeless as herself, their squab noses poking out of the bladders of lard that did duty for their faces?

And Durtal found the same impression of insensibility to mysticism in the picture gallery. There he could study Stephan Lochner's precursor, Master Wilhelm—the first early German painter whose name is known—and in this again he found the look of elaborate chubbiness as in the Dombild. Wilhelm's Virgin was indeed less vulgar than the Virgin of the cathedral; but in feeling she was equally insipid, over-finished, and even more simperingly pretty. She was the triumph of delicate pertness, and had the look of a stage chamber-maid with her hair crimped over her forehead. And the child, twisted into an unnatural attitude, while he caressed his Mother's chin, turned his face round to be the better seen.

In short, this Virgin was neither human nor divine; she had not even the too realistic touch of Lochner, and could, no more than the other, have been the chosen Mother of God.

It is indeed strange that these very early painters should have begun where painting as an art ends, in mere finish and smoothness; men who from the first put sugar in their new wine and betray their lack of energy, of enthusiasm, of simplicity, while no faith projects itself from their work. They are the very converse of every other school; for everywhere else, in Italy, Flanders, Holland, Burgundy, pictures began by being clumsy and unfinished, barbarous and hard, but at least ardent and pious!

As he studied the other pictures in this collection, the mass of anonymous work, the paintings ascribed to the Master of the Lyversberg Passion, and the Master of the Saint Bartholomew, Durtal came to the conclusion that the School of Cologne had known nothing of mysticism till it had felt the influence of the Flemish painters. It had needed a Van Eyck, and the yet more exquisite Roger van der Weyden, to breathe the air of Heaven into these craftsmen. They thus had changed their manner, had imitated the ascetic innocence of the Flemings, had assimilated their tender piety and simplicity, and, in their turn, had sung the glory of the Mother and mourned over the sufferings of the Son in ingenuous hymns.

"This school may be thus summed up," said Durtal. "It is the triumph of padding and puffing, the apotheosis of fatness and sheen, and this has nothing to do with Christian art in the true sense of the word.

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“If we want to understand the whole personal character of German religious painting, we must study other schools than this, the only one ever spoken of, and always with praise. We must turn to the less familiar schools of Franconia and Swabia; there we find the very opposite. As art it is savage and rough, but it lives—it weeps, nay it cries aloud, but it prays. We must look at the works of these unkempt geniuses, such as Gruenewald, whose Christs, rebellious and wrathful, grind their teeth; or Zeitblom, whose ‘Veronica’s veil,’ in the Berlin Museum, is unpleasant, no doubt; the angels have black leather crosses on their breasts, and the Saviour’s head is terrible, horrible; still there is such energy in the work, such decision, such crudity, that the very sincerity of its ugliness is impressive.

“Certainly,” Durtal went on, “even setting apart such daring painters as Gruenewald, I prefer many an unknown artist whose work is strange rather than beautiful, but at any rate mystical, to the honey and lard of Cologne; for instance, an anonymous painter who is to be found in the Grand Duke’s collection at Gotha, as the author of one of those curious Mass-scenes which in the Middle Ages were called the ’Mass of Saint Gregory,’ wherefore, we know not.”

Durtal turned over his note-book and read through the description he had recorded of this work, which he remembered as an instance of a sort of pious brutality.

The picture was set out on a gold background. A little above the altar, but scarcely higher, a wooden sarcophagus, a sort of square bath, was seen, with a board over it from end to end. On this plank-bridge sat the Christ, His legs hidden in this tomb, holding a cross. His face was haggard and hollow, He was crowned with green thorns, and His emaciated body was spotted all over by the ends of the scourges as if the wounds were flea-bites. Over Him, in the air, floated the instruments of the Passion: the nails, the sponge, a hammer and a spear; to the left, on a very small scale, were the busts of Jesus and of Judas, near a pedestal on which lay three rows of pieces of silver.

In front of this altar, adoring this truly hideous Saviour painted in accordance with the prophetic descriptions of Isaiah and David, were Pope Gregory on his knees, his hands clasped, a grave Cardinal, whose hands were hidden under his robe, and a rough-looking Bishop, standing, in a dark green cloak embroidered with gold; he held a cross.

It was enigmatical and it was sinister, but those austere and commanding faces were alive. There was a stamp of faith, indomitable and resolute, in those countenances. It was harsh to the palate, the roughest wine of mysticism; but at least it was not the mawkish syrup of the early Cologne painters.

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“Ah! that mystical breath by which the soul of the artist becomes incorporate in the colour on a canvas, in the lines of carved stone, in written words, and speaks to the souls of those who can understand! How few have had it!” thought Durtal, closing his notes of travel. In Germany it may be seen in the very bunglers among painters; in Italy, setting aside Angelico, whose works reveal his saintly spirit and are the coloured image of his secret soul, and his pupil, Benozzo Gozzoli, the last of the Mediaeval painters; if we also except his precursors: Cimabue, the survivors of the rigid Byzantines, Giotto—-who thawed those fixed and puzzling figures, Orcagna, Simone di Martino, Taddeo Gaddi—all the very early painters—how much dexterous trickery do we find among the great painters, mimicking the religious note, and producing a deceptive imitation by sheer sham.

“The Italians of the Renaissance, above all others, excelled in this spurious piety, and those are comparatively rare who, like Botticelli, were honest enough to confess that their Virgins were Venuses and their Venuses Virgins.

“The Berlin gallery, where he is to be seen in some exquisite and triumphant examples, shows this very plainly; we see the two versions of the type side by side.

“First we have a wonderful Venus, nude, with pure gold hair brought round her body by one hand, standing out in her white flesh against a black background, gazing with limpid grey eyes, liquid with the colour of stagnant water, and edged with lids like a young rabbit’s—pink lids; she must have wept much, and her disconsolate look, her drooping attitude, suggest some far-away thought of the unsatisfied weariness of the senses and the intolerable unrest of horrible desires that nothing can satisfy.

“And not far away is a Virgin, very like her—indeed her very self, with her sensitive, slightly upturned nose, her lips like a folded clover-leaf, her brackish eyes, her pink lids, her golden hair, her greenish complexion, her strongly-moulded frame and large hands. The countenance is the same, fretful and weary; it is evident that the same model sat for both. They are both purely pagan. For the Venus, well and good! But the Virgin!

“It may be added that in this picture a row of torch-bearing angels makes the result, if possible, even less Christian, for these delightful creatures, with their ambiguous smiles and supple grace, have all the dangerous attraction of wicked angels. They are Ganymedes, borrowed from mythology, not from the Bible.

“How far we are from God with this paganism of Botticelli’s!” said Durtal to himself. “What a difference between this painter and that Roger van der Weyden whose Nativity is the glory of one of the adjoining rooms in that magnificent Old Museum of Berlin!”

Ay, that Nativity!—He had only to turn to his notes to see it plainly before him.

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Painted as a triptych, on the right wing was an old man in front of some wondering bystanders, burning incense to the Virgin, who is visible through an open window above a landscape in distant perspective with avenues undulating to the horizon; while a woman, her head dressed in a muffler that is almost a turban, touches the old man's shoulder with one hand and raises the other with an indescribable gesture of surprise and joy, her face expressive of ecstasy. On the left wing kneel the three Kings, their hands uplifted, their eyes raised to Heaven, contemplating an Infant beaming from the heart of a star; nothing can be more beautiful than these three transfigured faces; and these are praying with all their heart, never troubling themselves about us.

Still, these two divisions are but accessory to the central subject which they complement, and which is thus arranged:

In the middle, in front of a sort of ruined palace or columnar cow-shed without a roof, the Virgin kneels in prayer before the Babe; to the right the donor, the Chevalier Bladelin, is seen, also kneeling, and on the left Saint Joseph, holding a lighted taper, gazes down on Jesus. There are besides six little angels, three below at the door of the stable and three above in the air. This is the whole scene.

It is noteworthy that the goldsmith's work, the mingled splendour of Oriental hangings, the brocades hemmed with fur and strewn with gems of which Van Eyck and Memling made such free use to array their figures of the Virgin and the donors, are not to be seen in this panel. The textures are rich and heavy, but have none of the gorgeous colouring of the silks of Bruges or the carpets of Persia. Roger van der Weyden seems intentionally to have reduced the whole setting of the scene to its simplest expression, and yet, while using an unaffectedly sober key of colour, he has produced a masterpiece of pure and lucid harmony.

Mary, with no diadem, no jewelled band, not a bracelet or a gem, her head simply crowned by a few golden rays, is seen in a white dress, closed to the throat, and a blue cloak of which the ample folds lie on the ground; the sleeves of her under dress, fastened at the wrists, are of a rich blue violet, more nearly black than red.

Her face is indescribable; of superhuman loveliness, with long red-gold hair; the brow high, the nose straight, the lips full, the chin small; but words are of no avail; what cannot be described is the expression of candour and sadness, the tide of love that rises to those downcast eyes as she looks down on the tiny, helpless Babe, round whose head there is a rosy nimbus starred with gold.

Never was there a more unearthly and yet more living Virgin. Neither Van Eyck, with his rather vulgar and never beautiful heads, nor Memling—more tender and refined, no doubt, but limited to his ideal of a woman with a round forehead and a face shaped like a kite, wide above and pointed below—ever achieved the elegance of form or the purity of a woman made divine by love, a being who, even apart from her surroundings and

bereft of the attributes by which she is recognizable, could be none other than the Mother of God.

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By her side the Chevalier Bladelin, dressed all in black, with his equine type of face, his shaven cheeks, his dignity, at once priestly and princely, is lost in contemplation, far away from the world; he is praying in good earnest. And Saint Joseph, opposite to him, represented as a bald old man, with a short beard, and wearing a red cloak, comes forward as if amazed at his happiness, and scarce daring to believe that the moment has come when he may adore the Messiah born at last; he smiles, deferentially, mildly stepping with the almost clumsy care of an old man who would fain be serviceable but fears to intrude.

To make the whole thing more than perfect, above the figure of Pierre Bladelin extends a wondrous landscape, cut across by the High Street of Middelburg, the town founded by this nobleman, a street bordered by castellated houses with battlements and church towers, and vanishing in a country scene lighted up by a clear sky, a blue spring day; above Saint Joseph a meadow and woods, sheep and shepherds, and three exquisite angels in robes, one of pinkish yellow, one of purple like a campanula, and one of greenish citron hue; three really ethereal beings, having no relationship with the pertly innocent pages invented by the Renaissance.

If we sum up the whole impression produced by this work, we are led to the conclusion that mystical art, still dwelling on earth, and not restricted to scenes in Heaven, as Angelico had chosen to limit it in his “Coronation of the Virgin,” has produced in Roger van der Weyden’s triptych the purest effluence of prayer to be found in painting. Never has the Nativity been so gloriously set forth, nor, it may be said, more artlessly and simply expressed. The masterpiece of the Christmas festival is at Berlin, just as the masterpiece of the Deposition is at Antwerp, in the agonized and magnificent work of Quentin Matsys.

“The early Flemish painters were the greatest that ever lived!” said Durtal to himself, “and this Roger Van der Weyden, or Roger de la Pasture as he is sometimes called, crushed between the fame of van Eyck and of Memling—as Gherard David was later, and Hugo van der Goes, Justus of Ghent, and Dierck Bouts—was in my opinion superior to them all.

“And after them what a falling away! Theatrical Crucifixions, the fleshy coarseness of Rubens which Vandyck tried to mitigate by making it leaner. We must leap into Holland to find the mystic accent once more, and it reveals itself in the soul of a Judaizing Protestant, under an aspect so mysterious and eccentric that at first sight we hesitate, feeling ourselves, as it were, to make sure that we are not mistaken in regarding this as religious art.

“Nor need we go to Amsterdam to verify the truth of this impression. It is enough to go to see the ‘Disciples at Emmaus,’ in the Louvre.”

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Durtal, started on this theme, fell into a reverie over Rembrandt's strange conception of Christian aesthetics. It is evident that in his mode of depicting Gospel scenes this painter still exhales a breath of the Old Testament; his church, even if he had meant to paint it as it was in his day, would still be a synagogue, so strong is the odour of the Jew in all his work; he is possessed by the imagery, the prophecies, all the solemn and barbarous side of the East. And this we can understand when we know that he was the companion of Rabbis, whose portraits he has left us, and the friend of Manasseh ben Israel, one of the most learned men of his age. On the other hand, we may admit that this Protestant Dutchman engrafted on this stock of cabalistic learning and Mosaic ceremonial an attentive and assiduous study of the Old Testament, for he possessed a Bible, which was sold by auction with his furniture to pay his debts.

This would be enough to justify his choice of subjects and the composition of his pictures; but the riddle remains unsolved of the results achieved by an artist whom we cannot conceive of, after all, as praying before he would paint: like Angelico and Roger van der Weyden.

Be this as it may, he, with the eye of a visionary, with his serious but fervid art, his genius for concentration, for getting a spot of the essence of sunlight into the heart of darkness, has accomplished great results; and in his Biblical scenes has spoken a language which no one before him had even attempted to lisp.

Is not this picture of the Pilgrims to Emmaus a typical instance of this? Pull the work to pieces; it ought to seem dull, monotonous, voiceless. As a composition it is utterly common: we see a sort of cellar of stone-work, a table facing us, behind which sits Jesus, His feet bare, His lips colourless, His complexion muddy, His raiment of a pinkish grey; He is breaking the bread, while, to His right, an apostle, clutching his napkin, looks at Him, fancies he recognizes Him, and on the left another disciple, quite sure that he knows Him, clasps his hands—and this one utters a cry of joy that we can hear! A fourth figure, with an intelligent profile, sees nothing, but, attentive to his duties, waits on the guests.

It is a meal of humble folk in a prison; the colours are limited to a key of sad greys and browns, excepting in the case of the man who twists his napkin, whose sleeves are thick with a vermilion like red sealing-wax, while the others might be painted with dust and pitch.

These are the literal facts; but they are not the truth, for everything is transfigured. The head of Christ is luminous merely by the way He looks up; a pale radiance fills the room. This Jesus, ugly as He is, with lips like death, asserts Himself by a gesture, a look of ineffable beauty, as the murdered Son of a God!

We stand dumfounded, not even trying to understand; for this work, stamped with transcendent naturalism, is beyond and apart from painting; no one can copy or reproduce it.

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“After Rembrandt,” Durtal went on, “there is an irremediable decay of religious feeling in painting. The seventeenth century has not left a single picture in which there is a genuine stamp of manly devotion; excepting, indeed, in Spain at the time when Saint Theresa and Saint John of the Cross flourished there; then the mystical realism of its painters produced some fiercely fervid works;” and Durtal recalled a picture by Zurbaran he had seen and admired in the Gallery at Lyons, Saint Francis of Assisi standing upright in a habit of grey serge, the cowl over his head, his hands hidden in his sleeves.

The face looked as if it had been moulded or chiselled out of cinders; the mouth was open, livid, below ecstatic eyes as white as if they had been blinded. It was a wonder how this corpse, of which nothing was left but the bones, could hold itself up; and terror came over the beholder as he thought of the excessive maceration and overwhelming penances that must have exhausted that frame and seamed that face.

This painting was the evident outcome of the relentless and terrible mysticism of Saint John of the Cross, the art of the rack, the *delirium tremens* of divine intoxication here on earth; aye, but what a passion of adoration, what a voice of love stifled by anguish found utterance in this canvas.

As to the eighteenth century, it was not worth a thought; that century was the age of the belly and the bath-room; as soon as art tried to touch the Church it only made a washing-basin into a holy-water stoup.

In our own time, again, there is nothing to note.

Overbeck, Ingres, Flandrin—all sorry jades harnessed willy-nilly to religious tasks by commissions from the pious. In the church of Saint Sulpice Delacroix extinguishes all the feeble art that surrounds him, but his sense of Catholic art is null.

In truth, faith is now dormant, and without that no mystical work is possible!

At the present moment Signol is dead, but Olivier Merson is left; vacuity all along the line. We need not take into account the got-up absurdities and paintings to puzzle Rosicrucian simpletons; nor, again, the feeble imagery of the wealthy idlers or the worthy youths who fancy that if they paint a woman larger than life, that makes her mystical. Silence would befit the subject, only that, unluckily, a well-meaning publisher was struck by the idea of mobilizing the clerical forces to hail James Tissot as an evangelical painter. His Life of Christ is one of the least religious works conceivable, for, in fact, it might be regarded as a hesitating paraphrase of the Life of Jesus as narrated by that cheerful apostate and terrible jester, Renan.

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The firm of Mame has completed this artist's treason by the issue of these melancholy chromo-lithographs. Under the pretext of realism, of information acquired on the spot, of authenticated costumes—all extremely doubtful, since we should be forced to conclude that nothing has changed in Palestine in the course of nineteen centuries—-Monsieur Tissot has given us the basest masquerade that anyone has yet dared present as an illustration of the Scriptures. Look at that disreputable trull, a street slut tired of shouting "This way to the boats!" till she falls fainting. This is the *Magnificat*, the Blessed Virgin. That epileptic boy with outstretched arms is Jesus in the Temple. Look at the Baptism, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Massacre of the Innocents, the Saint Peter walking on the Sea, the Magdalen at the feet of Jesus, the ridiculous *Consummatum est*—look at them all: these prints are matchless for platitude, effeteness, poverty of spirit. They might have been designed by the first-comer, and are painted with muck, wine-sauce, mud!

Certainly the hapless Catholics have no luck when once they try to meddle with what they do not understand; their incurable lack of artistic sense is once more displayed in this attempt over which the whole world of art and letters is laughing in their sleeve.

"Then is there nothing, absolutely nothing, to the credit side for the Church?" exclaimed Durtal. "And yet some attempts at ascetic art have been made in this century. A few years since, the Benedictine House at Beuron, in Bavaria, tried to revive ecclesiastical art"; and Durtal remembered having looked through some reproductions of mural frescoes painted by these monks in a tower at Monte Cassino.

These frescoes had gone back to the types of Assyria and Egypt, with their crowned gods, their sphynx-headed angels having fan-shaped wings behind their heads, their old men with plaited beards playing on stringed instruments; and then the Friars of Beuron had given up this hieratic style, in which, it must be owned, they succeeded but ill, and in certain later works—especially in a volume of the Way of the Cross, published at Freiburg in Breisgau—they had adopted a strange medley of other styles.

The Roman soldiers who figured in those pages were huge firemen, a bequest from the schools of Guerin and David; and then, unexpectedly, in certain plates where the Magdalen and the Holy women appeared, a younger spirit seemed to prevail among the commonplace groups—Greek female types derived from the Renaissance, pretty and elegant, evidently imported from the works of the pre-Raphaelites, and strongly recalling Walter Crane's illustrations.

Thus the ideal at Beuron had developed into an alloy of the French art of the First Empire and contemporary English work.

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Some of these compositions were all but laughable, that of the Ninth Station, to mention one: Christ lying at full length on His face, and being pulled up by a rope tied to His bound hands; it looked as if He were learning to swim. Still, but for feeble and vulgar incidents, clumsy and obvious details, what strange scenes suddenly rose before his mind, distinct from the mass: Veronica on her knees before Jesus, was really distracted with grief, really fine; the borrowed or copied figures of the other persons represented disappeared; even in the least original of these compositions the coarse, unsatisfactory utterances of these monks spoke an almost eloquent language; and this because intense faith and fervour lurked in the work. A breath had passed over those faces, and they were alive; the emotion, the voice of prayer, was felt in the silence of this conventional crowd. This Way of the Cross was matchless from this point of view: Monastic piety had introduced an unexpected element, giving evidence of the mysterious power it has at its command, infusing a personal emotion, a peculiar aroma, into a work which, without it, would never indeed have existed. These Benedictines had suggested the sensation of kneeling worship and the very fragrance of the Gospel, as artists of wider scope had failed in doing.

Their attempt, however, had begotten no following, and at this day the school is almost dead, producing nothing but feeble prints for old women designed by the lay-brothers.

How, indeed, could it have been anything but still-born? The idea of doing for the West what Manuel Pauselinos did for the East, of eliminating study from nature, imposing an uniform ritual of colour and line, of compelling every artistic temperament to squeeze itself into the same mould, shows an absolute misapprehension of art in the mind of the man who attempted it. The system was bound to end in ankylosis, in the paralysis of painting, and this, in fact, was the result.

At about the same time with these Religious an unknown artist, living in the country, and never exhibiting in Paris, was painting pictures for churches and convents, working for the glory of God and refusing all remuneration from priests or monks. Durtal knew his pictures, and they had suggested much the same reflections as those aroused by the Benedictine paintings of Beuron.

At first sight Paul Borel’s work is neither cheerful nor attractive; the phrases he used might often have made a partisan of the modern smile; and besides, to judge his work fairly it is indispensable to get rid of part of it, to refuse to see anything but that which has evaded the too-familiar formulas of commonplace unction; and then what a spirit of manly fervency, of ardent piety, filled and upheld it.

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His most important paintings are buried in the chapel of the Dominican school at Oullins, in a remote corner of the suburbs of Lyons. Among the ten subjects that decorate the nave, we find Moses Striking the Rock, the Disciples at Emmaus, the Healing of One Possessed, of One Born Blind, and of Tobit; but in spite of the calm energy shown in these frescoes, they are disappointing by reason of their general heaviness and of the sleepy and unwonted effect of colour. Not till we reach the choir, beyond the communion railing, do we find works of a quite different kind of art, above some magnificent figures of saints of the Order of Friars Preacher, amazing in the power of prayer, the essence of saintliness that they diffuse.

There, too, Durtal had found two large compositions: one of the Virgin bestowing the Rosary on Saint Dominic, and the other of Saint Thomas Aquinas kneeling before an altar on which stands a Crucifix radiating light. Never since the Middle Ages had monks been so understood and so painted; never had a more impetuous fount of soul been revealed under so stern a casing of features. Borel was the painter of the Monastic Saints; his art, by nature rather torpid, soared up with them as soon as he tried to paint them.

At Versailles, again, even better perhaps than in the chapel of the Oullins seminary, the sincere and deeply religious work of Borel might be studied. At the entrance to the chapel of the Augustine Sisters in that town, of which Borel had painted the nave and the choir, there stood a figure of an Abbess of the fourteenth century, Saint Clare of Montefalcone, in the black robes of an Augustinian Nun, against the stone walls of her cell, an open book on one side of the figure and a brass lamp on the other, somewhat behind her on a table.

In that face, bent over the Crucifix she was pressing to her lips, in that countenance, at once sweet and hungering, in the movement of the arms closely folded over her bosom, raised to her face, and themselves forming a cross, he had seen the complete absorption of a bride, the rapt, ecstatic joy of the purest love, and at the same time something of the anxious affection of a mother cherishing the Christ she kissed, and seemed to shelter in her bosom like a suffering child.

And this was all set forth without any theatrical attitude or forced gestures, with perfect simplicity. This Saint Clare has no ravings, no outcries, like Saint Magdalen of Pazzi; she does not soar with the flight of divine intoxication. The mystic possession manifests itself in a mute rapture; her transports are controlled, and her inebriety is grave; she does not diffuse herself, but opens her soul, and Jesus, as He enters in, stamps her with His likeness, impresses her with the image of the Crucifix she holds, and of which the impress was found graven on her heart when it was examined after her death.

This was the most remarkable religious painting of our time, and it was achieved with no borrowing from the Early painters, no trickery of awkward attitudes supported by iron

bars, no affectations, no artifice. And what a devout Catholic, what an emotionally pious artist must the man be who could produce such a work!

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After him the rest was silence. Among the religious youth of to-day no one is to be found equal to the presentment of Church subjects. “Only one,” said Durtal, thinking it over, “gave any hope of such powers, for he stands apart from the rest, and, at any rate, has talent.”

He rose and went to turn over his portfolios, picking out the lithographs by Charles Dulac.

This artist had begun with a series of landscapes, idealizing nature, at first with a timid hand—extravagantly large pools, and trees with leaves that looked like wild wigs tossed by the wind; then he had produced a rendering in black and white of a Canticle of the Sun, or of Creation, and had poured out in nine plates, printed in different states of tone, that effluence of mystical feeling which in his first set was still latent and undecided.

The rather hackneyed dictum that “a landscape is a state of mind,” was strictly appropriate to this work; the artist had stamped his faith on these views, studied, no doubt, from nature, but seen, it was evident, not by the eyes alone, but by a captivated spirit singing in the open air Daniel’s hymn and David’s psalm, as interpreted by Saint Francis, and repeating after them the thought that all the Elements shall sing to the glory of Him who created them.

Among these plates two were genuinely inspiring: that with the title, *Stella Matutina*, and the other with the words, *Spiritus Sancte Deus*; but another, the broadest, the most decisive, and the simplest of them all, bearing the title *Sol Justitiae*, seemed best of all to set forth the individual sympathies of the artist.

It was thus composed: A light, remote, translucent distance was lost in infinitude—a peninsula, a desert waste of waters with ribs of shore, tongues of land planted with trees repeated in the mirror of the lake; on the horizon the sun, half set, cast its beams reflected by the sheet of waters; that was all, but amazing placidity and calm, a sense of fulness was shed over all. The idea of justice, to which that of mercy answers as its inevitable echo, was symbolized in the serene solemnity of this expanse lighted up by the glow of a kindly season and mild atmosphere.

Durtal drew back to get a more complete view of the work as a whole.

“There is no denying it,” said he; “this artist has the instinct, the subtle sense of aerial space, of expanse; he understands the soul of calm waters flowing under a vast sky! And then, this print diffuses emanations as from a Catholic, which steal into us, slowly soak into our heart.

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“And by this time,” said he, closing the portfolio, “I am far enough away from the original matter, and none the nearer to any article I can write for the *Review*. A paper on the primitive German painters would, indeed, be quite in its line; yes, but what an undertaking! I should have to work up my notes, and after dealing with Meister Wilhelm, Stephan Lochner, and Zeitblom, to speak of Bernhardt Strigel, an almost unknown painter, of Albert Duerer, Holbein, Martin Schongauer, Hans Balding, Burgkmayer, and I know not how many more. I should have to account for whatever may have survived of orthodoxy in Germany after the Reformation; to mention, at any rate, from the Lutheran point of view, that extraordinary painter, Cranach, whose Adams are bearded Apollos of the complexion of a Red Indian, and his Eves slender, chubby-faced courtesans, with bullet heads, little shrimps’ eyes, lips moulded out of red pomatum, breasts like apples close under the neck, long, slim legs, elegantly formed, with the calf high up, and large, flat feet with thick ankles.

“Such a treatise would carry me too far. It is amusing to dream over, but not to write. I should do better to seek a less panoramic, a compacter subject. But what?—Well, I will see later,” he concluded, getting up, for Madame Mesurat jovially announced that dinner was ready.

CHAPTER XIII.

To change his weariness of the place, Durtal one sunny afternoon went to the further end of Chartres, to visit the ancient church of Saint Martin du Val. It dated from the tenth century, and had served as the chapel by turns of a Benedictine House and of a Capuchin convent. Restored without any too flagrant heresies, it was now included in the precincts of an Asylum, and was reached by crossing a yard where blind folk in white cotton caps sat nodding on benches in the shade of a few trees.

Its small, squat doorway and three little belfries, as if it had been built for a village of dwarfs, attested its Romanesque origin; and, as at Saint Radegonde at Poitiers and Notre Dame de la Couture at le Mans, the interior opened, under an altar very much raised above the ground, into a crypt lighted by loopholes borrowing their light from the ambulatory of the choir. The capitals of the columns, coarsely carved, resembled the idols of Oceania; under the pavement and in the tombs lay many of the Bishops of Chartres, and newly-consecrated prelates were supposed to spend the first night of their arrival at the See in prayer before these tombs, so as to imbue themselves with the virtues of their predecessors and enlist their support.

“The Manes of these Bishops might very well have whispered to their present successor, Monseigneur des Mofflaines, some plan for purifying the House of the Virgin by turning out the vile musician who degrades the Sanctuary on Sundays to the level of a music hall!” sighed Durtal. ’But, alas! nothing disturbs the inertia of that aged, and

invalid shepherd, who is, indeed, never to be seen either in his garden, in the cathedral, or in the town.

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“Ah! But this is something better than all the vocal flourishes of the choristers!” said Durtal to himself as he listened to the bells aroused from silence to shed the blessed drops of sound over the city.

He called to mind the meanings ascribed to bells by the early symbolists. Durand of Mende compares the hardness of the metal to the power of the preacher, and thinks that the blows of the tongue against the side, aim at showing the orator that he should punish himself and correct his own vices before he blames those of others. The wooden crossbeam to which the bell is suspended resembles in form the Cross of Christ, and the rope pulled by the ringer to set the bell going is allegorical of the knowledge of the Scripture which depends on the Cross itself.

According to Hugh of Saint Victor, the tongue of the bell is the sacerdotal tongue, which, striking on both sides of the body, declares the truth of both Testaments. Finally, to others the bell itself is the mouth of the Liturgy, and the tongue its tongue.

“In fact, the bell is the Church’s herald, its outer voice, as the priest is its inward voice,” Durtal concluded.

While meditating in this wise, he had reached the cathedral, and for the hundredth time stood to admire those powerful abutments throwing out, with the strong curve of a projectile, flying buttresses like spoked wheels, and, as usual, he was amazed by the flight of the parabola, the grace of the trajectory, the sober strength of those curved supports. “Still,” said he to himself, as he studied the parapet raised above them, bordering the roof of the nave, “the architect who was content to stamp out those trefoil arches, as if they were punched in that stone parapet, was less happily inspired than certain other master-masons or stone-workers who enclosed the little gutter-path they made round church roofs with scriptural or symbolical images. Such an one was he who built the cathedral at Troyes, where the top parapet is carved alternately into fleur de lys and Saint Peter’s keys; and he who at Caudebec sculptured the edge into gothic letters of a delightfully decorative character, spelling a hymn to the Virgin, thus crowning the church with a garland of prayer, wreathing its head with a white chaplet of aspiration.”

Durtal left the north side of the cathedral, went past the royal door and round the corner of the old tower. With one hand he held on his hat, and with the other grasped the skirts of his coat, which flapped about his legs. The storm blew permanently on this spot. There might be not a breath of air anywhere else in the town, but here, at this corner, winter and summer, there was always a blast that caught cloaks and skirts and lashed the face with icy thongs.

“That perhaps is the reason why the statues of the neighbouring north door, which are so incessantly scourged by the wind, stand in such shivering attitudes with narrow and tightly-drawn raiment, their arms and legs held close,” thought Durtal, with a smile.

“And is it not the same with that strange figure dwelling in companionship with a sow spinning—though it is not in fact a sow, but a hog—and an ass playing on a hurdy-gurdy on the storm-beaten wall of the old tower?”

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These two animals, whose careless herd he seems to be, represent in their merry guise the old popular sayings: *Ne sus Minerveum*, and *Asinus ad lyram*, which may be freely rendered by “Every man to his trade,” and “Never force a talent;” for we should but be as inept as a pig trying to be wise or an ass trying to strike the lyre.

But this angel with a nimbus, standing barefoot under a canopy, supporting a sun-dial against his breast, what does he mean, what is he doing?

A descendant of the royal women of the north porch, for he is like them in his slender shape, sheathed in a clinging robe with string-like pleats, he looks over our heads, and we wonder whether he is very impure or very chaste.

The upper part of the face is innocent, the hair cropped round the head; the face is beardless and the expression monastic, but between the nose and mouth there is a broad slope, and the lips, parting in a straight gash, wear a smile, which as we look seems just a little impudent, just a little vulgar, and we wonder what manner of angel this may be.

There is in this figure something of the recalcitrant seminarist, and also something of the virtuous postulant. If the sculptor took a young Brother for his model, he certainly did not choose a docile novice, such as he who no doubt served for the study of Joseph standing under the north door; he must have worked from one of the religious *Gyrovagoi* who so tormented St. Benedict. A strange figure is this angel, who has a father at Laon, behind the cathedral, and who anticipated by many centuries the puzzling seraphic types of the Renaissance.

“What a wind!” muttered Durtal, hastening back to the west front, where he went up the steps and pushed the door open.

The entrance to this immense and obscure church is always coercive; we instinctively bend the head and advance cautiously under the oppressive majesty of its vault. Durtal stopped when he had gone a few steps, dazzled by the illumination of the choir in contrast with the dark alley of the nave, which only gained a little light where it joined the transepts. The Christ had the legs and feet in shadow, the body in subdued light, and the head bathed in a torrent of glory; Durtal gazed up in the air at the motionless ranks of Patriarchs, and Apostles, and Bishops, and Saints in a glow as of dying fires, dimly lighted glass, guarding the Sacred Body at their feet, below them; they stood in rows along the upper storey in huge pointed settings, with wheels above them, showing to Jesus, nailed to earth, His army of faithful soldiers, His legions as enumerated in the Scriptures, the Legends, the Martyrology; Durtal could identify in the armed throng of the painted windows St. Laurence, St. Stephen, St. Giles, St. Nicholas of Myra, St. Martin, St. George of Cappadocia, St. Symphorian, St. Philip, St. Foix, St. Laumer, and how many more whose names he could not recollect—and paused in admiration near the transept, in front of a figure of Abraham fixed for ever in a threatening gesture,

holding a sword over a crouching Isaac, the blade shining brightly against the infinite blue.

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He stood admiring the conceptions and the craftsmanship of those thirteenth century glass-workers, their emphatic language, necessary at such great heights, the way in which they had made the pictures legible from a distance by introducing a single figure in each, whenever that was possible, and painting it in massive outline, with contrasting colours, so as to be easily taken in at a glance when seen from below.

But the triumph of this art was neither in the choir, nor in the transepts of the church, nor in the nave; it was at the entrance, on the inner side of the wall, where on the outside stood the statues of the nameless queens. Durtal delighted in this glorious show, but he always postponed it a little to excite himself by expectancy, and revel in the leap of joy it gave him, repetition of the sensation not having yet availed to weaken it.

On this particular day, under a sunny sky, these three windows of the twelfth century blazed with splendour with their broad short blades, the blade of a claymore, flat wide panels of glass under the rose that held the most prominent place over the west door.

It was a twinkling sheet of cornflowers and sparks, a shifting maze of blue flames—a paler blue than that in which Abraham, at the end of the nave, brandished his knife; this pale, limpid blue resembled the flames of burning punch and of the ignited powder of sulphur, and the lightning flash of sapphires, but of quite young sapphires, as it were, still infantine and tremulous. And in the right hand pointed window he could distinguish in burning red the Stem of Jesse—figures piled up espalier fashion, in the blue fire of the sky; while to the left and in the middle, scenes were shown from the Life of Jesus—-the Annunciation, Palm Sunday, the Transfiguration, the Last Supper, and the Supper at Emmaus; and above these three windows Christ hurled thunder from the heart of the great rose, the dead emerged from their graves at the trumpet-call, and St. Michael weighed souls.

“How did the glass-makers discover and compound that twelfth century blue?” wondered Durtal. “And why have their successors so long lost it, as well as their red?

“In the twelfth century glass-painters made use chiefly of three colours; first, blue—that ineffable, uncertain sky-blue which is the glory of the Chartres windows; then red—a purplish red, full and important; and green—inferior in quality to the two others. For white they preferred a greenish tinge.

“In the following century the palette is more extensive, but the stain is darker; the glass, too, is thicker. And yet, what a glowing blue of pure, bold sapphire tone the artists of the furnace had at their command, and what a fine red they used, the colour of fresh blood! Yellow, of which they were less lavish, was, if I may judge from the robe of a king near the Abraham, in a window by the transept, a daring hue of bright lemon. But apart from these three colours, which have a sort of resonance, and burst forth like songs of joy in these transparent pictures, others grow more sober; the violets are like Orleans plums

or purple egg-fruit, the browns are of the hue of burnt sugar, the chive-coloured greens turn dark.

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“But what masterpieces of colour they achieved by the harmony and contrast of these tones, and with what skill did they handle the lead-lines, emphasizing certain details, punctuating and dividing these paragraphs of flame as if with lines of ink.

“And another thing which is amazing is the perfect agreement of all these various crafts, practised side by side, treating the same subjects, or supplementing each other—each, by its own mode of expression, under one guiding mind, contributing to the whole; with what a sense of fitness, with what skill were the posts distributed, the places assigned to each as beseemed the purpose of his craft, the requirements of his art.

“Architecture having finished the lower portion of the edifice, retires into the background to make way for Sculpture, giving it the fine opportunity of the doorways; and Sculpture, hitherto invisible at excessive heights, as a mere accessory, suddenly finds itself supreme. With due sense of justice it now comes forward where it can be seen, and the sister art retires, leaving it to address the multitude, giving it the noblest framework in those arched doorways, imitating a deeper perspective by their concentric arches, diminishing and retreating to the door-frames.

“In other instances Architecture does not give everything to one art, but divides the bounty of her great *facade* between sculpture and painting; reserving to the former the hollows and nooks where statues may find niches, and giving to glass-painters the tympanum of the great door, where at Chartres the image-maker has displayed the Triumph of Christ. This we see in the great west doors of Tours and of Reims.

“This plan of substituting glass for bas-reliefs had its disadvantages; seen from outside —their wrong side—these diaphanous pictures look like spiders’ nets on an enormous scale and thick with dust. With the light on them the windows are, in fact, grey or black; it is only by going inside and looking back that their fire can be seen flashing; the outside is here sacrificed to the inside. Why?

“Perhaps,” said Durtal, answering himself, “it is symbolical of the soul having light inwardly, an allegory of the spiritual life—”

He took in all the windows of the nave with a rapid glance, and it struck him that their effect was a combination of the prison and the grave, with their coals of fire burning behind iron bars, some crossed like the windows of a gaol, and others twisting like black twigs and branches. Is not glass painting of all arts that in which God does most to help the artist, the art which man, unaided, can never make perfect, since the sky alone can give life to the colours by a beam of sunshine, and lend movement to the lines? In short, man fashions the form, prepares the body, and must wait till God infuses the soul.

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“It is to-day a high-day of light and the Sun of Justice is visiting His Mother,” he went on, as he walked to where the pillared thicket of the choir ended at the south transept, to look at the window known as Notre Dame de la belle Verriere, the figure, in blue, relieved against a mingled background of dead-leaf olive, brown, iris violet, plum-green; She gazed out with her sad and pensive pout—a pout very cleverly restored by a modern glass-painter; and Durtal remembered that people had come to pray to Her, as he now went to pray to the Virgin of the Pillar and Notre Dame de Sous Terre.

Such devotion was a thing of the past; the men of our time need, it would seem, a more tangible, a more material Virgin than this slender, fragile image, hardly visible in dark weather; nevertheless, a few peasants still kept up the habit of kneeling and offering a taper before Her, and Durtal, who loved these old neglected Madonnas, joined them and invoked Her too.

Two other windows also appealed to him by the singularity of the figures, perched very high up, in the depths of the apse, and serving as attendant pages, at a distance, to the Virgin holding Her Son in the centre light commanding the whole perspective of the cathedral; these each contained in a light-toned lancet, a barbarous and grotesque seraph, with sharply-marked features, white wings full of eyes, and robes with jagged, strap-like edges of a pale green colour; their legs were bare, and they were represented as floating. These two angels had jujube yellow aureoles tilted to the back like sailors’ hats; and this ragged attire, the feathers folded over the breast, the hat of glory, with their general expression of refractory wilfulness, suggested the idea that these beings were at once paupers, Apaches or Mohicans, and seamen.

As to the remaining windows, especially those which included several figures and were divided into several pictures, it would have needed a telescope and have taken many days of study only to make out the story they told, and discover the details; and months would not have sufficed for the task, since the glass had been in many cases repaired and often replaced without regard to order, so that it was especially difficult to decipher it.

An attempt had been made to count the number of figures represented in the cathedral windows; they were as many as 3889; in the mediaeval times everybody had been eager to present a glass picture to the Virgin. Not cardinals only, kings, bishops and princes, canons and nobles, but the corporations of the town also had contributed these panels of fire; the richest, such as the Guilds of Drapers and Furriers, of Goldsmiths and Money-changers, had each presented five to Our Lady, while the poorer companies of the Master Scavengers and Water-carriers, the Porters and Rag-pickers, each gave one.

Pondering on these things, Durtal wandered round the ambulatory and paused in front of a small stone Virgin ensconced at the foot of the stairs leading up to the chapel of Saint Piat, constructed in the fourteenth century as a sort of outbuilding behind the

apse. This Virgin, dating from the same period, had shrunk into the shade, effacing Herself, deferentially leaving the more important places to the senior Madonnas.

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She carried an Infant playing with a bird, in allusion, no doubt, to the passage in the apocryphal Gospels of the Infancy, and of Thomas the Israelite, which shows us the Child Jesus amusing Himself by modelling birds out of clay, and giving them life by breathing upon them.

Then Durtal continued his walk through the chapels; stopping only to look at one which contained relics of opposite utility and double purpose: the shrines of Saint Piat and Saint Taurinus. The bones of the former saint were displayed to secure dry weather in times of rain, and those of the second to invoke rain in times of drought. But what was far less comforting and more irritating even than this array of side-chapels, with their wretched adornment—with names that had been changed since their first dedication so that the tutelary protection earned by centuries of service had ceased to exist—was the choir, battered, dirty, degraded as if on purpose.

In 1763 the old Chapter had thought fit to deface the Gothic columns, and to have them colour-washed by a Milanese lime-washer, of a yellowish pink speckled with grey; then they had abandoned to the town-museum some magnificent pieces of Flemish tapestry that screened the inner circuit of the choir aisles, and had put in their place bas-reliefs in marble executed by the dreadful bungler who had crushed the altar under the gigantic group of the Virgin. And mischance had helped. In 1789 the Sansculottes were intending to destroy this mountainous Assumption, and some ill-starred idiot saved it by placing a cap of liberty on the Virgin's head!

To think that some beautiful windows were knocked out in order to get a better light for this mass of lard! If only there were the slightest hope of ever getting rid of it; but alas! all such hopes are vain. Some years ago, when Monseigneur Regnault was Bishop, the idea was indeed suggested—not of making away with this petrified lump of tallow, but at least of getting rid of the bas-reliefs.

Then the prelate—who stuffed his ears with cotton for fear of taking cold—set his face against it; and for reasons of equal importance, no doubt, the sacrilegious hideousness of this Assumption must be for ever endured, and the marble screens as well.

But though the interior of this choir was a disgrace, the groups round the ambulatory of the apse and the outer wall of the choir were well worth lingering over.

These figures under canopies and tabernacles carved by Jehan de Beauce began on the right by the south transept, went round the horse-shoe behind the altar, and ended at the north transept where the Black Virgin of the Pillar stands.

The subjects were the same as those treated in the small capitals of the royal doorway, outside the church, above the panegyric of the kings, saints, and queens. They were taken from the Apocryphal legends, the Gospel of the Childhood of Mary, and the Protoevangelist James the Less.

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The first of these groups was executed by an artist named Jehan Soulas. The contract, dated January 2nd, 1518, between this sculptor and the delegates of the authorities conducting the works of the church, still existed. It set forth that Jehan Soulas, a master image-maker, dwelling in Paris at the cemetery of Saint Jehan in the parish of Saint Jehan en Greve, pledged himself to execute in good stone of the Tonnerre quarry, and better than the images that are round about the choir of Notre Dame de Paris, the four first groups, of which the subjects were prescribed and explained; in consideration of the sum of two hundred and eighty *livres Tournois*, which the Chapter of Chartres undertook to pay him as he might require.

Soulas, who had undoubtedly learned his craft from some Flemish artist, produced certain little *genre* pictures well adapted, by their spirit and liveliness, to cheer the soul that the solemnity of the windows might have depressed; for in this aisle they really seemed to let the light filter through Indian shawl-stuff, admitting only a few dull sparks and smoky gleams.

The second group, representing Saint Anna receiving from an unseen angel an order to go to meet Joachim at the Golden Gate, was a marvel of grace and subtle observation; the saint stood listening attentive in front of her fald-stool, by which lay a little dog; and a waiting-maid, seen in profile, carrying an empty pitcher, smiled with a knowing air and a wink in her eye. And in the next scene, where the husband and wife were embracing each other with the trepidation of a worthy old couple, stammering with joy and clasping trembling hands, the same woman, seen full-face this time, was so delighted at their happiness that she could not keep still, but, holding up her skirts, was almost in the act of dancing.

A little further on, the image-maker had represented the birth of Mary, a thoroughly Flemish scene: in the background, a bed with curtains, on which Saint Anna reclined, watched by a maid, while the midwife and her attendant washed the infant in a basin.

But another of these bas-reliefs, close to the Renaissance clock, which interrupts the series of this history told in the choir-aisle, was even more astonishing. In this Mary was sewing at baby-clothes while reading, and Saint Joseph, asleep in a chair, his head resting on his hand, was instructed in a dream of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. And he not only had his eyes shut, he was sleeping so soundly, so really, that one could see him breathe, one felt his body stretching, relaxing, in the perfect abandonment of his whole being. And how diligently the young mother stitched while she was absorbed in prayers, her nose in her book! Never, certainly, was life more closely apprehended, or expressed with greater certainty and truth to life caught in the act, at the instant, ere it moved.

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Next to this domestic scene, and the Adoration of the Shepherds and Angels, came the Circumcision of Jesus, with a white paper apron pasted on by some low jester; then the Adoration of the Magi; and Jehan de Soulas and the pupils of his studio had finished the work on their side. They were succeeded by inferior craftsmen, Francois Marchant of Orleans, and Nicolas Guybert of Chartres; and after them art went on sinking lower and lower, down to one Sieur Boudin, who had dared to sign his miserable puppets, down to the stupid conventionality of Jean de Dieu, Legros, Tuby, and Mazieres, to the cold and pagan work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But there was an improvement in the eight last groups opposite the Virgin of the Pillar—some simple figures carved by the pupils of Soulas; these, however, were to some extent wasted, since they stood in the shadow, and it was almost impossible to judge of them in that half-dead light.

In reviewing this ambulatory, in parts so pleasing and in others so unseemly, Durtal could not help recalling the details of a similar but more complete work—one that had not been wrought in succeeding ages and disfigured by discrepancies of talent and date. This work was at Amiens, and it, likewise, was the decoration of the outer aisle of a cathedral choir.

This story of the life of Saint Firmin, the first Bishop and patron saint of the city, and of the discovery and translation of his relics by Saint Salvo, was told in a series of groups that had been gilt and painted; then, to complete the circuit of the sanctuary, the life of the second patron of Amiens had been added, Saint John the Baptist; and in the scene of the Baptism of Christ a fair-haired angel was represented holding a napkin, an ingenuous and arch being, one of the most adorable seraphic faces ever carved or painted by Flemish art in France.

This legend of Saint Firmin was set forth, like that of the Birth of the Virgin at Chartres, in separate chapters of stone, surmounted in the same way with gothic canopies or tabernacles; and in the compartment where Saint Salvo, surrounded by the multitude, discerns the beams which radiate from a cloud to indicate the spot where the lost body of the Martyr had been buried, a man on his knees with clasped hands, seems to pant, uplifted in prayer, burning, projected by the leap of his soul, his face transfigured, turning a mere rustic into a saint in ecstasy, already dwelling in God far above the earth.

This worshipper was the masterpiece of the ambulatory at Amiens, as the sleeping Saint Joseph was of the bas-reliefs at Chartres.

“Take it for all in all,” said Durtal to himself, “that work in the Picardy Cathedral is more explicit, more complete, more various, more eloquent even than that of the church in La Beauce. Irrespective of the fact that the unknown image-maker who created it was as highly gifted as Soulas with acute observation, and persuasive and decided simple-mindedness and spirit, he had besides a peculiar and more noble vein of feeling. And then his subjects were not restricted to the presentment of two or three personages; he

frequently grouped a swarming crowd, in which each man, woman, or child differed in individual character and feature from every other, and was conspicuously marked by that unlikeness, so clear and living was the realism of each small figure!

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“After all,” thought Durtal, looking once more at the choir aisles as he turned away, “though Soulas maybe inferior to the sculptor of Amiens, he is none the less a delightful artist and a true master, and his groups may console us for the ignominious work of Bridan and the atrocious decoration of the choir.”

He then went to kneel before the Black Virgin, and returning to the North transept near which She stands, he gazed once more in amazement at the incandescent flowers of the windows; again he was captivated and moved by the five pointed windows under the rose, in which, on each side of the Mauresque Saint Anna, stood David and Solomon, a forbidding pair, in a furnace of purple, and Melchizedec and Aaron with tawny complexions and hairy faces, with enormous colourless eyes standing out passionless in a blaze of daylight.

The radiating rose-window above them was not of the vast diameter of those in Notre Dame de Paris, nor of the incomparable elegance of the star-patterned rose at Amiens. It was smaller and heavier, sparkling with flowers like saxifrages of flame, opening in the pierced wall.

Durtal turned on his heel to look at the South transept, where five great windows faced those on the North. There he saw, blazing like torches on each side of the Virgin placed exactly opposite Saint Anna, the four Evangelists borne on the shoulders of the four greater Prophets—Saint Matthew on Isaiah, Saint Luke on Jeremiah, Saint John on Ezekiel, Saint Mark on Daniel—each stranger than the other, with their eyes like the lenses of opera-glasses, their hair in ripples, their beards like the up-torn roots of trees; excepting Saint John, who was always represented as a beardless youth in the Latin Mediaeval Church, to symbolize his virginity; but the most grotesque of these giants’ was perhaps Saint Luke, who, perched on Jeremiah’s back, gently scratches the prophet’s head, as if he were a parrot, while turning woeful, meditative eyes up to Heaven.

Durtal went down the nave, darker than the choir; the pavement sloped gently to the door, for in the Middle Ages it was washed every morning after the departure of the crowds who slept on it; and he looked down, in the middle, on the labyrinth marked out on the ground in lines of white stone and ribbons of blue stone, twisting in a spiral, like a watch-spring. This path our fathers devoutly paced, repeating special prayers during the hour they spent in doing so, and thus performing an imaginary pilgrimage to the Holy Land to earn indulgences.

When he was out in the square once more, he turned back to take in the splendid effect of the whole before going home.

He felt at once happy and awe-stricken, carried out of himself by the tremendous and yet beautiful aspect of the church.

How grandiose and how aerial was this cathedral, sprung like a jet from the soul of a man who had formed it in his own image, to record his ascent in mystic paths, up and up by degrees in the light; passing through the contemplative life in the transept, soaring in the choir into the full glory of the unitive life, far away now from the purgatorial life, the dark passage of the nave.

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And this assumption of a soul was attended, supported, by the bands of angels, the apostles, the prophets, and the righteous, all arrayed in their glorified bodies of flame, an escort of honour to the Cross lying low on the stones, and the image of the Mother enthroned in all the high places of this vast reliquary, opening the walls, as it seemed, to present to Her, as for a perpetual festival, their posies of gems that had blossomed in the fiery heat of the glass windows.

Nowhere else was the Virgin so well cared for, so cherished, so emphatically proclaimed the absolute mistress of the realm thus offered to Her; and one detail proved this. In every other cathedral kings, saints, bishops, and benefactors lay buried in the depths of the soil; not so at Chartres. Not a body had ever been buried there; this church had never been made a sarcophagus, because, as one of its historians—old Rouillard—says, “it has the preeminent distinction of being the couch or bed of the Virgin.”

Thus it was Her home; here She was supreme amid the court of Her Elect, watching over the sacramental Body of Her Son in the sanctuary of the inmost chapel, where lamps were ever burning, guarding Him as She had done in His infancy; holding Him on Her knee in every carving, every painted window; seen in every storey of the building, between the ranks of saints, and sitting at last on a pillar, revealing herself to the poof and lowly, under the humble aspect of a sunburnt woman, scorched by the dog-days, tanned by wind and rain. Nay, She went lower still, down to the cellars of Her palace, waiting in the crypt to give audience to the waverers, the timid souls who were abashed by the sunlit splendour of Her Court.

How completely does this sanctuary—where the sweet and awful presence is ever felt of the Child who never leaves His Mother—lift the spirit above all realities, into the secret rapture of pure beauty!

“And how good must They both be,” Durtal said to himself, as he looked round and found himself alone, “never to abandon this desert, never to weary of waiting for worshippers! But for the honest country folk who come at all hours to kiss the pillar, what a solitude it would be, even on Sunday, for this cathedral is never full. However, to be just, at the nine o’clock mass on Sundays the lower end of the nave is thronged,” and he smiled, remembering that end of the church packed with little girls brought in schools by Sisters, and with peasant women who, not being able to see there to read their prayers, would light ends of taper and crowd together closely, several looking over one book.

This familiarity, this childlike simplicity of piety, which the dreadful sacristans of Paris would never endure in a church, were’ so natural at Chartres, so thoroughly in harmony with the homely and unceremonious welcome of Our Lady!

“A thing to be ascertained,” said Durtal, starting on a new line of thought, “is whether this church has preserved its surface uninjured, or whether it may not have been coloured in the thirteenth century. Some writers assert that, in Mediaeval times, the interiors of cathedrals were always painted. Is that the fact? Or, admitting that the statement is correct as to all Romanesque churches, is it equally so with regard to Gothic churches?

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“For my part, I like to believe that the sanctuary of Chartres was never befooled with gaudiness, such as we have to endure at Saint Germain des Pres, in Paris, and Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers. In fact such colour can only be conceived of—if at all—as used in small chapels; why stain the walls of a cathedral with motley? For this tattooing, so to speak, reduces the sense of space, brings down the roof, and makes the pillars clumsy; in short, it eliminates the mysterious soul of the nave, and destroys the sober majesty of the aisle with its feebly vulgar fret or guilloche, lozenges or crosses, scattered over the pillars and walls, in a paste of treacly yellow, endive-green, vinous purple, lava drab, brick red—a whole range of dull and dirty colours; to say nothing of the horror of a vault dotted with stars that look as if they had been cut out of gilt paper and stuck against a smalt background, a sky of washing-blue!

“It is endurable—if it must be—in the Sainte-Chapelle, because it is very small, an oratory, a shrine; it might even be intelligible in that wonderful church at Brou, which is a boudoir; its vaulting and pendants are in polychrome and gold, and the ground has been paved with enamelled tiles, of which visible traces remain round the tombs. This gaudiness of the roof and floor was in harmony with the filagree tracery of the walls, the heraldic glass, and the clear windows, the profusion of lace-like carving and coats of arms in the stone-work, blossoming with bunches of daisies mingling with labels, mottoes, monograms, Saint Francis’ girdles and knots. The colouring was in keeping with the alabaster retables, the black marble tombs, the pinnacled tabernacles with their crockets of curled and dentate foliage. We can then quite easily imagine the columns and walls painted, the ribs and bosses washed with gold, and making a harmonious whole of this *bonbonniere*, which indeed is a piece of jewelry rather than of architecture.

“This building at Brou was the last effort of mediaeval times, the last rocket flung up by the flamboyant Gothic style—a Gothic which though fallen from its glory struggled against death, fought against returning paganism and the invading Renaissance. The era of the great cathedrals ended in the production of this exquisite abortion, which was in its way a masterpiece, a gem of prettiness, of ingenuity, of tormented and coquettish taste.

“It was emblematic of the soul of the sixteenth century, already devoid of reserve; the sanctuary, too brightly lighted, was secularized; we here see it fully blown, and it never folded up or veiled itself again. We discern in this a lady’s bower, all paint and gold; the little chapels (or pews) with chimney-places where Margaret of Austria could warm herself as she heard Mass, furnished with scented cushions, provided with sweetmeats and toys and dogs.

“Brou is a fine lady’s drawing-room, not the house for all comers. Then, naturally, with its screen-work, and the carving of the rood-loft stretching like a lace portal across the entrance to the choir, it invites, it almost requires some skilful tinting of the details, the touches of colour that complete it, and harmonize it finally with the elegance of the

founder, the Princess Marguerite, whose presence is far more conspicuous in this little church than is that of the Virgin.

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“Even then it would be satisfactory to know whether the walls and pillars at Brou ever were really painted; the contrary seems proven. But in any case, though a touch of *rouge* might not ill beseem this curious sanctum, it would not be so at Chartres, for the only suitable hue is the shining, greasy patina, grey turning to silver, stone-colour turning buff—the colouring given by age, by time helped by accumulated vapours of prayer and the fumes of incense and tapers!”

And Durtal, arguing over his own reflections, ended by reverting, as he always did, to his own person, saying to himself,—

“Who knows that I may not some day bitterly regret this cathedral and all the sweet meditations it suggests; for, after all, I shall have no more opportunities for such long loitering, such relaxation of mind, since I shall be subject to the discipline of bells ringing for conventual drill if I suffer myself to be locked up in a cloister!

“Who knows whether, in the silence of a cell, I should not miss even the foolish cawing of those black jackdaws that croak without pause,” he went on, looking up with a smile at the cloud of birds that settled on the towers; and he recalled a legend which tells that since the fire in 1836 these birds quit the cathedral every evening at the very hour when the conflagration began, and do not return till dawn, after spending the night in a wood at three leagues from Chartres.

This tale is as absurd as another, also dear to the old wives of the city, and which tells that if you spit on a certain square of stone, set with black cement into the pavement behind the choir, blood will exude.

“Hah, it is you, Madame Bavoil.”

“Yes, our friend, I myself. I have just been on an errand for the Father, and am going home again to make the soup. And you, are you packing your trunks?”

“My trunks?”

“Why, are not you going off to a convent?” said she, laughing.

“Would not you like to see it?” exclaimed Durtal. “Catch me at that! Enlisting as a private subject to a pious drill, one of a poor squad, whose every movement must mark time, and who, though he is not expected to keep his hands over the seam of his trowsers, is required to hide them under his scapulary—”

“Ta, ta, ta,” interrupted the housekeeper, “I tell you once more, you are grudging, bargaining with God—”

“But before coming to so serious a decision it is quite necessary that I should argue all the pros and cons; in such a case some mental litigation is clearly permissible.”

She shrugged her shoulders; and there was such peace in her face, such a glow of flame lurked behind the liquid blackness of her eyes, that Durtal stood looking at her, admiring the honesty and purity of a soul which could thus rise to the threshold of her eyes and come forth in her look.

“How happy you are!” he exclaimed.

A cloud dimmed her eyes, and she looked down.

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“Envy no one, our friend,” said she, “for each has his own struggles and griefs.”

And when he had parted from her, Durtal, as he went home, thought of the disasters she had confessed, the cessation of her intercourse with Heaven, the fall of a soul that had been wont to soar above the clouds. How she must suffer!

“No, no,” he said, “the service of the Lord is not all roses. If we study the lives of the Saints we see these Elect tormented by dreadful maladies, and the most painful trials. No, holiness on earth is no child’s play, life is not amusement. To Saints, indeed, even on earth excessive suffering finds compensation in excessive joys; but to other Christians, such small fry as we are, what distress and trouble! We question the everlasting silence and none answers; we wait and none comes. In vain do we proclaim Him as Illimitable, Incomprehensible, Unthinkable, and confess that every effort of our reason is vain, we cannot cease to wonder, and still less cease to suffer! And yet—and yet if we consider, the darkness about us is not absolutely impenetrable, there is light in places and we can discern some truths, such as this:

“God treats us as He treats plants. He is, in a certain sense, the soul’s year; but a year in which the order of the seasons is reversed; for the spiritual seasons begin with spring, followed by winter, and then autumn comes, followed by summer.

“The moment of conversion is the spring, the soul is joyful and Christ sows the good seed; then comes the cold and all is dark, the terror-stricken soul believes itself forsaken and bewails itself; but without its feeling it during the trials of the purgatorial life, the seed germinates in the contemplative peace of autumn and flourishes in the summer life of Union.

“Aye; but each one must be the helping gardener of his own soul, listening to the instructions of the Master who plans the task and directs the work. Alas, we are no more the humble labourers of the Middle Ages, who toiled, giving God thanks, who submitted without discussion to the Master’s orders. We, by our little faith, have exhausted the value of prayer, the panacea of aspirations; consequently many things seem to us unjust and cruel, and we rebel, we ask for pledges; we hesitate to begin our task, we want to be paid in advance, and our distrust makes us vile!—O Lord, give us grace to pray, and never dream of demanding an earnest of Thy favours! Give us grace to obey and be silent!

“And I may add,” said Durtal to himself as he smiled on Madame Mesurat, who opened the door in answer to his ring, “Grant me, Lord, the grace not to be too much irritated by the buzzing of this great fly, the inexhaustible flow of this good woman’s tongue!”

CHAPTER XIV.

“What a fearful muddle, what a sea of ink is this menagerie of good and evil emblems!” exclaimed Durtal, laying down his pen.

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He had harnessed himself that morning to the task of investigating the symbolical fauna of the Middle Ages. At first sight the subject had struck him as newer and less arduous, and certainly as less lengthy, than the article he had thought of writing on the Primitive German Painters. But he now sat dismayed before his books and notes, seeking a clue to guide him through the mass of contradictory evidence that lay before him.

“I must take things in their order,” said he to himself, “if indeed any principle of selection is possible in such confusion.”

The Beast-books of Mediaeval times knew all the monsters of paganism—Satyrs, Fauns, Sphinxes, Harpies, Centaurs, Hydras, Pygmies, and Sirens; these were all regarded as various aspects of the Evil Spirit, so no research is needed as to their meaning; they are but a residuum of Antiquity. The true source of mystic zoology is not in mythology, but in the Bible, which classifies beasts as clean and unclean, makes them symbolize virtues and vices, some species being allegorical of heavenly personages, and other embodying the Devil.

Starting from this base, it may be observed that the liturgical interpreters of the animal world distinguished beasts from animals, including under the former head wild and untamable creatures, and under the second gentle and timid creatures and domestic animals.

The ornithologists of the Church, furthermore, represent birds as being the righteous, while Boetius, on the other hand, often quoted by Mediaeval writers, credited them with inconstancy, and Melito compares them in turn to Christ, to the Devil, and to the Jewish nation. It may be added that Richard of Saint Victor, disregarding these views, sees in winged fowl a symbol of the life of the soul, as in the four-footed beast he sees the life of the body—“And that gets us no further!” sighed Durtal.

“This is beside the mark. We must find some other symbolism, closer and clearer.

“Here the classification of naturalists would be useless, for a biped and a reptile not unfrequently bear the same interpretation as emblems. The simplest plan will be to divide the Church menagerie into two large classes, real beasts and monsters; there is no creature that we may not include in one or the other category.”

Durtal paused to reflect:

“Nevertheless to arrive at a clearer notion and better appreciate the importance of certain families in Catholic Mythography, we had better first take out all those animals which symbolize God, the Virgin, and the Devil, setting them aside to be referred to when they may elucidate other figures; and at the same time weed out those which apply to the Evangelists and are combined in the figures of the Tetramorph.

“The surface thus being removed, we may investigate the remainder, the figurative language of ordinary or monstrous beings.

“The animal emblems of God are numerous; the Scriptures are filled with creatures emblematic of the Saviour. David compares Him, by comparing himself, to the pelican in the wilderness, to the owl in its nest, to a sparrow alone on the house-top, to the dove, to a thirsting hart; the Psalms are a treasury of analogies with His qualities and His names.

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“Saint Isidor of Seville—Monseigneur Sainct Ysidore, as the naturalists of old are wont to call him—figures Jesus as a lamb by reason of his innocence, as a ram because He is the head of the Flock, even as a he-goat because the Redeemer was subject to the flesh of iniquity.

“Some took as His image the ox, the sheep, and the calf, as beasts meet for sacrifice, and others those animals that symbolize the elements: the lion, the eagle, the dolphin, the salamander—the kings of the earth, air, water, and fire. Some again, as Saint Melito, saw Him in the kid, the deer, and even in the camel, which, however, according to another passage of the same author, personifies a love of flattery and of vain praise. Others again find Him in the scarabaeus, as Saint Euchre does in the bee; still, the bee is regarded by Raban Maur as the unclean sinner. Christ’s Resurrection is, to yet other writers, symbolized by the Phoenix and the cock, and His wrath and power by the rhinoceros and the buffalo.

“The iconography of the Virgin is less puzzling; She may be symbolized by any chaste and gentle creature. The Anonymous Englishman in his *Monastic Distinctions*, compares Her to the bee, which we have seen so vilified by the Archbishop of Mayence, but the Virgin was most especially represented by the dove, the bird of all others whose Church functions are most onerous.

“All authorities agree in taking the dove as the image at once of the Virgin and of the Paraclete. According to Saint Mechtildis, it is the simplicity of the heart of Jesus; with others it signifies the preachers, the active religious life, as contrasted with the turtle dove, which personifies the contemplative life, since the ring-dove flies and coos in company, whereas the turtle dove rejoices apart and alone.

“To Bruno of Asti the dove is also an image of patience, a figure of the prophets.

“As to the beasts symbolizing Hell and evil, they are almost without number; the whole creation of monsters is to be found there. Then among real animals we find: the serpent—the aspic of Scripture, the scorpion, the wolf as mentioned by Jesus Himself, the leopard noted by Saint Melito as being allied to Antichrist, the she-tiger representing the sins of arrogance, the hyena, the jackal, the bear, the wild-boar, which, in the Psalms, is said to destroy the vineyard of the Lord, the fox, described as a hypocritical persecutor by Peter of Capua and as a promoter of heresy by Raban Maur. All beasts of prey; and the hog, the toad—the instrument of witchcraft, the he-goat—the image of Satan himself, the dog, the cat, the ass—under whose form the Devil is seen in trials for witchcraft in the Middle Ages, the leech, on which the anonymous writer of Clairvaux casts contumely; the raven that went forth from the ark and did not return—it represents malice, and the dove which came back is virtue, Saint Ambrose tells us; and the partridge which, according to the same writer, steals and hatches eggs she did not lay.

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“If we may believe Saint Theobald, the Devil is also symbolized by the spider, for it dreads the sun as much as the Evil One dreads the Church, and is more apt to weave its net by night than by day, thus imitating Satan, who attacks man when he knows him to be sleeping and powerless to defend himself.

“The Prince of Darkness is also to be seen as the lion and the eagle interpreted in an evil sense.

“This,” reflected Durtal, “is the same fact as we find in the expressive symbolism of colours and flowers; constantly a double meaning. The two antagonistic interpretations are almost invariably met with in the lore of hieroglyphics, excepting only in that of gems.

“Thus it is that the lion, defined by Saint Hildegarde as the image of zeal for God, the lion, figuring the Son Himself, becomes to Hugh of Saint Victor the emblem of cruelty. Basing their argument on a text in the Psalms, certain writers identify it with Lucifer. He is in fact the lion who seeks whom he may devour, the lion who rushes on his victim. David speaks of him with the dragon to be trodden under foot, and Saint Peter in his first Epistle describes him as roaring in quest of a Christian to devour.

“It is the same with the eagle, which Hugh of Saint Victor calls the standard of Pride. Chosen by Bruno of Asti, Saint Isidor and Saint Anselm to represent the Saviour, the Fisher of Men, because he pounces from the highest sky on fish swimming on the surface of the water and carries them up, the eagle, classed in Leviticus and Deuteronomy with the unclean beasts, is transformed, as being a bird of prey, into a personification of the Devil snatching away souls to gnaw and tear them.

“Thus every ferocious beast or bird and every reptile is a manifestation of the Evil One,” Durtal concluded.

To pass to the Tetramorph. The evangelistic animals are well known:—

Saint Matthew, who expatiates on the subject of the Incarnation and sets forth the human genealogy of the Messiah, is symbolized by a man.

Saint Mark, who more especially devotes his book to the miracles of the Son, saying less about His doctrine than about His acts and His resurrection, has the Lion for his attribute.

Saint Luke, who writes more especially of the virtues of Jesus, of His patience, meekness, and mercy, and who dwells at length on His sacrifice, is distinguished by the Ox or Calf.

Saint John, who preaches above all else the Divinity of the Word, is represented by the Eagle.

And the meaning assigned to the ox, the lion, and the eagle, is in perfect accordance with the character and personal aim of each Gospel.

The lion, emblematical of Omnipotence, is also the apt allegory of the Resurrection. All the primitive naturalists, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Anselm, Saint Yves of Chartres, Saint Bruno of Asti, Saint Isidor, Adamantius, all accept the legend that the lion-cub after its birth remains lifeless for three days; then on the fourth day it awakes as it hears its father's roar and springs full of life out of the den. Thus Christ, rising at the end of three days, escapes from the tomb at the call of His Father.

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The belief still prevailed that the lion sleeps with its eyes open; hence it became the emblem of vigilance, and Saint Hilary and Saint Augustine read in this manner of taking repose an allusion to the Divine nature, which was not extinguished even in the sepulchre, though the human nature of the Redeemer was in truth dead.

Finally, as it was considered certain that this animal effaced the traces of its steps in the sand of the desert with its tail, Raban Maur, Saint Epiphanius, and Saint Isidor regarded it as signifying the Saviour veiling His Godhead under the forms of the flesh.

“Not an ordinary beast—the lion!” exclaimed Durtal. “Well,” he went on, consulting his notes, “the ox is less pretentious! It is the paragon of strength with humility; according to Saint Paul it is emblematical of the priesthood; of the preacher, according to Raban Maur; of the Bishop, according to Peter Cantor, because, says this writer, the prelate wears a mitre of which the two horns resemble those of an ox, and he uses these horns, which are the wisdom of the Two Testaments, to rip up heretics. Still, in spite of these more or less ingenious interpretations, the ox is in fact the beast of immolation and sacrifice.

“Turning to the eagle, it is, as we have seen, the Messiah pouncing on souls to catch them; but other meanings are ascribed to it by Saint Isidor and by Vincent of Beauvais. If we believe them, the eagle that desires to test the prowess of his eaglets takes them in his talons and carries them out into the sun, compelling them to look with their eyes as they begin to open, on the blazing orb. The eagle which is dazzled by the fire is dropped and cast away by the parent bird. Thus doth God reject the soul which cannot gaze on him with the contemplative eye of love!

“The eagle, again, is typical of the Resurrection; Saint Epiphanius and Saint Isidor explain it thus: The eagle in old age flies up so near to the sun that its feathers catch fire; revived by the flames, it drops into the nearest spring, bathes in it three times and comes out regenerate: is not this indeed the paraphrase of the Psalmist’s verse, “Thy youth shall be renewed as the eagle’s”? Saint Madalene of Pazzi, however, regards it differently, and takes it to typify faith leaning on charity.

“I shall have to find a place for all these documents in my article,” sighed Durtal, placing these notes in a separate wrapper.

Now for the chimerical fauna introduced from the East, imported into Europe by the Crusaders, and travestied by the illuminators of missals and by image-makers.

Foremost, the dragon, which we already find rampant and busy in mythology and in the Bible.

Durtal rose and went into his library to find a book, “Traditions teratologiques,” by Berger de Xivrey. It contained long extracts from the “Romance of Alexander,” which was the delight of the grown-up children of the Middle Ages.

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“Dragons,” says this narrative, “are larger than all other serpents, and longer.... They fly through the air, which is darkened by the disgorging of their stench and venom ... This venom is so deadly that if a man should be touched by it or come nigh it, it would seem to him a burning fire, and would raise his skin in great blisters, as though he had been scalded.” And the author adds: “The sea is swollen up by their venom.”

Dragons have a crest, sharp talons, and a hissing throat, and are almost unconquerable. Albertus Magnus tells us, however, that magicians, when they wish to subdue them, beat as loudly as they can on drums, and that the dragon, imagining that it is the roll of thunder, which they greatly dread, let themselves be handled quietly and are taken.

The enemy of this winged reptile is the elephant, which sometimes succeeds in crushing it by falling on it with all its weight; but most times it is killed by the dragon, which feeds on its blood, of which the freshness allays the intolerable burning caused by its own venom.

Next to this monster comes the gryphon, a combination of the quadruped and the bird, for it has the body of the lion and the head and talons of the eagle. Then the basilisk, regarded as the king of serpents; it is four feet long, and has a tail as thick as a tree, and spotted with white. Its head bears a tuft in shape like a crown; it has a strident voice, and its eye is murderous, “A look,” says the “Romance of Alexander,” “so piercing, that it is pestilential and deadly to all beasts, whether venomous or no.” Its breath is no less fetid, nor less dangerous, for, “by its breath are all things infected, and when it is dying it is fain to disgorge it; it stinks so that all other beasts flee from it.”

Its most formidable foe is the weasel, which bites its throat, “though it be a beast no bigger than a rat,” for “God hath made nothing without reason and remedy,” the pious Mediaeval writer concludes.

Why the weasel? There is nothing to show; nor was this little creature, who did such good service, honoured by our forefathers as having a favourable meaning.

It is symbolical of dissimulation and depravity, and taken to typify the degrading life of the mountebank. It may also be remembered that this carnivorous beast, which was supposed to carry its young in the mouth and give birth to them through the ear, is numbered among the unclean animals in the Bible.

“This zoological homoeopathy is rather inconsistent,” observed Durtal, “unless the similar interpretation given to these two creatures, hating each other, may signify that the Devil devours himself.”

Next we have the phoenix, “a bird of very fine plumage resembling the peacock; it is very solitary, and feeds on the seeds of the ash;” its colour, moreover, is of purple

overshot with gold; and because it is said to rise again from its ashes, it is always typical of the Resurrection of Christ.

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The unicorn was one of the most amazing creatures in mystical natural history.

“It is a very cruel beast, with a great and thick body after the fashion of a horse; it hath for a weapon a great horn, half a fathom in length, so sharp and so hard that there is nothing it cannot pierce.... When men need to take it they bring a virgin maid to the place where they know that it has its abode. When the unicorn sees her and knows that she is a virgin, it lieth down to sleep in her lap, doing her no harm; then come the hunters and kill it.... Likewise, if she be not a pure maid the unicorn will not sleep, but killeth the damsel who is not pure.”

Whence we conclude that the unicorn is one of the emblems of chastity, as also is another very strange beast of which Saint Isidor speaks: the porphyrion.

This has one foot like that of the partridge, and the other webbed like that of a goose, its peculiarity consists in mourning over adultery, and loving its master so faithfully that it dies of pity in his arms when it learns that his wife has deceived him. So that this species was soon extinct!

“There must be some more fabulous beasts to be included,” murmured Durtal, again turning over his papers.

He found the wyvern, a sort of Melusina, half woman and half serpent; a very cruel beast, full of malice and devoid of pity, Saint Ambrose tells us; the manicoris, with the face of a man, the tawny eyes and crimson mane of a lion, a scorpion’s tail, and the flight of an eagle; this sort is insatiable by human flesh. The leoncerote, offspring of the male hyena and the lioness, having the body of an ass, the legs of a deer, the breast of a wild beast, a camel’s head, and armed with terrible fangs; the tharanda, which, according to Hugh of Saint Victor, has the shape of the ox, the profile of the stag, the fur of the bear, and which changes colour like the cameleon; finally, the sea-monk, the most puzzling of all, since Vincent of Beauvais describes it as having its body covered with scales, and it is furnished, in lieu of arms, with fins all over claws, besides having a monk’s shaven head ending in the snout of a carp.

Others were also invented, as for instance the gargoyles, hybrid monsters, signifying the vomiting forth of sin ejected from the sanctuary; reminding the passer-by who sees them pouring forth the water from the gutter, that when seen outside the church, they are the voidance of the spirit, the cloaca of the soul!

“But,” said Durtal to himself, “that seems to me enough of the matter. From the point of view of symbolism this menagerie is not particularly interesting since these monsters—-the wyvern, the manicoris, the leoncerote, the tharanda and sea-monk—all mean the same thing, and all embody the Spirit of Evil.”

He took out his watch.

“Come,” said he, “I have still time enough before dinner to go through the list of real animals.”

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And he turned over his notes on birds.

“The cock,” said he, “is prayer, watchfulness, the preacher, the Resurrection, since it is the first to wake at daybreak; the peacock, that has, as an old writer says, “the voice of a devil and the feathers of an angel,” is a mass of contradictory symbols: it typifies pride, and, according to Saint Antony of Padua, immortality, as well as vigilance by reason of the eyes in its tail. The pelican is the image of contemplation and of charity; of love, too, according to Saint Madalene of Pazzi; the sparrow symbolizes penitential solitude; the swallow, sin; the swan, pride, according to Raban Maur; diligence and solicitude according to Thomas de Catimpre; the nightingale is mentioned by Saint Mechtildis as meaning the tender soul; and the same saint compares the lark to persons who do good works with cheerfulness; it is to be noted too that in the windows of Bourges the lark means charity to the sick.

“Here are others specified by Hugh of Saint Victor. To him the vulture means idleness; the kite, rapacity; the raven, detraction; the white owl, hypochondria; the common owl, ignorance; the magpie, chattering talk; and the hoopoe, sluttishness and evil report.

“This is all a sorry medley!” said Durtal, “and I fear it will be the same with the mammalia and other beasts!”

He compared a few passages. The ox, the lamb, the sheep, we have seen. The sheep is the type of timidity and meekness, and Saint Pacomius embodies in him the monk who lives punctual and obedient, and loving his brethren. Saint Melito on his part ascribes hypocrisy to the ostrich, temporal power to the rhinoceros, human frailty to the spider; we may also mention among the crustacea, the crab as symbolizing heresy and the synagogue, because it walks backwards and away from the path of righteousness. Among fish, the whale is the emblem of the tomb, just as Jonas, who came out of it after three days, is typical of Jesus risen from the dead. Among rodents the beaver is the image of Christian prudence, because, says the legend, when he is pursued by hunters he tears with his teeth the pouch containing castoreum and flings it at the foe. For this reason it is likewise the animal representative of the text in the Gospel which declares that a man must cut off the offending member which is an occasion of sin.

Let us pause before the den of wild beasts.

According to Hugh of Saint Victor the wolf is avarice; the fox is cunning; Adamantius says that the wild boar represents blind rage; the leopard wrath, ambush and daring; the tiger, and the hyena, which can change its sex at will and imitate the voice of man, signifies hypocrisy; while Saint Hildegarde shows that the panther, by reason of the beauty of its spots, is typical of vain-glory.

We need not dwell on the bull, the bison and the buffalo; the symbolists regard them as emblems of brute force and pride; while the goat and boar-pig are vessels of lust and filth.

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They divide this honour with the toad, an unclean reptile; the habitation of the Devil, who assumes its form to show himself to the female saints—for instance to Saint Theresa. As to the hapless frog it is equally defamed because of its likeness to the toad.

The stag is in better odour. Saint Jerome and Cassiodorus say it exemplifies the Christian who overcomes sin by the sacrament of penance, or by martyrdom. Representing God in the Psalms, it is also taken as the heathen desiring baptism; a legend attributes to it so vehement a horror of the Serpent, in other words of the Devil, that whenever it can it attacks and devours him, but if it subsequently goes for three hours without drinking, it dies; hence after that meal it runs to and fro in the forest seeking a spring of which, if it finds one, it drinks, and is then many years younger. The she-goat is sometimes held in ill-fame as being akin to the he-goat, but it more often is regarded as the Well-Beloved, to which the Bride in Canticles compares it. The hedgehog, hiding in crannies, is interpreted by Saint Melito as the sinner, by Peter of Capua as the penitent. As to the horse, as a creature of vanity and pride, it is opposed by Peter Cantor and Adamantius to the ox, which is all gravity and simplicity. It is well, however, to observe that to confuse the matter, by presenting the horse under another aspect, Saint Eucher compares it to a saint, and the Anonymous Monk of Clairvaux identifies the Devil with the ox. The poor ass is no better treated by Hugh of Saint Victor, who accuses it of stupidity, by Saint Gregory the Great, who taxes it with laziness, and Peter of Capua, who speaks of its lust. It must, however; be observed that Saint Melito compares it with Christ for its humility, and that the exegetists explain the ass’s foal ridden by Christ on Palm Sunday as an image of the Gentiles, as they interpret the she-ass that threw Him to mean the Jews.

Finally, two domestic animals dear to man, the cat and the dog, are generally contemned by the mystics. The dog, typical of sin, says Peter Cantor, and the most quarrelsome of beasts, adds Hugh of Saint Victor, is the creature that returns to his vomit; it also prefigures the reprobates of whom the Apocalypse speaks, who are to be driven out of the heavenly Jerusalem; Saint Melito speaks of it as the apostate, and Saint Pacomius as the rapacious monk, but Raban Maur redeems it a little from this condemnation by specifying it as emblematic of confessors.

The cat, which is but once mentioned in the Bible—in the Book of Baruch—is invariably abhorred by the primitive naturalists, who accuse it of embodying treachery and hypocrisy, and of lending its skin to the Devil, to enable him to appear in its shape to sorcerers.

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Durtal turned over a few more pages, discovering that the hare typified timidity and cowardice, and the snail laziness; noting the opinion of Adamantius, who ascribes levity and a mocking spirit to the monkey; that of Peter of Capua and of the Anonymous writer of Clairvaux, that the lizard, which crawls and hides in cracks in the walls, is, as well as the serpent, an emblem of evil; and he recorded the special ascription of ingratitude by Christ Himself to the viper, for He gives the name to the Jewish race. Durtal then hastily dressed, fearing to be late, as he was dining with the Abbe Gevresin and the Abbe Plomb. Pursued by Madame Mesurat, who insisted on dealing him one more blow with the clothes-brush, he rushed downstairs, and was soon at his friend's door.

Madame Bavoil, who opened it, appeared in a cap all askew and hair loose, up-turned sleeves and scorched arms, with cheeks crimson from the kitchen fire. She confessed to the concoction of a dish of beef *a la mode* softened by calf's foot jelly and strengthened by a dash of brandy, and fled, alarmed by the impatient call of a saucepan, of which the contents were boiling over on the hot plates of the stove, with a noise like cats swearing.

Durtal found the old Abbe tormented by rheumatism, but as ever, patient and cheerful. They talked a little while; then, seeing that Durtal was looking at some little lumps of gum lying on his writing table, the Abbe said,—

"That is incense from the Carmel of Chartres."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, the Carmelites are accustomed to burn none but genuine true incense. So I begged them to trust me with a specimen that I might procure the same quality for our cathedral."

"It is everywhere adulterated, I suppose?"

"Yes. This substance is found in commerce under three forms: male incense, which is the best if unadulterated; female incense, which is mixed with reddish fragments and dry grains called *marrons*; finally incense in powder, which is for the most part a mixture of inferior resin and benzoin."

"And what have you there?"

"This is male incense; do you see those oblong tears, those almost transparent drops of faded amber? how different from that which they use at Notre Dame; it is earthy, broken, full of scraps, and it is safe to wager that those knobs are crystals of carbonate of lime and not beads of pure resin."

"Why," said Durtal, "this substance suggests to me the idea of a symbolism of odours; has it ever been worked out?"

“I doubt it; but in any case it would be very simple. The aromatic substances used in the Liturgy are reduced to three, frankincense, myrrh, and balm.

“Their meaning is known to you. Incense is the Divinity of the Son, and our prayers which rise up like vapours in the presence of the Most High, as the Psalmist says. Myrrh is repentance, the sufferings of Jesus, His death, the martyrs, and also, according to Monsieur Olier, the type of the Virgin who heals the souls of sinners as myrrh cauterizes the festering of wounds; balm is another word for virtue.

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“But though there are few Liturgical savours, it is not so with regard to mystical effluences which vary infinitely. We have, however, but little information on the subject.

“We merely know that the odour of sanctity is antithetical to that of the Devil; that many of the Elect have diffused, during their lifetime and after their death, an exquisite fragrance which cannot be analyzed; such were Madalene of Pazzi, Saint Etienne de Muret, Saint Philip Neri, Saint Paternianus, Saint Omer, the Venerable Francis Olympus, Jeanne de Matel and many more.

“We know too that our sins stink, each according to its nature; and the proof of this is that the saints could detect the state of men’s consciences merely by the smell of their bodies. Do you remember how Saint Joseph of Cupertino exclaimed to a sinner whom he met: ’My friend, you smell very badly; go and wash.’

“To return to the odour of sanctity: in certain persons it has been known to assume a natural character almost identical with certain familiar scents. Saint Treverius exhaled a fragrance compounded of roses, lilies, balm, and incense; Saint Rose of Viterbo smelt of roses; Saint Cajetan of orange-blossom; Saint Catherine of Ricci of violets; Saint Theresa by turns of lily, jasmine and violet; Saint Thomas Aquinas of incense; Saint Francis of Paul of musk;—I mention these at random as they occur to me.

“Yes, and Saint Lydwine, when so ill, diffused a fragrance which also imparted a flavour. Her wounds exhaled a cheerful savour of spice and the very essence of Flemish home cooking—a refined extract of cinnamon.”

“On the other hand,” the Abbe went on, “the stench of wizards and witches was notorious in the Middle Ages. On this point all exorcists and writers on Demonology are agreed; and it is almost invariably recorded that after an apparition of the devil a foul odour of sulphur was left in the cells, even when the Saints had succeeded in dislodging him.

“But the essential odour of the devil is amply recorded in the life of Christina of Stumbela. You are not ignorant, I suppose, of the exploits in which Satan indulged against that saint?”

“Indeed, I am, Monsieur l’Abbe.”

“Then I may tell you that the narrative of these assaults has been preserved by the Bollandists, who have included the life of this pious woman in their biographies. It was written by Peter of Dacia, a Dominican, and her confessor.

“Christina was born early in the thirteenth century—1242, I believe—at Stumbela, near Cologne.

“She was persecuted by the devil from her infancy. He exhausted the armoury of his arts against her, appeared to her under the form of a cock, a bull, an apostle; covered her with lice, filled her bed with vermin, poisoned her blood, and as he could not make her deny God, he invented fresh torments.

“He turned the food she put into her mouth into a toad, a snake, a spider, and disgusted her so effectually with all food, that she was dying for want of it. She spent her days in vomiting, and prayer to God to rescue her, but He was silent.

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“Still, to sustain her in such trials, the Sacrament was left to her. Satan, knowing this, determined to deprive her of this sustenance, and appeared in the form of these creatures even in the host when she received it. Finally, to conquer her, he took the form of a huge toad, and established himself in her bosom. At first Christina fainted with fright, but then God intervened; by His order she wrapped her hand in her sleeve, slipped it between her body and the belly of the reptile, tore away the toad, and flung it on the stones.

“It was dashed to pieces, with a noise, said the saint, like an old shoe.

“These persecutions continued till Advent in 1268; and from that time the plague of filth began.

“Peter of Dacia relates that one evening Christina’s father came to fetch him from his convent in Cologne, and begged him to go with him to his daughter, tormented by the devil. He and another Dominican, Brother Wipert, set out, and on arriving at Stumbela they found in the haunted hut the Priest of the district, the Reverend Father Godefried, Prior of the Benedictines of Brunwilre, and Cellarer of that convent. As they stood warming themselves they discoursed of the pestilential incursions of the devil, when suddenly the performance was repeated. They were all bespattered with filth, Christina being caked with it, to use the Friar’s expression; and ‘strange to say,’ adds Peter of Dacia, ’this matter, which was but warm, burned Christina, raising blisters on her skin.’

“This continued for three days. At length, one evening, Friar Wipert, quite exasperated, began to recite the prayers for exorcism; but a terrific uproar shook the room, the candles went out, and he was hit in the eye by something so hard that he exclaimed, ’Woe is me! I am blind of an eye!’

“He was led, feeling his way, into an adjoining room, where the garments they changed were dried, and where water was constantly heated for their ablutions; he was cleansed, and his eye washed. It had suffered no serious injury, and he returned to the other room to say Matins with the two Benedictines and Peter of Dacia. But before chanting the service he went up to the patient’s bed and clasped his hands in amazement.

“She was covered with filth indeed, but all was changed. The smell, which had been supernaturally foul, was changed to angelic fragrance; Christina’s saintly resignation had routed the tempter of souls; and they all joined in praising God. What do you say to that narrative?”

“It is astounding, certainly; but is this the only instance of such infernal filth?”

“No; in the next century analogous circumstances haunted Elizabeth de Reute, and likewise the Blessed Betha. Here again Satan allowed himself such filthy sport. It may

also be noted that in modern times acts of the same kind were observed in the house of the Cure d'Ars."

"But in all this I see nothing to illustrate the symbolism of perfumes," remarked Durtal. "At any rate, the subject would seem to be narrow or ill-defined, and the number of odours that can be named is small.

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“There are certain essences mentioned in the Old Testament prefiguring the Virgin. Some of them are interpreted in other senses, as spikenard, cassia, and cinnamon. The first represents strength of soul; the second, sound doctrine; and the third, the sweet savour of virtue. Then there is the essence of cedar, which in the thirteenth century symbolized the Doctors of the Church; and there are three specifically liturgical perfumes: incense, balm, and myrrh; besides the odour of sanctity, which in the case of some saints could be analyzed; and the demoniacal stench, from a mere animal smell to the horrible nastiness of rotten eggs and sulphur.

“We must now inquire whether the personal fragrance of the Elect is in harmony with the qualities or acts of which each was, on earth, the example or the doer; and it would seem to have been so, when we remark that Saint Thomas Aquinas, who composed the admirable sequence on the Holy Sacrament, exhaled a perfume of incense, and that Saint Catherine of Ricci, who was a model of humility, smelt of violets, the emblem of that virtue, but—”

The Abbe Plomb now came in, and being informed by Durtal of the subject under discussion, he said,—

“But you have omitted from your diabolical flavours the most conspicuous.”

“How is that, Monsieur l’Abbe?”

“Certainly, for you have taken no account of the false fragrance which Satan can diffuse. In fact, his baleful effluvia are of two kinds: one characterized by the stench of sulphurous waters and drains; the other by a false odour of sanctity, delicious gusts of sweetness and temptation. This is how the Evil One tried to seduce Dominico de Gusman; he bathed him in delicious vapours, hoping thus to inspire him with notions of vain-glory; thus, too, did he to Jourdain of Saxony, who exhaled a sweet odour when saying Mass. God showed him that this phenomenon was of infernal origin, and it then ceased.

“And I recollect a singular anecdote told by Quercetanus concerning a mistress of Charlemagne’s who died. The king, who worshipped her, could not bear to have her body interred, though it was decomposing, exhaling, however, a perfume of violets and roses. The body was examined, and in its mouth a ring was found, which was removed. The demoniacal enchantment forthwith ceased, the body became foul, and Charlemagne allowed it to be buried.

“We may add to this diabolical odour of seduction another, which is, on the contrary, fetid, and is used to annoy the believer, to hinder him in prayer, to estrange him from his fellows, and drive him, if possible, to despair; still, this smell with which the devil infects a being may be included in the category of the smells of temptation—not, indeed, to pride, but to weakness and fear.

“Meanwhile, I have something else for you,” said the Abbe, addressing Durtal. “Here are the titles I have collected for you of some works on the symbolical animals of the Middle Ages. You have read ’*De Bestiis et aliis rebus*,’ by Hugh of Saint Victor?”

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“Yes.”

“Very good; you may further consult Albertus Magnus, Bartholomew de Glanville, and Pierre de Bressuire. I have noted on this paper a series of such beast-books: those of Hildebert, Philippe de Thann, Guillaume de Normandie, Gautier de Metz, and Richard de Fournival. Only you would have to go to Paris to procure them in the public libraries.”

“And that would not help me much,” replied Durtal. “I have, ere now, looked through many of these works, and they contain no information that can be of use from the point of view of symbolism. They are mere fabulous descriptions of animals, legends as to their origin and habits. The *Spicilegium Solesmense* and the *Analectae* of Dom Pitra are far more instructive. By his help, with that of Saint Isidor, Saint Epiphanius, and Hugh of Saint Victor, we can decipher the figurative meaning of monsters.

“They are all alike; there has been no complete or serious work produced on symbolism since the Middle Ages, for the Abbe Auber’s work on the subject is a delusion. In vain will you seek for a treatise on flowers which even alludes to the Catholic significance of plants. I do not, of course, mean those silly books compiled for lovers, and called the Language of Flowers, which you may find on the bookstalls with old cookery-books and dream-books. It is the same with regard to colours; nothing proven or authentic has been written concerning infernal or celestial hues; for in fact the treatise by Frederic Portal is worthless. To explain Angelico’s work I had to hunt here and there through the Mystics, to discover where I might the meanings they ascribe to colours; and I see plainly that I must do the same for my article on the emblematical fauna. There is, on the whole, nothing to be found in technical works; it is in the Bible and in the Liturgy, the fountain-head of symbolical lore, that I must cast my net. By the way, Monsieur l’Abbe, had you not some remarks to communicate on the zoology of the Scriptures?”

“Yes, we will go—”

“To dinner, if you please,” said Madame Bavoil.

The Abbe Gevresin said grace, and when they had eaten the soup the housekeeper served the beef.

It was strengthening, tender, savoury to its inmost fibre, penetrated by the rich and highly-flavoured sauce.

“You don’t get the like at La Trappe, our friend, eh?” said Madame Bavoil.

“Nor will he get anything so good at any other religious retreat,” said the Abbe Plomb.

“Do not discourage me beforehand,” said Durtal, laughing; “let me enjoy this without a pang—there is a time for all things.”

“Then you are fully determined,” said the Abbe Gevresin, “to write a paper for your *Review* on allegorical beasts?”

“Yes, Monsieur l’Abbe.”

“I have made a list for you from the works of Fillion and of Lesetre of the blunders made by the translators of the Bible when they disguised real beasts under chimerical names,” said the Abbe Plomb. “This, in a few words, is the upshot of my researches.

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“There was never any mythological fauna in the Sacred Books. The Hebrew text was misread by those who translated it into Greek and Latin, and the strange zoology that we find in certain chapters of Isaiah and Job is easily reduced to the nomenclature of well-known creatures.

“Thus the onocentaurs and sirens, spoken of by the Prophet, are neither more nor less than jackals, if we examine the Hebrew original. The lamia, a vampire, half woman and half serpent like the wyvern, is a night bird, the white or the screech owl; the satyrs and fauns, the hairy beasts spoken of in the Vulgate, are, after all, no more than wild goats —’schirim,’ as they are called in the Mosaic original.

“The reptile so frequently mentioned in the Bible under the name of ‘dragon’ is indicated in the original by various words, which sometimes mean the serpent or the crocodile, sometimes the jackal, and sometimes the whale; and the famous unicorn of the Scriptures is merely the primaeval bull or auroch, which is to be seen on the Assyrian bas-reliefs—a race now dying out, lingering only in the remotest parts of Lithuania and the Caucasus.”

“And Behemoth and Leviathan, spoken of by Job?”

“The word Behemoth is a plural form in Hebrew meaning Excellence. It designates a prodigious and enormous beast—the rhinoceros, perhaps, or the hippopotamus. As to Leviathan, it was a huge reptile, a gigantic python.”

“That is a pity,” said Durtal. “Imaginary zoology was far more amusing!—Why, what is this vegetable?” he inquired, as he tasted a curious stew of greens.

“Dandelions cut up and boiled with shreds of bacon,” replied Madame Bavoil. “Do you like the dish, our friend?”

“Indeed I do. Your dandelions are to garden spinach and chicory what the wild duck is to the tame, or the hare to the rabbit. And it is a fact that garden plants are generally poor and tasteless, while those that grow wild have a certain astringency and pleasant bitter flavour. It is the venison of vegetables that you have given us, Madame Bavoil!”

“I fancy,” said the Abbe Plomb, who had been thoughtful, “that just as we tried to compile a mystic flora the other day, we might make a list of the deadly sins as represented by animals.”

“Obviously, and with very little trouble. Pride is embodied in the bull, the peacock, the lion, the eagle, the horse, the swan, and the wild ass—according to Vincent de Beauvais. Avarice by the wolf, and, says Saint Theobald, by the spider; for lust, we have the he-goat, the boar, the toad, the ass, and the fly, which, Saint Gregory the Great tells, typifies the turbulent cravings of the senses; for envy, the sparrow-hawk, the

owl, and screech-owl; for greediness, the hog and the dog; for anger, the lion and wild boar, and, according to Adamantius, the leopard; for sloth, the vulture, the snail, the she-ass, and, Raban Maur says, the mule.

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“As to the virtues antithetical to these vices, humility may be typified by the ox and the ass; indifference to worldly possessions by the pelican, the emblem of the contemplative life; chastity by the dove and the elephant, though it is true that this interpretation of Peter of Capua is contradicted by other mystics, who accuse the elephant of pride, and speak of him as an ‘enormous sinner’; charity by the lark and the pelican; temperance by the camel, which, taken in another sense, typifies under the name of *gamal* extravagant fury; vigilance by the lion, the peacock, the ant—quoted by the Abbess Herrade and the Anonymous monk of Clairvaux—and especially by the cock, to which Saint Eucher attributes this virtue in common with all other symbolists.

“I may add that the dove alone epitomizes all these qualities and is the synthesis of all virtue.”

“Yes, and she alone is never spoken of as having any evil significance.”

“A distinction she shares with white and blue, the only colours which are exempt from the law of antithesis and are never ascribed to any vice,” said Durtal.

“The dove!” cried Madame Bavoil, who was changing the plates; “she plays a beautiful part in the story of Noah’s Ark. Ah! our friend, you should hear what Mother Jeanne de Matel says of her.”

“What does she say, Madame Bavoil?”

“The admirable Jeanne begins by saying that original sin produced in human nature the deluge of sin from which the Virgin alone was exempted by the Father, who chose Her to be His one Dove.

“Then she relates how Lucifer, represented by the raven, escaped from the ark through the window of free will; then God, to whom Mary had belonged from all eternity, opened the window of the Will of His Providence, and from His own bosom, from the heavenly Ark, He sent the original dove on the earth where she gathered a spray of the olive of His mercy, took her flight back to the Ark of Heaven, and offered this branch for the whole human race; She then implored Divine grace to abate the deluge of sin, and besought the Heavenly Noah to descend from that high Ark; then, without quitting the bosom of the Father from whom He is inseparable, He came down.”

“*Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*,” the Abbe Gevresin added, in conclusion.

“This prefiguration of the Word by Noah is certainly curious,” remarked Durtal.

“Animals are also introduced in the iconography of the saints,” the Abbe Plomb resumed. “So far as I can recollect, the ass is the attribute of Saint Marcellus, of Saint John Chrysostom, of Saint Germain, of Saint Aubert, of Saint Frances of Rome, and of

some others; the stag of Saint Hubert and Saint Rieul; the cock of Saint Landry and Saint Vitus; the raven of Saint Benedict, Saint Apollinarius, Saint Vincent, Saint Ida, Saint Expeditus; the deer of Saint Henry; the wolf of Saint Waast, Saint Norbert, Saint Remaclus, and Saint Arnold; the spider betokens Saint

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Conrad and Saint Felix of Nola; the dog accompanies Saint Godfrey, Saint Bernard, Saint Roch, Saint Margaret of Cortona, and Saint Dominic, when it bears a burning torch in its mouth; the doe is the badge of Saint Giles, Saint Leu, Saint Genevieve of Brabant, and Saint Maximus; the pig of Saint Anthony; the dolphin of Saint Adrian, of Saint Lucian, and Saint Basil; the swan of Saint Cuthbert and Saint Hugh; the rat is seen with Saint Goutran and Saint Gertrude; the ox with Saint Cornelius, Saint Eustachius, Saint Honorius, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Lucy, Saint Blandina, Saint Bridget, Saint Sylvester, Saint Sebaldus, Saint Saturninus; the dove belongs to Saint Gregory the Great, Saint Remi, Saint Ambrose, Saint Hilary, Saint Ursula, Saint Aldegonde, and Saint Scholastica, whose soul flew up to Heaven under that form.

“And the list might be indefinitely extended. Shall you mention in your article these accompaniments to the saints?”

“In point of fact,” replied Durtal, “most of these attributes are based on history or legend, and not on symbolism; so I shall not devote any particular attention to them.”

There was a silence.

Then, abruptly, the Abbe Plomb, looking at his brother priest, said to Durtal,—

“I am going to Solesmes again a week hence, and I told the Reverend Father Abbot that I should take you with me.”

Then, seeing Durtal’s amazement, he smiled. “But I will not leave you there,” he went on, “unless you wish not to return to Chartres. I only propose that you should pay a visit there, just long enough to breathe the atmosphere of the convent, to make acquaintance with the Benedictine Fathers, and try their life.”

Durtal was silent, somewhat scared; for this proposal, simple enough as it was, that he should go to live for some days in a cloister, had startled him into a strange, a grotesque notion that if he should accept, it would be playing away his last card, risking a decisive step, taking a sort of pledge before God to settle there and end his days in His immediate presence.

But what was most strange was that this idea, so imperative and overpowering that it excluded all possible reflection, bereft him of all his powers of self-protection, left him disarmed at the mercy of he knew not what—this idea, which nothing justified, was not centred, not fixed on Solesmes; whither he should retreat was for the moment of small importance; that was not the question; the only point to settle was whether he meant to yield at all to a vague impulse, to obey unformulated orders which were nevertheless

positive, and give an earnest to God, Who seemed to be harassing him without any sufficient explanation.

He felt himself inexorably condemned, tacitly compelled to pronounce his decision then and there.

He tried to struggle, to reason, to recover his self-possession; but the very effort was fatal. He felt a sort of inward syncope, as though, while his body was still upright, his soul was fainting within him with fatigue and terror.

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“But this is madness!” he cried. “Madness!”

“Why, what is the matter?” cried the two priests.

“I beg your pardon. Nothing.”

“Are you in pain?”

“No, it is nothing.”

There was an awkward pause which he was determined to break.

“Did you ever take laughing gas?” said he; “the gas which sends you to sleep and is used in surgery for short operations? No? Well, you feel a buzzing in your brain, and just as you hear a great noise of falling waters you lose consciousness. That is what I am feeling; only the experience is not in my brain, but in my soul, which is giddy and helpless, on the point of fainting away.”

“I should like to think,” said the Abbe Plomb, “that it is not the thought of a visit to Solesmes that has thus upset you.”

Durtal had not courage enough to own the truth; he was afraid of seeming ridiculous if he confessed to such a panic; so to avoid a direct answer he vaguely shook his head.

“And I cannot help wondering why you should hesitate, for you will be welcomed with open arms. The Father Abbot is a man of the highest merit, and, moreover, no enemy to art. Besides—and this I hope will suffice to reassure you—he is a most simple and kind-hearted monk.”

“But I have to finish my article.”

The two priests laughed.

“You have a week before you to write your article in.”

“And then, to get any benefit from a monastery, I ought not be in the state of dryness and diffusion in which I find myself vegetating,” Durtal went on with difficulty.

“The saints themselves are not free from distractions,” replied the Abbe Gevresin. “For instance, think of the monk of whom Tauler speaks, who, on quitting his cell in the month of May, would cover his face with his hood, that he might not see the country, and so be hindered from contemplating his soul.”

“Oh, our friend, must that gentle Jesus, as the Venerable Jeanne says, be for ever the poor man pining for admittance at the door of our heart? Come, just a little goodwill—-open yours to Him,” cried Madame Bavoil.

And Durtal, finally driven into his last intrenchments, by a nod signified acquiescence in the wish of all his friends. But he did it with deep reluctance, for he could not rid himself of a distracting idea that this concession implied a vow on his part to God!

CHAPTER XV.

This idea, which had taken firm possession of him for a few minutes, seemed to fade away, and by the morrow there only remained a startled excitement which nothing could account for; he now shrugged his shoulders, but still, at the bottom of his soul a vague sense of dread would surge up.

Was not the very absurdity of it a proof that this notion was one of the presentiments that we sometimes feel without understanding it? Was it not, again, for lack of a command plainly given by some inward voice, a warning, a direct and secret hint, that he should be on his guard not to think of this visit to a cloister as a mere pleasure trip?

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“But this is monstrous!” Durtal exclaimed at last. “When I went to La Trappe for my great purification, I was not harassed by apprehensions of this kind; when I have gone there again several times since, it never occurred to me that I should really bury myself in a monastery; and now that it is a matter merely of a short visit to a Benedictine monastery, I am trembling and recalcitrant.

“Such a commotion is quite childish! And yet no, not so very childish,” he suddenly told himself. “When I have been to Notre-Dame de l’Atre I have been sure that I should not remain, since I knew that I could not endure more than a month of their austere Rule; so there was nothing to fear; whereas in a Benedictine Abbey, where the Rule is lighter, I am not certain that I could not stay.

“In that case—well, well, so much the better! for after all sooner or later I must decide, I must make up my mind as to what I really mean; have some definite notion of the value of my promissory notes, of the greater or less strength of my energy, my fitness, my limitations.

“A few months ago I longed for the monastic life, that is beyond doubt—and now I am wavering. I have abortive gushes of feeling, ineffectual projects, inclinations which fail, wishes which come short—I will and I will not. Still it is needful to understand oneself; but of what use is it for me to try to sound the well of my own soul? If I go down into it, I find everything dark and cold and empty.

“I am beginning to think that by dint of staring into that darkness I am becoming like a child that fixes its eyes on the blackness of night; I end by creating phantoms and inventing terrors. That is certainly the case as regards this excursion to Solesmes, for there is nothing, absolutely nothing to justify my alarms.

“How silly this all is; how much simpler it would be to allow myself to live, and, above all, to be led!”

“I have hit it,” he went on after a moment’s reflection. “The cause of this turmoil is evident. It is my lack of self-abandonment, my want of confidence in God—yes, and my little love, my dryness of spirit, which have brought me to this state.

“In the lapse of time this disorder has brought on the malady from which I am suffering, an utter anaemia of the soul, aggravated by the patient’s terrors, since he, unaware of the nature of the complaint, exaggerates its importance.

“Thus stands my balance-sheet since I came to Chartres.

“The position is very different from what it was in Paris. For the phase I am going through is the very contrary to that in which I previously lived; in Paris my soul was not dry and friable, but dank and soft; it was saponaceous; the foot sank in it. In short, I

was melting away, in a state of langour, more painful perhaps than this state of drought which is toughening me to horniness. Still on close examination, though the symptoms have changed, the evil persists; softness or dryness, the results are identical.

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“At the same time it seems strange that this spiritual anaemia should now exhibit such opposite symptoms. On one hand I am conscious of weariness, indifference, and torpor in prayer; it seems to me, bitter, vain, and hollow, so badly do I pray; I am inclined to let everything go, to cease the attempt, to wait for a glow of fervour which I cannot hope for; on the other hand, I am at the same time conscious of a persistent and obstinate yearning, an invisible touch, a craving for prayer, a constant invitation from God keeping me alert. And there are times, too, when, though I can prove to myself that I am not stirring, I fancy I am trembling and shall be swept away by a tide.

“That is very much of what I feel. In this frame of mind, half stay-at-home, half gipsy-like, if I take up a book of the higher mysticism—Saint Theresa or Saint Angela—that subtle touch gains definiteness, I am aware of shocks running through me; I fancy that my soul is convalescent, that it is young again, and breathes once more; but if I try to take advantage of this lucid moment to collect myself and to pray, it is all over—I flee from myself—nothing will work. What misery, and how pitiable!

“The Abbe Gevresin has guided me so far, but how?

“He has trusted chiefly to the method of expectancy, restricting himself to combating my generally flaccid state, and invigorating me rather than contending with details. He has prescribed the heroic remedies of the soul, desiring me to communicate when he found me weak. But, if I am not mistaken, he is now turning his batteries. Either he is giving up a line of attack which has failed, or else, on the contrary, he is improving it, his treatment having produced, without my being aware of it, the effects he was aiming at; in either case, to promote or complete the cure, he wants to send me to a convent.

“The plan seems to be, indeed, part of his system, for he did the same thing when he was helping in my conversion. He sent me off to a health resort for the soul—and the waters were powerful indeed and terrible; now he thinks I no longer need have so severe a treatment inflicted on me, and he is persuading me to stay in a more restful place, a less bracing air—is that it?

“Even his way of coming up unexpectedly and hurling his opinion at me is not quite the same as it was. This time, it was, indeed, not he who undertook to crystallize my irresolution by announcing my departure for Solesmes; but it comes to the same thing. For, after all, there is something not quite above board in this affair. Why did the Abbe Plomb promise the Benedictines that he would take me with him?

“He certainly acted on the request of the Abbe Gevresin. There can have been no other reason for his talking of me to the Fathers. I have, indeed, spoken to him of my distress of mind, of my vague craving for retirement, and my love for monasteries. But I certainly did not suggest that he should thus take the lead, and hurry matters on so!

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“Here I am, as usual, imagining plots and schemes, looking for things that never existed, and discerning motives where perhaps there are none. And even if there were! Is it not for my benefit that these good friends are laying their heads together?

“I have only to hear and obey. Now to have done with this and return to the Bestiary; for I want to finish this work before I go.” And posting himself in front of the cathedral, he studied the south porch, which had most of zoological mysticism and devilries.

But he did not find the monstrosities of his fancy. At Chartres the Vices and Virtues were not symbolized by more or less chimerical creatures, but by human faces. After careful search he discovered on some of the pillars of the middle doorway the Vices embodied in small carved groups: Lust, as a woman fondling a young man; Drunkenness as a boor about to hit a bishop; Discord by a husband quarrelling with his wife, while an empty bottle and a broken distaff lie near them.

By way of infernal monsters, the utmost he could discern,—and that by dislocating his neck—were two dragons in the right-hand bay, one exorcised by a monk and the other bridled by a Saint with his stole.

Of divine beasts he could distinguish in the row of Virtues certain female figures with symbolical creatures by their side: Docility accompanied by an ox; Chastity by a phoenix; Charity by a sheep; Meekness by a lamb; Fortitude by a lion; Temperance by a camel. Why should the phoenix here typify Chastity, for it is not used generally in that sense in the Bird-books of the Middle Ages?

Somewhat disconcerted by the poverty of the fauna of Chartres, he comforted himself by a study of this southern porch; it was a match for that on the north, and repeated, with a variant, the subject of the west front—the glorification of Christ, but in His function as the Supreme Judge, and in the person of His Saints.

This front, begun in the time of Philip Augustus, and built at the cost of the Comte de Dreux and his wife Alice of Brittany, was not completed till the time of Philippe le Bel. It was divided, like the other two, into three portions: a central door with a tympanum in a pointed arch bearing the presentment of the Last Judgment; one on the left devoted to the Martyrs, and one on the right dedicated to the Confessors.

The central bay suggested the form of a boat set on end, its prow in the air; its deeply spreading sides contained in their niches six Apostles on each, and in the middle, between the doors, stood a single statue of Christ.

This statue, like that at Amiens, was famous; every guidebook sings the praises of the regular features, the calm expression of the face; in reality the countenance is particularly fatuous and cold, beautiful but lifeless. How inferior to that of the twelfth

century, the expressive and living God seated between the symbols of the Tetramorph in the tympanum of the royal front.

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The Apostles were perhaps rather more refined, rather less squat than the patriarchs and prophets supporting Saint Anne under the north porch, but their quality as works of art was less striking. They resembled the Christ, Whom they escorted with decent duty: it was honest work, phlegmatic sculpture, so to speak.

They held the instruments of their death with placid propriety, like soldiers presenting arms.

On the right hand stood Saint Peter, holding the cross on which he was bound head downwards; Saint Andrew, with a Latin cross, however, and not the X-shaped cross to which he was nailed; then Saint Philip, Saint Thomas, Saint Matthew, Saint Simon, all armed with the sword, though Saint Philip was crucified and stoned, Saint Thomas pierced with a lance, and Saint Simon sawn asunder.

To the left were Saint Paul, substituted for Saint Matthias, chosen to succeed Judas; he carried a sword; Saint John, bearing his Gospel; Saint James the Great, with a sword; Saint James the Less, with a fuller's club; Saint Bartholomew, with the knife that served to flay him, and Saint Jude with a book.

Perched on twisted columns, they trampled under their feet—bare, in token of their apostleship—the executioners of their martyrdom. They had long flowing hair, and forked beards cut into two points, excepting Saint John, who was beardless, and Saint Paul, who, tradition says, was bald; and they were all dressed alike in cloaks hanging in formal curves. Saint James the Great was alone distinguished by a tunic sprinkled with shells, like that of the pilgrims who were wont to visit him at Compostella in one of the huge sanctuaries erected in his honour in Mediaeval times.

He was the patron Saint of Spain; but did he really ever preach in those lands, as Saint Jerome and Saint Isidor assert, and the Toledo Breviary? Some doubt it. At any rate his story, as related by Durand of Mende, in the thirteenth century, was as follows: Being sent into Spain to convert the idolaters, he failed, and returned to Jerusalem, where he was beheaded by Herod. His body was subsequently carried to Spain, and his remains performed such miracles as he had never wrought in his lifetime.

"Indeed," reflected Durtal, "we have singularly little information with regard to the Apostles. They appear, for the most part, only incidentally in the Gospels; and excepting a few—Saint Peter, Saint John, and Saint Paul—whose figures are more or less definite, they float past like shades, lost, veiled as it were, in the halo of glory shed about Him by Jesus Christ. And after His death they vanish into thin air, and their very existence is only sketched in a few vague legends.

"Take Saint Thomas, the Treasure of God, as Saint Bridget calls him: where was he born? We are not told. What were the circumstances and reasons of his call? None knows. In what lands did he preach the new faith? Here disputes begin. Some report

him among the Medes, the Parthians, the Persians, in Ethiopia, in Hindustan. He is commonly represented with a cubit-measure and a square, for it is said that he built a church at Meliapore; for which reason he was taken in the Middle Ages as the patron Saint of architects and masons.

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“According to the Roman Breviary he was killed at Calamine by a spear-thrust; according to the Golden Legend he was killed with the sword in an uncertainly described place; the Portuguese assert that they have his relics at Goa, the chief of their Indian possessions.

“In the thirteenth century this saint was regarded as the type of perverse disbelief. Not satisfied with having failed to believe in Christ until he had seen and put his finger into His wounds, he was equally incredulous, if our forefathers are to be believed, when he was told of the Assumption of the Virgin, and Mary was fain to show Herself to him and throw down Her girdle to convince him.

“Saint Bartholomew is even more obscure, lost in the thick shade of the ages. He was the best educated of the Apostles, says Sister Emmerich, for the others, particularly Peter and Andrew, had preserved rough manners and a clumsy exterior from their humble origin.

“It is supposed that his name was Bartholomew. The Synoptical Gospels number him among the Apostles, but Saint John omits him, and mentions in his place one Nathanael, of whom the other three Evangelists do not speak.

“It seems tolerably certain that these two were identical, and Saint Bernard supposed that this Bartholomew or Nathanael was the bridegroom of the marriage at Cana.

“He is said to have preached in Arabia, in Persia, in Abyssinia, to have baptized among the Iberi, the races of the Caucasus, and, like Saint Thomas, in India, but there is no authentic evidence to show this. According to some writers he was decapitated; others say he was flayed alive and then crucified, near the frontiers of Armenia.

“This last view was adopted by the Roman Breviary and prevailed; hence he was chosen as the patron Saint of fleshers, who skin beasts, of leather-dressers and skinners, shoemakers and binders, who use leather, and even of tailors, for the early painters represent him with half his body flayed and carrying his skin over his arm like a coat.

“Stranger and still more puzzling is Saint Jude. He was also called Thaddaeus and Lebbaeus, and was the son of Cleophas and of Mary the Virgin’s sister; he is said to have married and had children.

“He is scarcely mentioned in the Gospels, but they point out that he is not to be confounded with Judas—which, however, was done, actually by reason of the similarity of name, during the Middle Ages; Christians rejected him and sorcerers appealed to him.

“He never speaks in the course of the Sacred Narrative but when he breaks silence at the scene of the Last Supper to ask the Lord a question as to predestination; and Christ replies beside the mark, or rather does not answer him at all. He was also the author of a Canonical Epistle, in which he seems to have been inspired by the Second Epistle of Saint Peter; and, according to Saint Augustine, it was he who introduced the dogma of the Resurrection of the flesh into the *Credo*.

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“In legend he is associated with Saint Simon; according to the Breviary, he is said to have evangelized Mesopotamia and to have suffered martyrdom with his companion Saint in Persia. The Bollandists, on the other hand, assert that he was the Apostle to Arabia and Idumea, while the Greek Menology relates that he was shot to death with arrows by the infidels in Armenia.

“In fact all these accounts differ; and iconography adds to the confusion by representing Jude with the most various attributes. Sometimes, as at Amiens, he holds a palm, or, as at Chartres, a book. He is also seen with a cross, a square, a boat, a wand, an axe, a sword, and a spear.

“But in spite of the unfortunate reputation earned for him by his namesake Judas, the symbolists of the Middle Ages regard him as a man of charity and zeal, and attribute to him the splendour of the purple and gold fires of the chrysoprase, regarded as emblematical of good works.

“All this is but incoherent,” thought Durtal, “and what also strikes me as strange is that this Saint, so rarely invoked by our forefathers—who for long never dedicated any altar to him, is twice represented in effigy at Chartres—supposing the Verlaine of the royal porch to represent Saint Jude; but then that seems improbable.”

“What I should now like to know,” he went on, “is why the historians of this cathedral pronounce the scene of the last Judgment represented on the tympanum of the door as the most remarkable of its kind in France. This is utterly false, for it is vulgar, and certainly inferior to many others.

“The demoniacal half is far less vigorous, more supine, less crowded than in other churches of the same period. At Chartres, it is true, the devils with wolves’ muzzles and asses’ ears, trampling down bishops and kings, laymen and monks, and driving them into the maw of a dragon spouting flames—the demons with goats’ beards and crescent-shaped jaws seizing hapless sinners who have wandered to the mouldings of the arch, are all very skilfully arranged, in well composed groups round the principal figure; but the Satanic vineyard lacks breadth and its fruit is insipid. The preying demons are not ferocious enough, they almost look as if they were monks and were doing it for fun, while the damned take it very calmly.

“How far more desperate is the devil’s festival at Dijon!” Durtal recalled to mind the church of Notre Dame in that city, so strange a specimen of thirteenth-century gothic of the Burgundian stamp. The church was of almost elementary simplicity; above its three porches rose a straight wall with two storeys of columns forming arcades and surmounted by grotesque figures. To the right of this front was a small tower with a pointed roof; and on the roof a “Jacquemart” of iron tracery, with three puppets that strike the hours; behind, rising from the transept, was a small tower with four little glazed belfries.

This building, small as compared with great cathedrals, was stamped with the Flemish hall-mark; it had the homespun peasant expression, the cheerful faith of the race. It was a domestic sanctuary, very native to the soil; the folks would hold converse with the Black Virgin standing there on an altar, tell her all their little concerns, make themselves at home there in confidential gossiping prayer, quite without ceremony.

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But it was not well to trust too much to the benign and genial aspect of this building, for the long rows of grotesque figures that were ranged above the doorways and the arcades belied the jovial security of the rest.

There they were, in high relief, in close array, grinning and jibing; a motley crowd of demented nuns and mad monks, of bewildered rustics and outlandish women; hobgoblins writhing with laughter, and hilarious devils; and in the midst of this mob of the reprobate a figure of a real woman, held by two demons tormenting her, stood out, leaning forward as if she wanted to throw herself down. With haggard, dilated eye, and clasped hands, in terror she beseeches the passer-by, shows him the place of refuge, and cries to him to enter. Involuntarily he pauses in amazement to look at that face, distorted with fear, pinched with anguish, struggling amid this pack of monsters, this vision of frenzied nightmare. At once fierce and pitying, she threatens and entreats; and this image of one for ever excommunicate, cast out of the temple and left to all eternity on the threshold, is as haunting as the memory of suffering, as a nightmare of terror.

Nowhere, certainly, in the satanic menagerie of La Beauce, is there a statue of such startling and assertive art.

From another point of view—that of the picture as a whole, and of the broad view taken of the subject, the Judgment of Souls at Notre Dame de Chartres is for beneath that of the cathedral at Bourges.

“That, indeed, is, I think, the most wonderful of all,” said Durtal to himself. “The similar scenes at Reims and at Paris, with the gangs of sinners held in chains tugged by demons, and those of the same kind at Amiens, have none of them such breadth of scope.”

At Bourges, as in all works of this class in the Middle Ages, the dead are escaping from their sepulchres, and on the uppermost frieze, below a figure of Christ, with whom the Virgin and Saint John are interceding, Saint Michael is weighing souls; to the left devils are dragging away the wicked, and to the right angels are conducting the blessed.

The resurrection of the dead, as it is represented by the image-maker of Le Berry, is enough to set the noisy prudery of the Catholics neighing, for the figures are nude, and certain reticences, usually observed at any rate in the female form, are here omitted. Men and women push up the lid of the tomb, stride across the edge, leap up, roll over pell mell, one above another; some ecstatically clasping their hands in prayer, their eyes fixed on heaven; others anxiously looking about them on all sides; others praying with terror, throwing up their arms; others, again, in dejected attitudes, beating their breasts in lamentable self-accusation; and yet others who are dazzled by the abrupt change from darkness to light, shaking their numbed limbs and trying to move.

The mad confusion of all these human beings, suddenly awakened, and brought like owls into the light of day, trembling with fear or with joy as they see and understand that the day of Judgment is come, is all expressed with a fulness, a spirit, a certainty of observation which leave the petty accuracy and mild energy of the Chartres sculptor far behind them.

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In the upper division, again, the weighing of souls goes on in a magnificent composition; Saint Michael with wide-spread wings holds a large pair of scales and smiles as he caresses a little child with folded hands, while a goat-headed devil watches eagerly to seize him if the Archangel should turn away; and behind this lingering demon begins the dolorous procession of the outcast. Nor have we here the infernal courtliness of the scene as represented at Chartres, the doubtful consideration of an evil spirit gently driving in a nun; it is brutality in all its horror, the lowest violence; the sometimes comic side of these struggles is not to be seen here. At Bourges the myrmidons of the deep work and hit with a will. A devil with a wild beast's muzzle and a drunkard's face in the middle of his fat stomach, is hammering the skull of a wretch who struggles, grinding his teeth, while the devil bites his legs with the end of his tail that bears a serpent's head. Another monster, with a crushed face and pendant breasts, a man's face in his stomach and wings springing from his loins, has clasped a priest in his arms and is pitching him head foremost into a cauldron boiling over the flames from a dragon's mouth blown up with bellows by two of the devil's slaves. And in this cauldron sit two figures symbolical of slander and lust, a monk and a woman writhing and weeping, for enormous toads are gnawing at the tongue of one and at the heart of the other.

On the other side of Saint Michael the scene is different; a chubby, smiling angel is playing with a child whom he has perched on one of his fellow-angels' shoulders, and the infant delightedly waves a bough; behind him slowly marches a representative group of saints—a woman, a king, a cenobite, conducted by Saint Peter towards a doorway leading to a sanctum where sits Abraham, an old man with a cloth spread over his knees full of little heads all rejoicing—the souls that are saved.

And Durtal, as he recalled the features of Saint Michael and his angels, perceived that they were the brethren in art of the Saint Anne, Saint Joseph, and the angel of the great portal at Reims. They were all of the same peculiar type—a young and yet old countenance, a long sharp nose and pointed chin; only here, perhaps, a little rounder, a little less angular than at Reims.

This sort of family likeness gave support to a theory that the same sculptors or their pupils had worked on the carvings of those two cathedrals, but not at Chartres, where no similar type is to be seen; though a certain striking resemblance exists between other statues in the north porch and some figures, of a different class however, on the facade at Reims.

"Anyone of these hypotheses may be correct, though there is no chance of proving their truth, for we can discover no information with regard to the schools of art of the period," said Durtal to himself, as he turned his attention to the left-hand bay of the south porch, dedicated to the martyrs.

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There, in the archway of the door, dwelt, side by side, Saint Vincent the deacon, of Spain; Saint Denys the bishop; Saint Piat the priest; and Saint George the warrior; all four victims of the ingenious cruelty of the infidels.

Saint Vincent in his long gown hung a contrite head over his shoulder.

“He,” thought Durtal, “was literally butchered and cooked, for we are told in the legend according to Voragine that his body was torn with sharp combs of brass till his bowels fell out, and that after this foretaste, this *hors d’oeuvre* of torture, he was broiled on a gridiron, larded with nails, and basted with the sauce of his own blood. He lay calm, praying while he was being toasted. He remained unmoved, grilling and praying. When he was dead, Dacian, his persecutor, ordered that his body should be cast out on a field to be devoured by beasts; but a raven came to settle by him, and drove away a wolf by pecking at it. Then a millstone was tied about his neck and he was thrown into the sea, but his body came to land near some pious women who buried it.

“Saint Denys, the first Bishop of Paris, was thrown to the lions, who retreated before him; he was then beheaded at Montmartre, with Saint Eleutherius and Saint Rusticus. The image-maker had not here represented him, as usual, carrying his head, but had shown him standing with his crozier and mitre. And he was not humble and pitiable, like his neighbour, the Spanish Deacon, but upright and imperious, with his hand uplifted, in the attitude rather of admonishing the faithful than of blessing them, and Durtal stood lost in thought before this writer, whose brief book holds so important a place in the series of mystical writings.

“He, more than any other, and first among the contemplative authors, had overstepped the threshold of Heaven and brought down to men some details of what happens there. The knowledge of the angelic ranks dates from him, for it was he who revealed the organization of the heavenly host as an order, a hierarchy copied by human beings and parodied in hell. He was a sort of messenger between Heaven and earth, and was the explorer of our celestial heritage, as Saint Catherine of Genoa at a later date was the explorer of purgatory.

“A less interesting personage was Saint Piat, a priest of Tournai, beheaded by a Roman proconsul. In this assembly of famous saints he was rather the poor country-cousin, a mere provincial Saint. He figured here because his relics repose in the cathedral, for historians record the translation of his remains to Chartres in the ninth century. By his side was Saint George, arrayed as a knight of the time of Saint Louis, his head bare with an iron fillet, armed with a lance and shield; standing as if on guard on a pedestal, showing the wheel which was the instrument of his martyrdom.

“The companion statue, on the opposite side of the door, was that of Saint Theodore of Heraclea, wearing a coat of mail, and a surcoat, and also holding a shield and spear.

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“Next to this saint, who was subsequently roasted to death by a slow fire, in the town of Amasea, were Saint Stephen, Saint Clement, and Saint Laurence.

“Above this double rank of martyrs the tympanum represented the story of Saint Stephen disputing with the Doctors and stoned by the Jews; and on all sides, on the square pillars that supported the roof of the porch, was carved stone-work representing the tortured bodies of the righteous: Saint Leger, Saint Laurence, Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Saint Bacchus, Saint Quentin, and many more; a whole procession of the Blessed, being blinded, burnt, cut in pieces, flogged with vigorous energy, and beheaded. But it was all in melancholy decay. The *sans-culottes*, by amputating more of their limbs in their tempest of fury, had crowned the martyrdom of these Saints.

“The doorway to the right, dedicated to the Confessors, was a vast hull set on end; on the sloping side to the left of the door stood Saint Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra, holding up a gloved hand, and trampling under foot the cruel host killing the children whose death became a theme for so many laments; Saint Ambrose, Doctor of the Church and Bishop of Milan, wearing a singular peaked mitre, like an extinguisher; Saint Leo, the Pope who defied Attila; and finally Saint Laumer, one of the glories of the Chartres district.

“He, like Saint Piat in the left-hand bay, is somewhat of a stranger dragged into this illustrious company. He was of old highly venerated in La Beauce, having, in his lifetime, had a career which may be briefly summed up. During his childhood he had kept sheep; he had then been cellarer to the cathedral; had become first an anchorite, then a monk, and finally Abbot of the Monastery of Corbion in the forests of the Orne.

“The opposite slope of the bay sheltered Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, Saint Jerome, as a Doctor of the Church, Saint Gregory, Pope and Doctor, and Saint Avitus.

“What is curious in this door,” thought Durtal, “is the parallel of personages. On one side, to the right, Saint Nicholas, the great miracle-worker of the East; on the other side, to the left, Saint Martin, the great miracle-worker of the West. Then, as companion figures, Saint Ambrose and Saint Jerome;—the first often redundant and pompous in second-rate prose, but ingenious and delightful in his hymns; the second who, in the Vulgate, really created the language of Church use, purifying and airing the Latin of Pagan literature, foul with lascivious meaning, reeking at once of an old goat and of essence of roses. Again, face to face, two Popes, Saint Leo and Saint Gregory, and two Abbots of Monasteries, Saint Laumer and Saint Avitus, who was Prior of a House founded in the forests of Le Perche.”

These two last statues had been added later; their style and costume betrayed a date subsequent to the thirteenth century; had they, then, taken the place of others representing the same Monks, or different Saints?

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The tympanum again expressed the same purpose of parallelism, evidently intended by the master of the work. This was also devoted to two miracle workers, to a correspondence in this respect of the north and the south. It represented episodes in the lives of Saint Nicholas and Saint Martin: Saint Nicholas furnishing a dowry for the daughters of a gentleman who was dying of hunger, and about to sell their honour, and the sepulchre of this archbishop exuding an oil of sovereign efficacy in the cure of diseases; Saint Martin giving half of his cloak to a beggar, and then beholding Christ wearing the garment.

The remainder of this porch was of secondary interest. In the mouldings of the arches and in the pillars of the bays the ranks of the Confessors appeared again, the nine choirs of Angels, the parable of the wise and foolish Virgins, a replica of the four-and-twenty elders on the royal front, the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Virtues, the Vices, the Christian Virgins, and small statues of the Apostles, all more or less injured and more or less invisible.

This south porch, with its seven hundred and eighty-three statues and statuettes, spoken of by the guide-books as the most attractive of all, was to artists, on the contrary, the least absorbing; for, with the exception of the noble effigies of Saint Theodore and Saint George, the glorification of the others who dwell there was on the whole, from the artistic point of view, very inferior in interest to the sculpture on the twelfth-century west front, or even to that of the north porch—that complete embodiment of the Two Testaments—where the sculpture, if more barbarous, was less placid and cold.

And Durtal came to this conclusion: “The exterior of the cathedral of Chartres may be summed up in three words: *Latvia*, *hyperdulia*, and *dulia*. *Latria*, the worship of Our Lord, on the west front; *Hyperdulia*, the worship of the Blessed Virgin, in the north porch; *Dulia*, the worship of the Saints, in the south porch.

“For although the Redeemer is magnified in this south portal in His character of Supreme Judge, He seems to make way for the Saints. And this is quite intelligible, since He is enthroned there for two purposes, and His true palace, His real throne, is in the triumphal tympanum of the royal doorway in the west front.”

Before quitting this side of the building, as he glanced once more at the ranks of the Elect, Durtal stopped in front of Saint Clement and Saint Gregory.

Saint Clement, whose extraordinary death almost casts his life into oblivion—a life exclusively occupied in harrowing souls. Durtal recalled the narrative of Voragine. After being exiled to the Chersonesus, in the reign of Trajan, Clement was cast into the sea with an anchor tied to his neck, while the assembled Christians kneeling on the strand besought Heaven to restore his body. Then the sea withdrew three miles, and the faithful went dry-shod to a chapel which the angels had just erected beneath the waters,

where the body of the saint was found reposing, lying on a tomb; and for many centuries the sea retired every year for a week, to allow pilgrims to visit his remains.

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Saint Gregory, the first Benedictine to be elected Pope, was the creator of the Liturgy, the master of plain-song. He was alike devoted to justice and to charity, and a passionate patron of art; and this admirable Pope, with his broad and comprehensive spirit, regarded it as a temptation of the Devil that made the bigots, the Pharisees of his day, proclaim their determination not to read profane literature; for, said he, it helps us to understand that which is sacred.

Made Pope against his will, he led a life of anguish, mourning for the lost peace of his cloister; but he fought none the less with incredible energy against the inroads of the Barbarians, the heresies of Africa, the intrigues of Byzantium, and the Simony of his own priests.

He stands out in a dark age, amid a witches' sabbath of shrieking schisms; he is seen in the midst of these storms, protecting the poor from the rapacity of the rich, feeding them with his own hands, kissing their feet, every day; and in spite of this overworked life without a moment's respite, or a minute for rest, he succeeded in restoring monastic discipline, and sowing wherever he might the Benedictine seed, saving the headlong world by the vigilance of his Order.

Though he was not a martyr like Saint Clement, he died nevertheless for Christ, of exhaustion and fatigue, after living in the constant suffering of a frame undermined by disease, and weakened by voluntary maceration and fasting.

"This, no doubt, is the reason why the face of his statue is so sad and thoughtful," said Durtal to himself. "And yet he is listening to the dove, the symbol of inspiration which is speaking in his ear, dictating to him, the legend says, the antiphonal melodies, and undoubtedly whispering his dialogues, his homilies, his commentaries on the Book of Job, his pastoral letter—all the works which made him so immensely famous in the Middle Ages."

As he made his way home, Durtal, still reflecting on this array of the Righteous, suddenly was struck by this idea: "There is no portrait in Chartres of a Saint whose present help was of yore desired above all others: Saint Christopher, whose effigy was usually to be found at the entrance to a cathedral, standing alone in a spot apart.

"It stood thus, formerly, at the door of Notre-Dame de Paris, and is still to be seen in one corner of the principal front at Amiens; but in most places the iconoclasts overthrew it, and the churches where the statue of Christopher is now to be seen may be easily counted. It must once have existed at Chartres—but where? The monographs on this cathedral never allude to it."

Thus, as he walked on, he dreamed of the Saint whose popularity is easily accounted for, since our forefathers believed that they had only to look at his image, whether

painted or carved, to be protected for a whole day from disaster, and especially from violent death.

So he was always placed outside in a prominent spot, and very large, so that he might easily be seen by the wayfarer, even from afar. In some cases his effigy was found on a gigantic scale, inside the church. Thus he is represented in the Dom at Erfurt, in a fresco of the fifteenth century, too much restored.

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This colossal figure, five storeys high, extends from the pavement of the church to the roof. Christopher has a beard which flows in a stream, and legs as thick as the pillars of the nave. Bending and adoring, he bears on his shoulders a Child with a round face, as white as the chalk of a clown, blessing all comers with a smile. The Saint is wading barefoot through a pool full of little reeds, and imps, and horned fishes and strange flowers—all represented on a minute scale to emphasize the mighty stature of the Saint.

“That good friend,” thought Durtal, “though venerated by the poor, was somewhat coldly treated by the Church, for he, with Saint George and some other martyrs, was among those whose existence remains open to doubt.

“In Mediaeval times Saint Christopher was invoked for the cure of weakly children, and also as a protector against blindness and the plague.

“But indeed the Saints were the chief healers of that time. Every disease which the leeches and apothecaries could not alleviate was brought to the Saints. Some indeed were reputed specialists, and the ills they cured were known by their names. The gout was known as Saint Maurus’ evil, leprosy as Job’s evil, cancer was Saint Giles’, chorea Saint Guy’s, colds were Saint Aventinus’ ill, a bloody flux Saint Fiacre’s—and I forget the rest.

“Others again remained noted for delivering sufferers from certain affections they were reputed to heal: Saint Genevieve for the burning sickness and ophthalmia, Saint Catherine of Alexandria for headache, Saint Bartholomew for convulsions, Saint Firmin for cramp, Saint Benedict for erysipelas and the stone, Saint Lupus for pains in the stomach, Saint Hubert for madness, Saint Appolina, whose statue, standing in the chapel of the Hospital of Saint John at Bruges, is graced by way of *ex votos* with strings of teeth and wax stumps, for neuralgia and toothache—and how many more.

“And granting,” said Durtal, “that medical science is at this day a greater delusion than ever, I cannot see why we should not revert to the specific of prayer and the mystical panaceas of the past. If the interceding Saints should, in certain cases, refuse to cure us, at any rate they will make us no worse by a mistaken diagnosis and the exhibition of dangerous remedies. Though after all, even if our modern practitioners were not ignoramuses, of what use would that be, since the medicines they prescribe are adulterated?”

CHAPTER XVI.

The day had come for Durtal to strap his portmanteau and set out with the Abbe Plomb.

He became fidgety with waiting as the hours went by. At last, unable to sit still, he went out to kill the time, but a drizzling rain drove him for shelter into the cathedral.

After offering his devotions to the Virgin of the Pillar, he seated himself amid a camp of vacant chairs to meditate.

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“Before interrupting the quiet monotony of my life at Chartres by this journey, shall I not do well to look into myself, if only for a minute, and take stock of what I have gained before and since settling in this town?

“The gain to my soul? Alas! it consists less in acquisitions than in exchanges; I have merely found aridity in the place of indolence; and the results of the exchange I know only too well; of what use is it to go through them once more? The gains to my mind seem to me less distressing and more genuine, and I can make a brief catalogue of them under three heads: Past, Present, and Future.

“In the Past.—When I least expected it, in Paris, God suddenly seized me and drew me back to the Church, taking advantage of my love of Art, of mysticism, of the Liturgy, and of plain-song.

“Still, during the travail of this conversion, I could not study mysticism anywhere but in books; I knew it only in theory and not in practice. On the other hand, in Paris, I never heard any but dull, lifeless music, watered down, as it were, in women’s throats, or utterly disfigured by the choir schools. In most of the churches I found only a colourless ceremonial, a meagre form of service.

“This was the situation when I set out for La Trappe: under that strict rule I found mysticism not only in its simplest expression, written out and set forth in a body of doctrine, but mysticism as a personal experience, in action, simply an element of life to those monks. I could convince myself that the science of the soul’s perfection was no delusion, that the assertions of Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross were strictly true, and in that cloister it was also vouchsafed to me to be familiar with the enjoyment of an authentic ritual and genuine plain-song.

“In the Present.—At Chartres I have entered on new exercises, I have followed other traces. Haunted by the matchless grandeur of this cathedral, under the guidance of a very intelligent and cultivated priest I have studied religious symbolism, worked up that great science of the Middle Ages which is in fact a language peculiar to the Church, expressing by images and signs what the Liturgy expresses in words.

“Or, to be more exact, it would be better to say that part of the Liturgy which is more particularly concerned with prayer; for that part of it which relates to forms, and injunctions as to worship, is itself symbolism, symbolism is the soul of it. In fact, the limit-line of the two branches is not always easy to trace, so often are they grafted together; they inspire each other, intertwine, and at last are almost one.

“In the Future.—By going to Solesmes I shall complete my education; I shall see and hear the most perfect expression of that Liturgy and that Gregorian chant of which the little convent of Notre Dame de l’Atre, by reason of the limited number of the Brethren, could only afford a reduced copy—very faithful, it is true, but yet reduced.

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“By adding to this my own studies of the religious paintings removed now from the sanctuaries and collected in museums, and supplementing them by my remarks on the various cathedrals I may explore, I shall have travelled round the whole cycle of mysticism, have extracted the essence of the Middle Ages, have combined in a sort of sheaf these separate branches, scattered now for so many centuries, and have investigated more thoroughly one especially—Symbolism namely, of which certain elements are almost lost from sheer neglect.

“Yes. Symbolism has lent the principal charm to my life at Chartres; it occupied and comforted me when I was suffering from finding my soul so importunate and yet so low.”

And he tried to recapitulate the science, to view it as a whole.

He saw it as a thickly branched tree, the root deep set in the very soil of the Bible; from thence, in fact, it drew its substance and its nourishment: the trunk was the Symbolism of the Scriptures, the Old Testament prefiguring the Gospels; the branches were the allegorical purport of architecture, of colours, gems, flowers, and animals; the hieroglyphics of numbers; the emblematical meaning of the vessels and vestments of Church use. A small bough represented Liturgical perfumes, and a mere twig, dried up from the first and almost dead, represented dancing.

“For religious dancing once existed,” Durtal went on. “In ancient times it was a recognized offering of adoration, a tithe of light-heartedness. David leaping before the Ark shows this.

“And in the earliest Christian times the faithful and the priesthood shook themselves in honour of the Redeemer, and fancied that by choric motion they were imitating the joy of the Blessed, the glee of the Angels described by Saint Basil as executing figures in the radiant assemblies of Heaven.

“One is soon accustomed to endure Masses of the kind called at Toledo *Mussarabes*, during which the congregation dance and gambol in the cathedral; but these capers presently lose the pious character that they are supposed to bear; they become an incentive to the revelry of the senses, and several Councils have prohibited them.

“In the seventeenth century sacred dances still survived in some provinces; we hear of them at Limoges, where the Cure of St. Leonard and his parishioners pirouetted in the choir of the church. In the eighteenth century their traces are found in Roussillon, and at the present day religious dancing still survives; but the tradition of this saintly frisking is chiefly preserved in Spain.

“Not long since, on the day of Corpus Christi at Compostella, the procession was led through the streets by a tall man who danced carrying another on his shoulders. And to this day, at Seville, on the festival of the Holy Sacrament, the choir-children turn in a sort

of slow waltz as they sing hymns before the high altar of the cathedral. In other towns, on the festivals of the Virgin, a saraband is slowly danced round Her statue, with striking of sticks, and the rattle of castanets; and to close the ceremony by way of Amen the people fire off squibs.

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“All this, however, is of no great interest, and I cannot help wondering what meaning can have been attributed to cutting capers and spinning round. I find it difficult to believe that *farandoles* and *boleros* could ever represent prayer; I can hardly persuade myself that it can be an act of thanksgiving to trample peppers under foot or appearing to grind at an imaginary coffee-mill with one’s arms.

“In point of fact no one knows anything about the symbolism of dancing; no record has come down to us of the meanings ascribed to it of old. Church dancing is really no more than a gross form of rejoicing among Southern races. We need mention it merely as noteworthy, and that is all.

“Now, from a practical point of view, what has the influence of symbolism been on souls?”

Durtal could answer himself.

“The Middle Ages, knowing that everything on earth is a sign and a figure, that the only value of things visible is in so far as they correspond to things invisible—the Middle Ages, when consequently men were not, as we are, the dupes of appearances—made a profound study of this science, and made it the nursing mother and the handmaid of mysticism.

“Convinced that the only aim that it was incumbent on man to follow, the only end he could really need, was to place himself in direct communication with Heaven, and to out-strip death by merging himself, unifying himself to the utmost, with God, it tempted souls, subjecting them to a moderate claustral course, purged them of their earthly interests, their fleshly aims, and led them back again and again to the same purpose of renunciation and repentance, the same ideas of justice and love; and then to retain them, to preserve them from themselves, it enclosed them in a fence, placed God all about them, as it were, under every form and aspect.”

Jesus was seen in everything—in the fauna, the flora, the structure of buildings, in every decoration, in the use of colour. Whichever way man could turn, he still saw Him.

And at the same time he saw his own soul as in a mirror that reflected it; in certain animals, certain colours, and certain plants he could discern the qualities which it was his duty to acquire, the vices against which he had to defend himself.

And he had other examples before his eyes, for the symbolists did not restrict themselves to turning botany, mineralogy, natural history, and other sciences to the uses of a catechism; some of them, and among others Saint Melito, ended by applying the process to the interpretation of every object that came in their way. A cithara was to them the breast of the devout man; the members of the human frame became emblematical: the head was Christ, the hairs were the saints, the nose meant

discretion, the nostrils the spirit of faith, the eye contemplation, the mouth symbolized temptation, the saliva was the sweetness of the inner life, the ears figured obedience, the

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arms the love of Jesus, the hands stood for good works, the knees for the sacrament of penance, the legs for the Apostles, the shoulders for the yoke of Christ, the breast for evangelical doctrine, the belly for avarice, the bowels for the mysterious precepts of the Lord, the body and loins for suggestions of lust, the bones typified hardness of heart, and the marrow compunction, the sinews were evil members of Anti-Christ. And these writers extended this method of interpretation to the commonest objects of daily use, even to tools and vessels within reach of all.

Thus there was an uninterrupted course of pious teaching. Yves de Chartres tells us that priests instructed the people in symbolism, and from the researches of Dom Pitra we know that in the Middle Ages Saint Melito's treatise was popular and known to all. Thus the peasant learnt that his plough was an image of the Cross, that the furrows it made were like the hearts of saints freshly tilled; he knew that sheaves were the fruit of repentance, flour the multitude of the faithful, the granary the Kingdom of Heaven; and it was the same with many pursuits. In short, this method of analogies was a bidding to everybody to watch and pray better.

Thus utilized, symbolism became a break to check the forward march of sin, and at the same time a sort of lever to uplift souls and help them to overleap the stages of the mystical life.

This science, translated into so many languages, was no doubt intelligible only in broad outline to the masses, and sometimes, when it percolated through the labyrinthine maze of such minds as that of the worthy Bishop of Mende, it appeared overwrought, full of contradictions, and of double meanings. It seems then as if the symbolist were splitting a hair with embroidery scissors. But, in spite of the extravagance it tolerated and smiled at, the Church succeeded, nevertheless, by these tactics of repetition, in saving souls and carrying out on a large scale the production of saints.

Then came the Renaissance, and symbolism was wrecked at the same time as church architecture.

Mysticism in the stricter sense of the word, more fortunate than its handmaidens, survived that period of festive dishonour; for it may be safely asserted that, though it was unproductive while living through that period, it flourished anew in Spain, producing its noblest blossoms in Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa.

Since then doctrinal mysticism seems dried up at the source. Not so, however, as regards personal mysticism, which still dwells acclimatized and flourishing in convents.

As to the Liturgy and plain-song, they too have gone through very various phases. After being dissected and filtered in the numberless provincial Uses, the Liturgy was brought

back to the standard of Rome by the efforts of Dom Gueranger, and it may be hoped that the Benedictines at last will also bring all the churches back to the strict use of plain-song.

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“And this church above all!” sighed Durtal.

He looked at his cathedral, loving it better than ever now that he was to part from it for a few days. To impress it the better on his memory he tried to sum it up, to concentrate it, saying to himself,—

“It is the epitome of Heaven and Earth; of Heaven by showing us the serried phalanx of its inhabitants—Prophets, Patriarchs, Angels and Saints, lighting up the interior of the church by their transparent figures; by singing to the glory of the Mother and the Son. Of Earth, for it connotes the elation of the soul, the ascension of man; it points out quite clearly to Christian souls the path of the perfect life. They, to apprehend its symbolism, should enter by the Royal doorway, and pass up the nave, the transept and the choir—-the three successive phases of Asceticism; reach the top of the Cross where, surrounded by the chapels of the apse as by a Crown, the head of the Saviour lies, His neck bent, as we see them symbolized by the altar and the deflected axis of the church.

“There the pilgrim has reached the united ways, close to the Virgin, who mourns no more as she does in the agonizing scene on Calvary, at the foot of the Tree, but, under the figure of the Sacristy, remains veiled by the side of Her Son’s countenance, getting closer to Him the better to comfort and to see Him.

“And this allegory of the mystical life as set forth by the interior of the cathedral, is carried out by the exterior, in the suppliant effect of the whole building.

“The Soul, distraught by the joy of union, heart-broken at having still to live, only aspires now to escape for ever from the Gehenna of the flesh; thus it beseeches the Bridegroom with the uplifted arms of its towers, to take pity on it, to come to fetch it, to take it by the clasped hands of its spires and snatch it from earth, to carry it up with Him into Heaven.

“In short, this church is the finest expression of art bequeathed to us by the Middle Ages. The great front has neither the awful majesty of that of Reims, pierced as it is with tracery, nor the dull melancholy of Notre Dame de Paris, nor the gigantic grace of Amiens, nor the massive solemnity of Bourges; but it is full of imposing simplicity, a lightness, a spring, which no other cathedral has attained to.

“The nave of Amiens alone grows beautifully less as it rises with as eager a spring from the earth; but the body of the Amiens church is light and uncomforting, and that of Chartres is mysterious and hushed; of all cathedrals it is that which best suggests the idea of a delicate, saintly woman, emaciated by prayer, and almost transparent by fasting.

“And then its windows are matchless, superior even to those of Bourges, where, again, the sanctuary blossoms with glorious clumps of holy persons. And finally, the sculpture

of the west front, the Royal Portal, is the most beautiful, the most superterrestrial statuary ever wrought by the hand of man.

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“And it is almost unique in having none of the woeful and threatening solemnity of its noble sisters. Scarce a demon is to be seen watching and grinning on its walls to torture souls; in a few small figures it shows indeed the variety of penance, but that is all; and within, the Virgin is above all else the Mother of Bethlehem. Jesus, too, is more or less Her Child; He yields to Her when she entreats Him.

“It proclaims the plenitude of Her patience and charity by the length of the crypt and the breadth of the nave, which are greater than those of other churches.

“In fact, it is the mystical cathedral—that where the Madonna is most graciously ready to receive the sinner.

“Now,” said Durtal, looking at his watch, “the Abbe Gevresin must have finished his breakfast. It is time to take leave of him before joining the Abbe Plomb at the station.”

He crossed the forecourt of the palace and rang at the priest’s door.

“So you are sure you are going!” said Madame Bavoil, who opened the door, and admitted him to her master.

“Well, yes—”

“I envy you,” sighed the Abbe, “for you will be present at wonderful services and hear admirable music.”

“I hope so. And if only that could relieve the tension, could release me a little from this incoherent frame of mind in which I wander, and allow me to feel at home once more in my own soul and not in a strange place open to all the winds!—”

“Ah, your soul wants locks and latches,” said Madame Bavoil, laughing.

“It is a public mart where every distraction meets to chatter. I am constantly driven out, and when I want to go home again they are in possession.”

“Oh, I quite understand that. You know the proverb, ’Who goes hunting loses his seat by the hearth.’”

“That is all very well to say, but—”

“But, our friend, the Lord foresaw your case, when, with reference to such distractions which flutter about the soul like this, He replied to the Venerable Jeanne de Matel, who complained of such annoyances, that she should imitate the hunter, who, when he misses the big game he is seeking, seizes the smaller prey he may find.”

“Ay, but even then he must find it!”

“Go and live in peace, then,” said the Abbe. “Do not fret yourself with wondering whether your soul is enclosed or no; and take this piece of advice: You are accustomed —are you not?—to repeat prayers that you know by heart, and it is especially under those circumstances that wandering supervenes. Well, then, set those prayers aside, and restrict yourself to following, very regularly, the prayers of the services in the convent-chapel. You are less familiar with them, and merely to follow them you will be obliged to read them with care. Thus you will be less likely to have a divided mind.”

“No doubt,” replied Durtal. “But when I have not repeated the prayers I am wont to say, I feel as though I had not prayed at all. I know that this is absurd; still, there is no faithful soul who does not know the feeling when the text of his prayers is altered.”

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The Abbe smiled.

“The best prayers,” said he, “are those of the Liturgy, those which God Himself has taught us, those alone which are expressed in language worthy of Him—in His own language. They are complete, and supreme; for all our desires, all our regrets, all our wailing are contained in the Psalms. The prophet foresaw and said everything; leave him, then, to speak for you, and thus, as your interpreter before God, give you his help.

“As to the prayers you may feel moved to address to God apart from the hours devoted to the purpose, let them be short. Imitate the Recluses of Egypt, the Fathers in the Desert, who were masters in the art of supplication. This is what old Isaac said to Cassian: ’Pray briefly and often, lest, if your orisons be long, the enemy will come to disturb them. Follow these two rules, they will save you from secret upheaval.

“So, go in peace; and if any trouble should overtake you, do not hesitate to consult the Abbe Plomb.”

“Eh, our friend,” cried Madame Bavoil, laughing, “and you might also cure yourself of wandering thoughts by the method employed by the Abbess of Sainte-Aure when she chanted the Psalter: she sat in a chair of which the back was garnished with a hundred long nails, and when she felt herself wandering she pressed her shoulder firmly against the points; there is nothing better, I can tell you, for bringing folks back to reality and recalling their wandering attention.”

“Thank you, indeed!”

“There is another thing,” she went on, not laughing now. “You ought to postpone your departure for a day or two; for the day after to-morrow is a festival of the Virgin. They expect pilgrims from Paris, and the shrine containing our Mother’s veil will be carried in procession through the streets.”

“Oh no!” cried Durtal, “I have no love for worship in common. When our Lady holds these solemn assizes to gel out of the way. I wait till She is alone before I visit her. Hosts of people shouting canticles with eyes straight to Heaven or looking for Jesus on the ground by way of unction are too much for me. I am all for the forlorn Queens, for the deserted churches and dark chapels. I am of the opinion of Saint John of the Cross, who confesses that he does not love the pilgrimage of crowds because one comes back more distracted than when one started.

“No. What it is really a grief to me to leave in quitting Chartres is that very silence, that solitude in the cathedral, those interviews with the Virgin in the gloom of the crypt and the twilight of the nave. Ah, here alone can one feel near Her, and see Her!

“In fact,” he went on after a moment’s reflection, “one does see Her in the strictest sense of the word—or at least, can fancy that She is there. If there is a spot where I can call up Her face, Her attitude—in short Her portrait—it is at Chartres.”

“And how is that?”

“Well, Monsieur l’Abbe, we have no trustworthy information as to our Mother’s face or figure. Her features are unknown—intentionally, I feel sure, in order that each one may contemplate Her under the aspect that best pleases him, and incarnate Her in the ideal beauty of his dreams.

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“For instance, Saint Epiphanius describes her as tall, with olive eyes arched and very black eyebrows, an aquiline nose a rosy mouth, and a golden-toned skin. This is the vision of an oriental.

“Take Maria d’Agreda, on the other hand. She thinks of the Virgin as slender, with black hair and eyebrows, eyes dark and greenish, a straight nose, scarlet lips, and a brown skin. You recognize here the Spanish ideal of beauty imagined by the Abbess.

“Again in, turn to Sister Emmerich. According to her, Mary was fair-haired, with large eyes, a rather long nose, a narrow-pointed chin, a clear skin, and not very tall. Here we have the description given by a German who does not admire dark beauty:

“And yet both of these women were real Seers, to whom the Madonna appeared, assuming in each case the only aspect that could fascinate them; just as she was seen to be the model of mere prettiness—the only type they could understand—by Melanie at La Salette and Bernadette at Lourdes”.

“Well, I, who am no visionary, and who must appeal to my imagination to picture Her at all, I fancy I discern Her under the forms and expressions of the cathedral itself; the features are a little confused in the pale splendour of the great rose window that blazes behind Her head like a nimbus. She smiles, and Her eyes, all light, have the incomparable effulgence of those pure sapphires which light up the entrance to the nave. Her slight form is diffused in a clear robe of flame, striped and ribbed like the drapery of the so-called Berthe. Her face is white like mother-of-pearl, and her hair, a circular tissue of sunshine, radiates in threads of gold. She is the Bride of Canticles. *Pulchra ut Luna, electa ut Sol*.

“The church which is Her dwelling-place, and one with Her, is luminous with Her grace; the gems of the windows sing to Her praise; the slender columns shooting upwards, from the pavement to the roof, symbolize Her aspirations and desires; the floor tells of Her humility; the vaulting, meeting to form a canopy over Her, speaks of Her charity; the stones and glass echo hymns to Her. There is nothing, down to the military aspect of certain details of the sanctuary, the chivalrous touch which is a reminiscence of the Crusades—the sword-blades and shields of the lancet windows and the roses, the helm-shaped arches, the coat of mail that clothes the older spire, the iron trellis-pattern of some of the panes—nothing that does not arouse a memory of the passage at Prime and the hymn at Lauds in the minor office of the Virgin, and typify the *terribilis ut castrorum acies ordonata*, the privilege She possesses when She chooses to use it, of being ’terrible as an army arrayed for battle.’

“But She does not often choose to exert here, I believe; this cathedral mirrors rather Her inexhaustible sweetness, Her indivisible glory.”

“Ah! Much shall be forgiven you because you have loved much,” cried Madame Bavoil.

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And Durtal having risen to say good-bye, she kissed him affectionately, maternally, and said,—

“We will pray with all our might, our friend, that God may enlighten you and show you your path, may lead you Himself into the way you ought to go.”

“I hope, Monsieur l’Abbe, that during my absence your rheumatism will grant you a little respite,” said Durtal, pressing the old priest’s hand.

“Oh, I must not wish to have no sufferings at all, for there is no cross so heavy as having none,” replied the Abbe. “So do as I do, or rather, do better than I, for I still repine; put a cheerful face on your aridity, and your trials.—Goodbye, God bless you!”

“And may the great Mother of Madonnas of France, the sweet Lady of Chartres, protect you!” added Madame Bavoil.

And when the door was shut, she added with a sigh,—

“Certainly, I should be very grieved if he left our town for ever, for that friend is almost like a child of our own! At the same time I should be very, very happy to think of him as a true monk!”

Then she began to laugh.

“Father,” said she, “will they cut his moustache off if he enters the cloister?”

“Undoubtedly.”

She tried to imagine Durtal clean-shaven, and she concluded with a laugh,—

“I do not think it will improve his beauty.”

“Oh, these women!” said the Abbe, shrugging his shoulders.

“And what, in short,” asked she, “may we hope for from this journey?”

“It is not of me that you should ask that, Madame Bavoil.”

“Very true,” said she, and clasping her hands she murmured,—

“It depends on Thee! Help him in his poverty, remember that he can do nothing without Thine aid, Holy Temptress of men, Our Lady of the Pillar, Virgin of the Crypt.”

THE END.