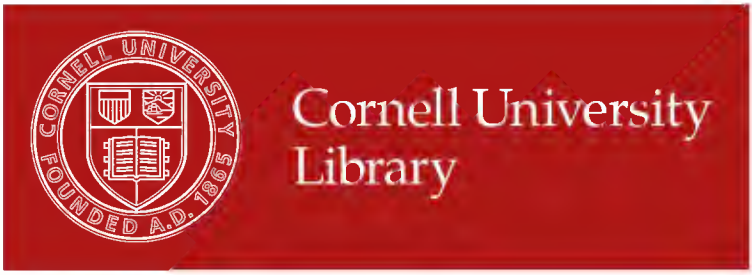
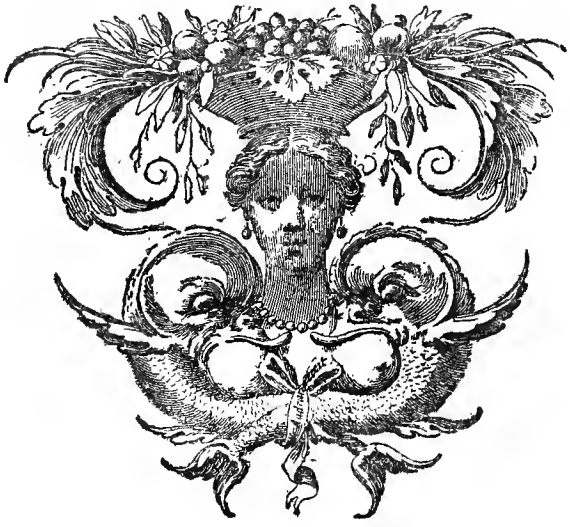
THE OPINIONS OF JÉRÔME COIGNARD BY ANATOLE FRANCE



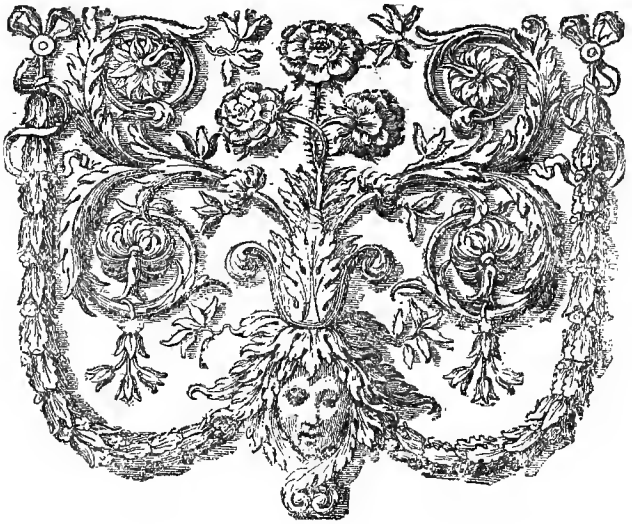
THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY FREDERIC CHAPMAN

THE OPINIONS OF JÉRÔME COIGNARD



THE OPINIONS OF JÉRÔME COIGNARD BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
MRS. WILFRID JACKSON



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CONTENTS

THE ABBÉ JÉROME COIGNARD

THE ABBÉ JÉRÔME COIGNARD

TO OCTAVE MIRBEAU

HERE is no need for me to tell over again here the life of Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard, professor of oratory at the college of Beauvais, librarian to Monseigneur de Séez, *Sagiensis episcopi bibliothecarius solertissimus*, as his epitaph has it, later on secretary at the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents, and finally curator of that queen of libraries (the Astaracian), whose loss is for ever to be deplored. He perished, assassinated, on the Lyons road, by a Jew cabalist of the name of Mosaïde (*Judæa manu nefandissima*), leaving several incomplete works, and the memory of his admirable familiar conversation. All the circumstances of his odd existence and tragic end have been reported by his disciple Jacques Menétrier, called Tournebroche,

or Turnspit, because he was the son of a cook in the Rue St. Jacques. This Tournebroche professed for him whom it was his habit to speak of as his good master, a lively and tender admiration. "His was the kindliest soul," said he, "that ever blossomed on this earth." Modestly and faithfully he edited the memoirs of the Abbé, who lives again in the work as Socrates does in the Memorabilia of Xenophon.

Observant, exact, and charitable, he drew a portrait full of life and instinct with a loving faithfulness. It is a work that makes one think of those portraits of Erasmus by Holbein that one sees in the Louvre, at Bâle, or at Hampton Court, the delicacy of which never wearies the sense of appreciation. In short, he left us a masterpiece. It will cause surprise no doubt, that he was not careful to have it printed. Moreover, he could have published it himself, for he set up as a book-seller in the Rue St. Jacques at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, where he succeeded Blaizot.

Perhaps, living as he did among books, he feared to add, if it were but a few leaves, to the horrible hoard of blackened paper that mildews unseen on the book-stalls. We may share his disgust when we pass the twopenny box on the quays, where the sun

and the rain slowly consume pages written for immortality. Like those pathetic death's-heads that Bossuet sent to the Abbot of la Trappe to divert his solitude, here are subjects for reflection fitted to make the man of letters conceive the vanity of writing. I may say, for my part, that between the Pont Royal and the Pont Neuf, I have felt that vanity to the full. I should incline to believe that Abbé Coignard's pupil never printed his work because, formed by so good a master, he judged sanely of literary glory, and esteemed it at its worth, and that is exactly nothing. He knew it for uncertain, capricious, subject to every vicissitude, and dependent on circumstances themselves petty and wretched. Seeing his contemporaries, ignorant, abusive, and mediocre, he saw no reason to hope that their posterity would suddenly become learned, balanced, and reliable. He merely divined that the Future, a stranger to our quarrels, would accord indifference in default of justice. We are well-nigh assured that, great and small, the Future will unite us in oblivion and cover us in a peaceful uniformity of silence. But if, by some extraordinary chance, that hope deceives us, if future generations keep some memory of our name and writings, we can foresee that they will only make acquaintance with

our thoughts by the ingenious labour of gloss and super-gloss which alone perpetuates works of genius through the ages. The long life of a masterpiece is assured only at the price of quite pitiable intellectual hazards, in which the gabble of pedants reinforces the ingenious word-twisting of æsthetic souls. I am not afraid to say that, at the present day, we do not understand a single line of the Iliad, of the Divine Comedy, in the sense primitively attaching to it. To live is to change, and the posthumous life of our written-down thoughts is not free from the rule: they only continue to exist on condition that they become more and more different from what they were when they issued from our minds. Whatsoever in future may be admired in us, will have become altogether alien from us.

Possibly Jacques Tournebroche, whose simplicity we know, did not put himself all these questions in reference to the little book under his hand. It would be an insult to think that he had an exaggerated opinion of himself.

I think I know him. I have meditated over his book. Everything he says, and everything he doesn't say, betrays an exquisite modesty of soul. If, however, he was not without knowledge of his talent, he knew also that it is precisely talent that is least

pardonable. In people of note we tolerate easily bareness of soul and falseheartedness. We are quite content that they should be bad or cowardly, and their good-luck even does not raise over much envy so long as it is not merited. Mediocrities are at once raised up, and carried along, by the surrounding nobodies who are honoured in them. The success of a commonplace person disturbs nobody. Rather, it secretly flatters the mob. But there is an insolence of talent which is expiated by dumb hatred, and calumnies not loud but deep. If Jacques Tournebroche consciously renounced the painful honour of irritating the foolish and the wicked by eloquent writing, one can only admire his good sense, and hold him the worthy scholar of a master who knew mankind. However it may be, the manuscript of Jacques Tournebroche, being left unpublished, was lost for more than a century.

I had the extraordinary good luck to find it again at a general broker's on the Boulevard Montparnasse, who spreads behind the dirtied panes of his shop, *croix du Lis*, *médailles de Sainte-Hélène*, and *decorations de Juillet*, without a suspicion that he is furnishing the generations a melancholy lesson on peacemaking. This manuscript was published under my care in 1893, under the title: *La Rotisserie de la Reine*

Pédauque. I refer the reader to it. He will find there more novelties than he looks for ordinarily in an old book. But it is not with that book that we have to do here.

Jacques Tournebroche was not content to make known the doings and sayings of his master in a connected recital. He was careful to collect much discourse and conversation of Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard that had not found place in the memoirs (for that is the name we must give to *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pédauque*) and he made a little note-book of it, which has fallen into my hands along with his other papers.

It is the note-book that I print now under the title: *The Opinions of The Abbé Jérôme Coignard.* The kind and gracious welcome the public gave the preceding work by Jacques Tournebroche, encourages me to commence forthwith these dialogues, in which we meet once more the former librarian of Monseigneur de Séez with his indulgent wisdom, and that kind of generous scepticism to which his considerations tend, so mingled with contempt and kindliness for man. I have no notion of taking responsibility for the ideas expressed by this philosopher on divers questions of politics and morality. My duties, as editor, merely bind me to present my author's thought in the most

favourable light. His unfettered understanding trampled vulgar beliefs underfoot, and did not side uncritically with popular opinion, except in matters touching the Catholic faith, wherein he was immovable. In anything else he did not fear to oppose his age. Were it only for that he would merit esteem. We owe him the gratitude due to minds that have fought against prejudices. But it is easier to praise than to imitate them. Prejudices melt away and grow unceasingly with the eternal mobility of the clouds. They are by nature most imposing, until they become hateful, and men are rare who are free from the superstition of their period, and look squarely at what the crowd dares not face. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard was independent in a humble walk of life; enough, I think to put him far above a Bossuet, and above all the great people that glitter, according to their degree, in the traditional pomp of custom and belief.

But while we hold that Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard lived as a free man, enfranchised from common errors, and that the spectre of common passions and fears had no empire over him, we must further observe that his surpassing intelligence had originality of outlook on nature and society, and only wanted, in order to astonish and delight mankind by some

vast and beautiful mental engineering feat, the skill or the will to scatter sophisms, like cement, in the interstices between truth and truth. It is only in that way that great systems of philosophy are built up and held together by the mortar of sophistry.

The synthetic faculty was wanting in him, or, (if you like), the art and law of symmetry. Without it, he was bound to appear, as in fact he did, a kind of wonderful compound of Epicurus and St. Francis of Assisi.

Those two, it seems to me, were the best friends that suffering humanity has yet met on its confused progress through life.

Epicurus freed the soul from empty fears and taught it to proportion its idea of happiness to its miserable nature and feeble powers. Good St. Francis, tenderer and more material, led the way to happiness by interior vision, and would have had souls expand like his, in joy, in the depths of an enchanted solitude. Both were helpful, one, to destroy illusions that deceive, the other, to create illusions from which one does not wake.

But it does not do to exaggerate. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard was certainly not the equal, in action or in thought, of the boldest of the sages, nor of the most ardent of the saints. The truths that he

discovered he could not fling himself upon headlong. In his hardiest exploration he maintained the pose of a peaceful pedestrian. He did not sufficiently except himself from the contempt other men inspired in him. He lacked that valuable illusion that sustained Descartes and Bacon, who believed in themselves when they believed in no one else. He had doubts of the witness he bore, and scattered heedlessly the treasures of his mind. That confidence, however common in thinkers, was withheld from him, the confidence in himself as the superior of the greatest wits. It is an unpardonable fault, for glory is only given to those who importune it. In Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard it was, moreover, a weakness, and an illogicality. Since he pushed philosophical audacity to its farthest limits, he should not have scrupled to proclaim himself the first of men. But his heart remained simple and his soul pure, and his poorness of spirit that knew not how to rear itself above the world, did him an irreparable wrong. But need I say that I love him better as he was? I am not afraid to affirm that Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, philosopher and Christian, mingled in an incomparable union the epicurism that wards off grief, and the holy simplicity that conducts to joy.

It is to be remarked that not only did he accept

the idea of God as furnished him by the Catholic faith, but further, that he tried to uphold it against argument of the rationalistic kind. He never imitated that practical address of professed Deists, who make a moral, philanthropical and prudish God for their own use, with whom they enjoy the satisfaction of a perfect understanding. The strict relations they establish with Him give much authority to their writings, and much consideration to their persons, before the public. And this God, akin to the government, temperate, weighty, exempt from fanaticism, and who has His following, is a recommendation to them in salons, academies, and public meetings. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard did not figure the Eternal to himself in so profitable a light. But considering the impossibility of conceiving of the world otherwise than under the category of intelligent beings, and that the cosmos must be held to be intelligible, even if but to demonstrate its absurdity, he referred the cause to an intelligence he called God, leaving the term in its infinite vagueness, relying for the rest on theology, which as we know, treats of the unknowable with minutest accuracy.

This reserve, which marks the limits of his understanding, was fortunate if, as I believe, it

deprived him of the temptation to nibble at some appetising system of philosophy, and kept him from putting his nose into one of those mouse-traps wherein independent minds are in such hurry to get caught. At his ease in the big old rat-run, he found more than one opening to look out on the world and observe nature. I do not share his religious beliefs, and am of opinion that they deceived him, as they have deceived, for their good or ill, so many generations of men. But it looks as if the old errors were less vexatious than the new, and that, since we are bound to go wrong, it were best to hold by illusions that have lost their sparkle.

It is certain, though, that Abbé Coignard, in accepting Christian and Catholic principles, did not deny himself the deduction of some original conclusions therefrom. Rooted in orthodoxy, his luxuriant spirit flourished singularly in epicurism and in humility. As I have said before he always tried to chase away those phantoms of the night, those empty fears, or as he called them, those gothic diabolisms, which make the pious existence of the simple bourgeois a kind of sordid and day-long witches' sabbath. Theologians have, in our own day, accused him of carrying hope to excess, and

even beyond bounds. I meet the reproach once more under the hand of an eminent philosopher.*

I do not know if Monsieur Coignard really reposed an exaggerated trust in divine goodness. But certainly he conceived the meaning of grace in a large and natural sense, and the world, in his eyes, less resembled the deserts of the Thebaid than the

* (Monsieur Jean Lacoste wrote in the *Gazette de France* of May 20, 1893): Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard is a priest full of knowledge, humility and faith. I do not say that his conduct was always an honour to his bands or that his robe was unstained. But if he succumbs to temptation, if the devil has in him an easy prey, he never loses confidence ; he hopes by God's grace to fall no more, and to reach the glories of Paradise. And, in fact, he affords us the spectacle of a very edifying death. Thus a grain of faith beautifies life, and Christian humility well becomes our human weakness.

Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, if he be not a saint, perhaps deserves purgatory. But he deserves the fire a very long time, and has run risk of hell. For in his acts of humility, though sincere, there was scarcely any repentance. He reckoned too much on the grace of God, and made no effort to help the workings of grace. That is why he fell back into his sin. Thus faith availed him little, and he was nearly a heretic, for the holy council of Trent, by its canons VI. and IX. in its sixth session, declared all those anathema who pretend "that it is not in the power of man to give up his evil ways" and who have such reliance on faith that they think faith alone can save them "without any motion of the will." Thus the divine mercy extended to Abbé Coignard is truly miraculous and beyond ordinary channels.

garden of Epicurus. He took his way through it with that daring ingenuousness which is the most marked trait in his character, and the foundation of his teaching.

Never did a mind show itself at once so bold and so pacificatory, nor soften its disdain with greater gentleness. His rule conjoined the freedom of the cynics and the innocence of the primitive community of the Portiuncula. Tenderly, he despised men. He tried to show them that having no measure of greatness about them save their capacity for sorrow, they could lay up for themselves nothing useful or beautiful save pity; that fit only for desire or suffering, they should practise themselves in the indulgent and the pleasure-giving virtues. He came to consider pride as the source of greatest evil, and the one vice against nature.

It seems likely indeed, that men make themselves miserable by the exaggerated opinion they have of themselves and their kind, and that if they could form a humbler and truer notion of human nature they might be kinder to others and kinder to themselves.

His sympathetic regard, then, urged him to humiliate his fellows, in their opinions, their know-

ledge, their philosophy, and institutions. He put his heart into showing them that their weak and silly nature has never constructed nor imagined anything worth the trouble of attacking and defending very briskly, and that if they knew the crudity and weakness of their greatest works, such as their laws and their empires, they would only fight in fun or in play, like children building sand-castles by the sea.

We must not be astonished or scandalised then, that he depreciated every conception which makes for the honour and glory of mankind, at the expense of their peace. The majesty of the law did not impose on his clear-sighted intellect, and he deplored the fact that the wretched were subjected to so many restraints, of which in most cases, they could not discover the origin or the meaning. All principles appeared equally contestable to him. He had at last come to believe that members of a state would never condemn so many of their kind to infamy, if it were not to taste, by contrast, the pleasure of respectability. Such a view made him prefer bad company to good, after the example of Him who lived among publicans and sinners. But he kept his purity of heart, his gift of sympathy, and the treasure of his pity. I shall not speak here of his

actions, which are recounted in *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pédauque.* I have no means of knowing whether, as was said of Madame de Mouchy, he was more worthy than his life. Our actions are not altogether our own ; they depend less on us than on fortune. They come to us from all sides. We do not always merit them. Our inviolable mind is all we have of our very own. Thence the vanity of the world's judgments. Nevertheless, I can say with pleasure that our leading lights have found Monsieur Coignard an amiable and pleasing person. Indeed one must be a Pharisee not to see in him a beautiful creation of God. So much said I hasten to return to his teachings, which alone matter here.

What he had least of was the bump of veneration. Nature had denied it him, and he took no steps to acquire it. He feared lest, in exalting some, he should cast down others, and his universal charity was extended equally to the humble and the proud. It bore itself to the victims with a greater solicitude, but the executioners themselves seemed to him too wretched to be worthy of hate. He wished them no harm, and merely pitied them that they were wicked.

He had no belief that reprisals, whether spontaneous,

or according to law, did anything but add ill to ill. He viewed with complacence neither the vengeance that is private and much to the point, nor the majestic cruelty of the law, and if he happened to smile when the police were being drubbed, it was simply the result of his being but flesh and blood, and naturally a good fellow.

He had, in fact, formed a very simple and sensible notion of evil. He ascribed it altogether to man's functions and natural feelings, without mixing up with it all the prejudices that take on an artificial consistency in the codes. I have said that he formed no system, being little inclined to resolve his difficulties by sophistry. It is evident that, at the outset, a difficulty stopped him short in his meditations on the means of establishing happiness or even peace on earth. He was convinced that man is by nature a vicious animal, and that communities are not abominable simply because he uses all his wits to shape them. Consequently he looked for no benefit from a return to nature. I doubt if he would have changed his opinion if he had lived to read *Emile*. When he died, Jean-Jacques had not yet stirred the world by eloquence of the sincerest feeling joined to logic or the falsest. He was still but a little vagabond, and unhappily for him, found other Abbés than Monsieur

Jérôme Coignard on the benches of Lyons' deserted walks. We may regret that Monsieur Coignard, who knew all sorts of people, never met by chance Madame de Warens' young friend. But it could only have been an amusing incident, a romantic scene. Jean-Jacques would not have found the wisdom of our disillusioned philosopher much to his taste. Nothing could be less like the philosophy of Rousseau than that of Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard. The latter is marked with a kindly irony. It is easy and indulgent. Founded on human infirmity it is solid at bottom. The other is lacking in its gay scepticism and fleeting smile.

Taking its seat on an imaginary base, that of the original virtue of our kind, it finds itself in an awkward position, the comicality of which is not quite evident to itself. It is the doctrine for men who have never laughed. Its embarrassment is seen in its bad humour. It is ungracious. There would be nothing in that but it reinstals man among the monkeys, and then gets unreasonably angry when the monkey is not virtuous. In which it is absurd and cruel. This was well exemplified when statesmen wished to apply the teachings of the *Contrat Social* to the best of Republics.

Robespierre venerated the memory of Rousseau.

He would have held Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard for a bad man. I would not make the remark if Robespierre had been a monster. But, for the learned, there are no monsters. Robespierre was an optimist, who believed in good. Statesmen of this turn do all the evil possible. If one meddles in the government of mankind one must never lose sight of the fact that they are monkeys, and mischievous. Only thus can you have a humane and kindly polity. The folly of the Revolution was to wish to establish virtue on earth. When one would make men good and wise, free, moderate, and liberal, one is led to the fatal desire of killing them all. Robespierre believed in virtue and he brought about the Terror. Marat believed in justice; he demanded two hundred thousand heads. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard is perhaps, of all the minds of the eighteenth century, the one whose principles were most opposed to the principles of the Revolution. He would not have signed a line of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, because of the excessive and unfair separation it establishes between man and the gorilla.

Last week I had a visit from an anarchist-comrade who honours me with his friendship, and whom I like, because having taken no part as yet in the

government of his country, he has kept much of his innocence. He wants to blow up everything merely because he believes men to be naturally good and virtuous. He thinks that, deprived of their goods, and delivered from laws, they would shed their egoism and wickedness. The tenderest optimism has led him to the most savage ferocity. His only misfortune and his only crime, is that he has brought an elysian soul, made for the golden age, into the business of a cook, to which he is condemned. He is a Jean-Jacques, very simple, and very honest, who has never let himself be worried by the sight of a Madame d'Houdetot, nor softened by the refined generosity of a Maréchal de Luxembourg. His candour leaves him at the mercy of his logic, and renders him terrible. He reasons better than a minister, but he starts from an absurd principle. He does not believe in original sin, and yet, for all that, it is a dogma of such solid and stable truth that we have been able to build on it everything we have chosen to.

Why were you not with him in my study, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, to make him feel the falsity of his doctrine? You would not have talked to this generous Utopian of the benefits of civilization and of state interests. You knew these to be

pleasantries, indecent to vent on the unfortunate. You knew that public order is but public violence, and that each man can judge of the interest he has in it. But you would have drawn a true and terrible picture of that state of nature he wishes to re-establish; you would have shown him in the idyll of his dreams, an infinity of bloody and domestic tragedies, and in his too happy anarchy the beginning of a dreadful tyranny.

And that leads me to define the attitude that Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard at the *Petit Bacchus*, took in regard to governments and peoples. He respected neither the supports of society nor the vault of Empire. He held as subject to doubt and as matter for dispute the very virtue of the Holy Ampulla, then a principle in the constitution such as universal suffrage is to-day. Such a liberty which would then have scandalised every Frenchman shocks us no longer.

But it would be to misunderstand our philosopher to make excuses for the liveliness of his criticisms on the old order of things.

Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard made no great difference between governments called absolute, and those we call free, and we may well suppose that had he lived in our day he would still have kept a strong

dose of that generous discontent of which his heart was full.

Since he dealt in principles, no doubt he would have discovered the vanity of ours. I judge by a remark of his which has come down to us. "In a democracy," said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "a people is subjected to its own will—a very hard slavery. In fact, it has as little knowledge of its own will, and is as opposed to it, as it could be to that of a prince. For the universal will is to be seen scarcely or not at all in the individual, who nevertheless suffers the constraint of all. And universal suffrage is a hoax, like the dove that brought the Sacred Chrism in its beak. Popular government, like monarchy, rests on fiction and lives by expedient. It suffices that the fiction be accepted, and the expedient happy."

This maxim is enough to make us believe that he would have preserved in our day the proud and smiling freedom which was the ornament of his mind in the age of kings. Still, he was never a revolutionary. He had too few illusions for that, and thought that governments should not be destroyed otherwise than by the blind and inexorable forces, slow and irresistible, that carry away all things.

He held that the one people could not be governed two ways at the same time, for this reason, that, nations being indeed bodies, their functions depend on the structure of their parts, and the condition of their organs; that is to say, of the land and the people, and not of the ruling powers, who must be adjusted to a nation as a man's clothes are to his body.

"The misfortune is," added he, "that the people are suited by them like a Harlequin or a Jack-in-the-green. Their coat is ever too loose or too tight, ill-fitting, ridiculous, grubby, covered with stains, and crawling with vermin. We may mend things by shaking it out, cautiously, putting in a stitch here, and when necessary, applying the scissors there, with discretion, so as to avoid being at the expense of another equally bad, but not clinging too obstinately to the old garment when the body has changed its shape by growth."

One sees from this that Monsier l'Abbé Coignard, was a friend to order and progress, and altogether was not a bad citizen. He incited no man to revolt, and had rather that instituted things were worn and ground-down by incessant friction, than overturned and broken by any great strokes. He was for ever pointing out to his disciples that

the harshest laws grew wonderfully smoother in practice, and that the clemency of time is surer than that of man. As for seeing the sprawling Corpus of the law one day re-shaped, he neither hoped it nor wished for it; laying no store by the benefits of hasty legislation. Jacques Tournebroche asked him at times whether he were not afraid that his critical philosophy, as exercised on institutions he himself judged necessary, might not have the inopportune effect of toppling down what he would wish preserved.

"Why, oh best of masters," said his faithful disciple, "why reduce to dust the foundations of all right, of justice, and law, and generally of all civil and military rule, since you acknowledge the necessity of right, justice, armies, magistrates and drill-sergeants?"

"My son," replied Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "I have ever remarked that men's prejudices are the source of their ills, just as spiders and scorpions issue from the gloom of cellars and the damp of back-gardens. It is just as well to pass the Turk's head or the broom at random now and then in these dark corners. It is not a bad thing even to give a touch of the pick here and there on the walls of the cellar and

garden. It scares the vermin and prepares the way for the ruin that must come."

"I agree willingly," replied the mild Tournebroche; "but when you have destroyed every principle, my master, what will be left?"

And his master replied: "After the destruction of every false principle society will still cohere, because it is founded on necessity, whose laws, older than Saturn, will still prevail when Prometheus shall have dethroned Jupiter."

Prometheus has dethroned Jupiter more than once since the time when Abbé Coignard spoke these words, and the prophecies of the sage have been so literally verified that at the present day one feels doubts, so much does the new resemble the old order, whether the power does not still rest in ancient Jove. There are those who deny the coming of the Titan. There is no sign on his breast, they say, of the wound whence the eagle, the creature of injustice, tore out his heart, the wound that should bleed for ever. He knows nothing of the griefs and insurgence of the exile. This is not the workaday divinity promised, and expected by us. This is the full-fed Jove from the hoary and laughable Olympus. When shall he appear again, the strong friend of men, the fire-kindler,

the Titan still nailed to his crag? A terrible noise from out the mountains makes known that he is lifting his lacerated shoulders from off the iniquitous rock, and we can feel, flaming on us, his distant breath.

A stranger to business, Monsieur Coignard inclined to pure speculation and dealt readily in general ideas. This disposition of his, which may have damaged him in the eyes of his contemporaries, gives his reflections some worth and usefulness after a century and a half. We can there learn to know the manners of our own day and disentangle what there is of evil in them.

Injustice, stupidity, and cruelty, do not strike us when they are the common lot. We see them in our ancestors but not in ourselves. Still, since there is no past epoch whatever, when mankind does not seem absurd to us, savage and unjust, it would be a miracle if our age had, by some privilege, cast away every shred of folly, malice, and savagery. The opinions of Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard would help us to make our examination of conscience, if we were not like those idols which have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not. With a little good faith and impartiality we should soon see that our legal codes are still but a hotbed of injustice, that

we preserve in our manners the inherited hardness of avarice and pride; that we value wealth alone, and have no respect for labour. Our system of affairs would appear to us what it really is, a wretched and precarious system, condemned by abstract justice if not by that of man, and the ruin of which is beginning. Our rich men would seem to us as foolish as cockchafers continuing to eat the leaves of a tree, while the little beetle on their body devours their entrails. No more would we be lulled to sleep by the false speeches of our statesmen; we should conceive a positive pity for our economists arguing with one another about the cost of the furniture in a burning house. Abbé Coignard's disquisitions reveal to us a prophetic disdain of the great principles of the Revolution and of the rights of the people, on which we have established these hundred years, with every kind of violence and usurpation, an incoherent succession of insurrectionary governments, themselves, innocent of irony, condemning insurrection. If we could begin to smile a little at follies, which once appeared majestic and at times were stained with blood; if we could perceive that our modern prejudices are, like the old, the outcome of something, either ridiculous or hateful; if we could judge one another with a charitable

scepticism,* quarrels would be less sharp, in the fairest country in the world, and Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, for one, would have laboured for the universal good.

ANATOLE FRANCE

* This has been very favourably received, Monsieur Hugues Rebell having admitted that there is such a thing as a charitable scepticism. Referring, not, it is true, to the opinions of Monsieur Coignard, but to some writings drawn from the same source, he has made some remarks of which I may avail myself here :

"An interesting vein of thought might be followed up after reading this work, furnishing, as it does, some valuable teaching : I may be permitted some reflections on it :

"1. The organisation of a particular society does not depend on individual wills, but on the compulsion of nature, or to put it more simply, on the unanimity of the more intelligent beings of which that society is composed who inevitably choose the most agreeable rule of life :

"2. Mankind at any one period, having the same organic constitution and passions as mankind at any other period, can never have entirely differing institutions. It results from this that a political revolution is no more than a rotatory movement, round the ancient ways, which ends where it began ; it is just a disease, an interruption in human development. And the result of this law is that all societies live and die in the same way."

HUGUES REBELL in *l'Ermitage, April* 1893.

Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard simply says that a people is not susceptible to more than one form of government at the same period.

THE OPINIONS OF
JÉRÔME COIGNARD

COLLECTED BY
JACQUES TOURNEBROCHE

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THE OPINIONS OF JÉRÔME COIGNARD

I

MINISTERS OF STATE

THIS afternoon, Abbé Jérôme Coignard visited, as he was in the habit of doing, Monsieur Blaizot, the bookseller in the Rue Saint-Jacques, at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*.

Perceiving the works of Jean Racine on the shelves he set about carelessly turning over the leaves of one of the volumes.

"This poet," he informed us, "was not lacking in genius, and had he but risen to the writing of his tragedies in Latin verse he would be worthy of praise, more especially in the case of his *Athalie*, where he shows that he understood politics well enough. In comparison with him Corneille is but

an empty ranter. This tragedy of the accession of Joas shows us some of the forces whose play raises empires or casts them down. And one must perforce believe that Monsieur Racine possessed that spirit of finesse which we should hold of more account than all the sublimities of poetry and eloquence, which in reality are but rhetorical tricks serving for the amusement of the vulgar. To raise mankind to the sublime belongs to an inferior order of mind self-deceived on the true nature of Adam's race, which is altogether wretched and deserving of pity. I refrain from calling man a ridiculous animal for the sole consideration that Jesus Christ ransomed him with His precious blood. The nobility of mankind is based only upon this inconceivable mystery, and of themselves human beings, be they mean or great, are but savage and disgusting beasts."

Just as my good master pronounced these final words Monsieur Roman came into the shop.

"Stop! Monsieur l'Abbé," exclaimed this able man. "You forget that those disgusting and ferocious beasts are, in Europe at any rate, subjected to an admirable government, and that states, such as the kingdom of France, and the Dutch Republic, are far removed from the barbarous and rude conditions which offend you."

My good master replaced the volume of Racine on the shelf, and replied to Monsieur Roman with his customary grace :

"I grant you, Monsieur, that in the writings of the philosophers, who treat of these subjects, the doings of public men take on a certain symmetry and perspicuousness, and in your treatise on *Monarchy* I admire the sequence and connection of ideas. But it is to you alone that I do honour for the fine sentiments that you attribute to the great politicians of times past and present. They had not the wit you endow them with, and these illustrious beings, who appear to have led the world, were themselves but the plaything of nature and chance. They did not rise above human imbecility, and were in fact but brilliant nobodies."

While listening impatiently to this speech Monsieur Roman had seized hold of an old atlas. He began to turn it about with a noise which mingled with the sound of his voice.

"What blindness!" said he. "What! to fail to understand the actions of great statesmen, of great citizens! Are you so ignorant of history that it does not appear obvious to you that a Cæsar, a Richelieu, a Cromwell, moulded his people as a potter his clay? Do you not see that a

state goes like a watch in the hands of a watch-maker?"

"I do not see it," replied my good master, "and during the fifty years of my life I have noticed that this country has changed its form of government several times without changing the condition of the people, excepting for an insensible progress that does not depend on the human will. From which I conclude that it is well-nigh immaterial whether we be governed one way or another, and that statesmen are only noteworthy by reason of their coats and their coaches."

"Can you talk like this," replied Monsieur Roman, "on the day following the death of a statesman who took such a prominent part in affairs, and who, after long disgrace, dies at the moment he has regained power and honour? By the tumult round his bier you may judge the result of his work. This result lasts after him."

"Monsieur," answered my good master, "this statesman was an honest man, laborious and painstaking, and it might be said of him as of Monsieur Vauban, that he was too well-bred to affect the appearance of it, for he never took pains to please any one. I would praise him before all, for having improved where others in the same business do but deteriorate.

He possessed his soul and had a glowing sense of the greatness of his country. He was praiseworthy also, in that he carried easily on those broad shoulders the spites of hucksters and rufflers. Even his enemies accord him a concealed approval. But what big things did he ever do, my good sir, and why does he seem to you anything but the sport of the winds which blew round him? The Jesuits whom he drove away, have come back; the little religious war he kindled to amuse the people has gone out, leaving next day but the stinking shell of a bad firework. I grant you he was clever in diverting opinion, or rather, in deflecting it. His party, which was but a party of opportunism and expediency, did not wait for his death to change its name and its chief without changing its doctrine. His cabal remained faithful to its chief and to itself in continuing to submit to circumstances. Is there anything astonishingly great about that?"

"There is certainly something admirable," replied Monsieur Roman. "Had he only withdrawn the art of government from the clouds of metaphysics to lead it back to reality, he should have all my praise. His party, you say, was one of opportunism and expediency. But to excel in human affairs what needs one but to seize the happy moment and have

recourse to utilitarian methods? This is what he did, or, at least, this is what he would have done, if the chicken-hearted instability of his friends and the false effrontery of his foes had left him any peace. But he wore himself out in the vain endeavour to placate the latter and steady the former. Time and men, those necessary tools, both were wanting to establish his beneficent rule. At least he framed admirable plans for home politics. And you ought not to forget that he endowed his country with vast and fertile possessions abroad. We owe him all the more gratitude in that he made these successful conquests alone and in spite of the parliament from which he drew his powers."

"Monsieur," answered my good master, "he showed energy and skill in colonial affairs, but not perhaps much more than a plain man displays in buying a piece of land. And what is not to my taste in all these over-sea affairs is the way the Europeans deal with the peoples of Africa and America. White men, when they come to grips with black and yellow races find themselves forced to exterminate them. One can only conquer the savage by a higher form of barbarity. Here is the extreme to which all foreign enterprises tend. I am not denying that the Spaniards, the Dutch, and the English have drawn

profit from them. But, ordinarily speaking, they launch themselves haphazard, and quite recklessly on these big and cruel undertakings.

"What is the wisdom and the will of one man in enterprises affecting commerce, agriculture, and navigation, which necessarily depend on an immense number of units? The part played by a statesman in such affairs is a very small one, and if it seems marked to us it is because our minds, turning to mythology, too willingly give a name and a personality to all the secret workings of nature.

"What did he discover in the matter of colonisation that was not already known to the Phœnicians in the time of Cadmus?"

At these words Monsieur Roman let fall his atlas, which the bookseller quietly picked up.

"I discover to my sorrow, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, "that you are a sophist. For that he must be who can thus smother the colonial enterprises of the dead and gone minister with Cadmus and the Phœnicians. You are unable to deny that these undertakings were his work and you have made this pitiable introduction of Cadmus to set us at loggerheads."

"Monsieur," said the Abbé, "let us leave Cadmus alone if he annoys you. I merely wish to say that a

statesman plays but a small part in his own works, and he deserves neither the glory nor the shame of them. I mean to say that, if, in this wretched comedy of life, princes appear to rule and people to obey, it is but a game, an empty show ; and that really they are, both one and the other, directed by an unseen force."

II

SAINT ABRAHAM

NE summer night, while the gnats danced round the lamp of the *Petit Bacchus*, Abbé Coignard was taking the air in the porch of St. Benoît-le-Bétourné. There he was meditating, as his habit was, when Catherine came up and seated herself by him on the stone bench. My good master was ever inclined to praise God in his works. He took pleasure in the contemplation of this handsome girl, and as he had an agreeable and graceful wit he held her in pleasant talk. He paid tribute not only to the charm of her tongue, but to that of her neck and the rest of her person, and to the fact that she smiled no less with all the dimplement and lines of her pretty body than with lips and cheeks; in such sort that one submitted with impatience to drapery disguising the rest of the smile.

"Since we must needs all sin in this world and no

one, without pride, may believe himself infallible, it is when with you, Mademoiselle, by preference, if such were your pleasure, that I would the Divine Grace failed me. I should gain thereby two valuable advantages, to wit : firstly, to sin with rare delight and unusual pleasure ; secondly, to find thereafter an excuse in the strength of your fascination ; for it is doubtless written in the Judgment Books that your charms are irresistible. That should be taken into consideration. There are imprudent people who sin with women ugly and ill-made. These unhappy mortals, setting about it in this way, run great risk of the loss of their souls, for they sin for sinning's sake, and their onerous ill-doing is full of evil intent. Whereas, so fair a skin as yours, Catherine, is an excuse in the eyes of the Almighty. Your charms wonderfully alleviate the fault, which becomes pardonable, being involuntary. In fact, to tell you the plain truth, Mademoiselle, when I am near you Divine Grace abandons me at one stroke of the wing. At this moment that I am talking to you, it is but as a little white spot above those roofs where, on the tiles, the cats make love with mad cries and childish lamentation, the while the moon is perched unblushingly on a chimney-pot. What I see of your person, Catherine,

appeals to me; but what I do not see appeals to me still more."

At these words she lowered her gaze on her lap; then turned its liquid appeal on the Abbé. And in a very sweet voice she said:

"As you wish me well, Monsieur Jérôme, do promise to grant me the favour I am going to ask you, and for which I shall be so grateful."

My good master promised. Who would not have done as much in his place?

Catherine then said vivaciously:

"You know, Monsieur l'Abbé, that Abbé La Perruque, the *vicaire* of St. Benoît, accuses brother Ange of having stolen his donkey, and he has carried his complaint to the ecclesiastical court. Now, nothing could be more untrue. The good brother had borrowed the donkey to take some relics to various villages. The donkey was lost on the way. The relics were found. That is the essential point, says brother Ange. But Abbé La Perruque reclaims his donkey, and won't listen to anything else. He is going to put the little brother in the Archbishop's prison. You alone can soften his anger and induce him to withdraw his complaint."

"But, Mademoiselle," said Abbé Coignard, "I have neither the power nor the inclination to do so."

"Oh!" resumed Catherine, sliding near to him and looking at him with a great pretence of tenderness, "I shall be very unhappy if I cannot succeed in giving you the inclination. Whilst as to the power, you have it, Monsieur Jérôme; you have it! And nothing would be easier for you than to save the little brother. You have only to give Monsieur La Perruque eight sermons for Lent and four for Advent. You write sermons so well that it must be a real pleasure to you to write them. Compose these twelve sermons, Monsieur Jérôme; compose them at once. I will come and fetch them myself from your stall at the Innocents. Monsieur La Perruque, who thinks a great deal of your worth and your knowledge, reckons that twelve of your sermons are as good as a donkey. As soon as he has the dozen he will withdraw his complaint. He has said so. What are twelve sermons, Monsieur Jérôme? I promise to write Amen at the foot of the last one. I have your promise?" she added, putting her arms round his neck.

"As for that," Monsieur Coignard said roughly, disengaging the pretty hands clasped on his shoulder, "I refuse flatly. Promises made to pretty girls are but skin deep, and it is no sin to retract them. Don't count on me, my beauty, to drag your bearded gallant from the hands of the ecclesiastical court!

Should I write a sermon, or two, or twelve, they would be directed against the bad monks who are the shame of the Church, and are as vermin clinging to the robe of St. Peter. This brother Ange is a rascal. He gives good women to touch, as relics, some old mutton or pork bone which he has gnawed himself with disgusting greediness. I wager he bore on Monsieur La Perruque's donkey a feather of the Angel Gabriel, a ray from the wise men's star, and in a little phial a trifle of the sound of the bells that rang in the belfry of Solomon's temple. He is a dunce, he is a liar, and you love him. There are three reasons why I should dislike him. I leave you to judge, Mademoiselle, which of the three is the strongest. Perchance it may well be the least honest; for in truth I was, a moment ago, drawn to you with a violence neither befitting my age nor my condition. But make no mistake; I resent extremely the insults offered by your cowled rascal to the Church of our Saviour Jesus Christ, of which I am a very unworthy member. And this capuchin's example fills me with such disgust that I am possessed by a sudden longing to meditate on some beautiful passage of St. John Chrysostom, instead of sitting knee to knee with you, Mademoiselle, as I have been doing for the last quarter of an hour. For the desire of the sinner is

short-lived and the glory of God is everlasting. I have never held an exaggerated notion of sins of the flesh. I think in justice to me that must be allowed.

"I am not scared like Monsieur Nicodème, for example, at such a little thing as taking one's pleasure with a pretty girl. But what I cannot endure is the baseness of soul, the hypocrisy, the lies, and the crass ignorance, which make your brother Ange an accomplished monk. From your intercourse with him, Mademoiselle, you get a habit of crapulence which drags you much below your position, which is that of a courtesan. I know the shame and the misery of it; but it is a far superior state to that of a monk. This rascal dishonours you even as he dishonours the gutters of the Rue St. Jacques by dipping his feet into them. Think of all the virtues with which you might adorn yourself, Mademoiselle, in your precarious walk of life, and one alone of which might one day open Paradise to you, if you were not subjugated and enslaved to this unclean beast.

"Even while permitting yourself to pick up here and there what must, after all, be bestowed on you as tokens of gratitude, you, Catherine, could blossom forth in faith, hope, and charity, love the poverty-stricken, and visit the sick. You could be

charitable and compassionate; and find pure delight in the sight of the skies, the waters, the woods, and the fields. Of a morning, on opening your window, you could praise God while listening to the song of the birds. On days of pilgrimage you might climb the hill of St. Valérien, and there, beneath the Calvary, softly bewail your lost innocence. You could act in such a way that He who alone reads our hearts would say: 'Catherine is my creature, and I know her by the glimmerings of a clear light not altogether extinguished in her.'"

Catherine interrupted him:

"But Abbé," she said drily, "you are spinning me a sermon."

"Did you not ask me for a dozen?" he replied.

She began to be angry:

"Take care Abbé. It rests with you if we are to be friends or enemies. Will you compose the twelve sermons? Think well before you answer."

"Mademoiselle," said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "I have done blameworthy things in my life, but not after reflection."

"You will not? Quite certain? One—two—You refuse? Abbé, I shall take my revenge."

For some time she sulked, mute and bad-tempered, on the bench. Then all at once she started crying:

"Have done, Monsieur l'Abbé! Have done! At your age, and a man of your cloth to plague me thus! Fie Monsieur l'Abbé! Fie! How shameful, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

As she was squealing at her shrillest, the Abbé saw Mademoiselle Lecoeur, of the draper's shop at the sign of the *Trois Pucelles*, pass through the porch. She was going thus late to confess to the third *vicaire* of St. Benoît, and turned away her head in sign of her huge disgust.

He owned to himself that Catherine's revenge was prompt and sure, for Mademoiselle Lecoeur's sense of virtue, fortified by age, had become so vigorous, that she was down upon every impropriety of the parish, and seven times a day stabbed with the point of her tongue the carnal sinners of the Rue St. Jacques.

But Catherine herself did not know how complete was her revenge. She had seen Mademoiselle Lecoeur come into the market-place, but she had not seen my father who was following closely.

He was coming with me to look for the Abbé in the porch, and take him to the *Petit Bacchus*. My father had a liking for Catherine. Nothing vexed him more than to see her close beset by gallants. He had no illusions about her conduct. But as he

said, knowing and seeing are two different things. Now Catherine's cries had reached his ears quite clearly, He was hasty and incapable of self-restraint. I was much afraid that his wrath would burst forth in coarse suggestion or savage threats. I already saw him drawing his larding-pin, which he wore on his apron-string like an honourable weapon, for he gloried in his art and in his spit.

My fears were but half-justified. The occasion surprised him, but not unpleasantly, when Catherine showed virtue, and satisfaction overcame anger in his mind.

He accosted my good master fairly civilly and said with mock severity :

" Monsieur Coignard, all priests who cultivate the society of courtesans lose thereby their virtue and their good name. And rightly so, even if no pleasure has rewarded their dishonour."

Catherine left the spot with a fine air of offended modesty, and my excellent master answered my father with a sweet and smiling eloquence :

" That maxim is excellent, Monsieur Léonard ; still one should not apply it without discretion, nor stick it on to everything as the lame cutler labels all his knives ' sixpence.' I will not inquire

why I merited its application a moment ago. Will it not do if I own that I merited it?

"It is not seemly to talk of oneself and it would be too great a shock to my modesty to be obliged to discourse on what is personal to me. I would rather set up the case of the venerable Robert d'Arbrissel who acquired merit from frequenting courtesans. One might also quote St. Abraham, the anchorite of Syria, who did not fear to enter a house of ill-fame."

"What St. Abraham was that?" asked my father, whose thoughts were all put to rout.

"Let us sit down outside your door," said my good master, "bring a jug of wine, and I will tell you the story of this great saint as it was recorded for us by St. Ephraim himself."

My father made a gesture of ready assent. We all three sat down under the eaves, and my good master spoke as follows:

"St. Abraham, being already old, lived alone in the desert in a little hut, when his brother died leaving a daughter of great beauty, named Mary. Assured that the life he led would be excellent for his niece, Abraham had built for her a little cell near his own, whence he taught her by means of a small window that he had had pierced.

"He took care that she fasted, watched, and sang psalms. But a monk, whom we may suppose to have been a false monk, drew nigh Mary while the holy man Abraham was meditating on the Scriptures, and led the young girl into sin; who thus said to herself:

"'It were far better, since I am dead to God, to go into a country where I am known to none.'

"Leaving her cell she betook herself to a neighbouring town called Edessa, where there were delightful gardens and cool fountains; it is still to this day the pleasantest of the towns of Syria. Meanwhile, the holy man Abraham remained plunged in profound meditation. His niece had already been gone some days when, opening her little window, he asked:

"'Mary, why do you no longer sing the psalms you sang so well?' And receiving no reply he suspected the truth and cried: 'A cruel wolf has carried off my ewe lamb from me!'

"He lived in sorrow for two years, after which he learnt that his niece was leading a bad life. Acting with discretion, he begged one of his friends to go to the town and find out what had become of her. The friend's report was, that, in very deed, Mary was leading a bad life. At this

news the holy man begged his friend to lend him a riding-dress and bring him a horse, and putting on his head a big hat which hid his face, so as not to be recognised, he presented himself at the hostelry where they had told him his niece was lodged. He looked on all sides to see if he could not see her, but, as she did not appear, he said to the innkeeper, feigning to smile:

"'Mine host, they tell me you have a pretty girl here. Can I not see her?'

"The innkeeper, an obliging man, had her called and Mary appeared in a costume, which, according to the words of St. Ephraim himself, sufficed to reveal her mode of life. The holy man was pierced with sorrow.

"He affected gaiety nevertheless, and ordered a good meal. Mary was in a sober mood that day. In giving pleasure one does not always taste it, and the sight of this old man whom she did not recognise, for he had not removed his hat, in no way inclined her to joyousness. The innkeeper cried shame upon her for such naughty behaviour so opposed to the duties of her profession, but she said with a sigh: 'Would to God that I had died three years ago!'

"The holy man Abraham was careful to adopt

the language, as he had taken the coat, of a gallant cavalier :

" ' My child,' said he, ' I have come here not to bewail your sins but to partake of your affection.'

" But when the innkeeper left him alone with Mary he feigned no more, but raising his hat, he said weeping :

" ' Mary, my child, do you not know me ? Am I not that Abraham who has been a father to you ? '

" He took her by the hand and all the night long he exhorted her to repentance and penance. Above all he was careful not to drive her to despair. He repeated incessantly ' My child, it is only God who is without sin.'

" Mary was naturally a sweet soul. She consented to go back to him. At daybreak they set out. She would have taken her robes and jewels. But the holy man made her understand that it would be more fitting to leave them. He mounted her on his horse and led her back to their cells, where they both took up their past life. Only this time the good man took care that Mary's room did not communicate with the outside world, and that there was no going out without passing through the room that he himself occupied. By which

means and by the grace of God, he kept his ewe lamb. Such is the history of St. Abraham," said my good master, drinking his cup of wine.

"It is quite beautiful," said my father, "and the misfortunes of poor Mary have brought tears to my eyes."

III

MINISTERS OF STATE (*concluded*)

THAT same day my good master and I were exceedingly surprised to meet at Monsieur Blaizot's at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, a little thin, yellow man, who was no other than the celebrated pamphleteer, Jean Hibou. . . . We had every reason to believe that he was in the Bastille, where he usually was. And if we had no hesitation in recognising him it was because his face still showed traces of the darkness and mildew of the dungeon. He was turning over with a trembling hand, under the bookseller's anxious eye, some political writings newly come from Holland. Abbé Jérôme Coignard doffed his hat with a natural grace which would have been more effective if the hat had not been staved in the night before in a scuffle, that need not concern us, in the arbour at the *Petit Bacchus*.

Abbé Coignard having shown his pleasure at meeting so able a man again; Monsieur Jean Hibou replied. "It will not be for long. I am leaving this country where I am unable to live. I cannot breathe the corrupted air of this town any longer. In a month's time I shall be settled in Holland. It is cruel to have to put up with Fleury after Dubois, and I am too virtuous to be a Frenchman. We are governed on bad principles, by fools and rogues. I cannot endure it."

"Truly," said my excellent master, "public affairs are badly managed and there are many thieves in office. Power is divided between fools and knaves, and should I ever write on the affairs of the day I should make a small book on the lines of the *Apokolokyntosis* of Seneca the Philosopher, or of our own *Satire Ménippée*, which is fairly pungent. This light and pleasant style suits the subject better than the morose stiltedness of a Tacitus or the patient seriousness of a de Thou. I would make copies of this lampoon which would be passed about under the rose, and it should display a philosophical disdain for mankind. The majority of the people in office would be extremely annoyed, but I think some would taste a secret pleasure in seeing themselves covered with shame. I judge so from what I heard said by a lady

of good birth whose acquaintance I made at Séez during the time when I was the Bishop's librarian. She was growing old, but still thrilled to lascivious memories. For I must tell you that for twenty years she had been the most notorious trollop in Normandy. And when I asked her what had given her the most lively pleasure in life, she answered me: 'To know myself dishonoured.'

"From this reply I gathered that she had some nicety of feeling. I would give as much credit to certain of our ministers, and if ever I write against them it would be to incite them to hug their infamy and viciousness.

"But why postpone the execution of so fine a project? I will ask Monsieur Blaizot at once for half a dozen sheets of paper and set about writing the first chapter of the new *Ménippée*."

He was already reaching out his hand to the astonished Monsieur Blaizot, when Monsieur Jean Hibou stopped him quickly:

"Keep this splendid scheme for Holland, Monsieur l'Abbé," he said, "and come with me to Amsterdam, where I will provide you with the means of livelihood at some coffee-house or bagnio. There you will be free, and of nights you shall write your *Ménippée* at one end of the table, whilst I, at the other, am busy

with my lampoons. They shall be full charged with virus, and who knows but what we may bring about a change in the affairs of the kingdom? Pamphleteers play more part than is thought in the downfall of empires. They prepare the catastrophe which is consummated by a popular revolt."

"What a triumph," he added, in a voice which whistled through his blackened teeth, carious with the bitter humours of his mouth, "what joy if I effected the destruction of one of those ministers, who, like cowards, shut me in the Bastille! Will you not take a share in such good work, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"By no means," replied my good master, "I should be very sorry to change anything in the system of the State, and if I thought that my *Apokolokyntosis* or *Ménippée* could have such a result, I would never write it."

"What!" exclaimed the disappointed pamphleteer, "didn't you tell me but a moment ago, that the present government was wicked?"

"No doubt," said Monsieur l'Abbé, "but I merely imitate the wisdom of that old crone of Syracuse who, at the time when Dionysius treated his people most execrably, went to the temple every day to pray to the gods for the life of the tyrant. Told of this singular

piety, Dionysius wished to know the reason for it. He sent for the good woman, and questioned her :

" She replied, ' I am no longer young and have lived under many tyrants, and I have always observed that a bad one was succeeded by a worse. You are the most detestable that I have yet seen. From which I conclude that your successor will be, if possible, more wicked than yourself, and I pray the gods to give him to us as late as may be.'

" That old woman was very sensible, and I think as she did, Monsieur Jean Hibou, that sheep do well to allow themselves to be sheared by their old shepherd, for fear a younger one should come along, who would but shear them closer."

Monsieur Jean Hibou's gall, stirred by this discourse, spent itself in bitter words :

" What cowardly talk ! What shameful sentiments ! Oh ! Monsieur l'Abbé, what little love you bear to the public good, and how ill you deserve the oak-leaf crown promised by the poets to civic heroes. You should have been born amongst the Turks, amongst the Tartars, slave to a Genghis Khan or a Bajazet, rather than in Europe where principles of public right are taught, and divine philosophy. What ! you endure bad government nor even wish to alter it ! Such sentiments would be punished in

a republic of my making by exile or banishment at least. Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, in the constitution that I meditate, which is to be formulated on the maxims of antiquity, I shall add a clause for the punishment of such bad citizens as you, and I shall proclaim penalties against whomsoever can improve his State but does not do so."

"Eh! eh!" laughed the Abbé, "that is not the way to make me wish to live in your Salentum. What you have let me know of it leads me to think that there would be much constraint there."

Monsieur Jean Hibou replied sententiously: "You would only be constrained to be virtuous."

"Ah, how right that old woman was, and what reason we have to fear a Jean Hibou after a Dubois and a Fleury! What you offer me, my good sir, is a government of violence and hypocrisy, and to hasten this promised good you undertake to make me a keeper of a coffee-house or a bagnio on a canal in Amsterdam! Thank you for nothing! I stick to the Rue St. Jacques, where we drink cool claret and grumble at the ministers. Do you think you can seduce me by the vision of a government of honest men that so hedges in all liberties that no one can enjoy them?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said Jean Hibou, getting

heated, "is it fair to attack a system of State conceived by me in the Bastille, and undisclosed to you?"

"Sir," retorted my excellent master, "I am suspicious of governments born of cabals and rebellions. To be in opposition is a very bad school of government, and wary politicians, who push themselves into office by this means, take great care to govern by rules entirely opposed to those they formerly taught. You need not go to China to see that! They are guided by the same necessities which lay on their predecessors. And they bring nothing new to the task but their inexperience. Which is one reason, sir, which makes me foretell that a new government would be more vexatious than the one it replaces, without being very different. Have we not already put it to the proof?"

"So," said Monsieur Jean Hibou, "you hold by abuses?"

"Such is the case," answered my good master. "Governments are like wines that grow crusted and mellow with age. The roughest lose at length something of their crudity. I fear an empire in the greenness of its youth. I fear the rawness of a republic, and since we must be ill-governed I prefer princes and statesmen in whom the first ardour has cooled off."

Monsieur Jean Hibou, crushing his hat on his nose, bade us good-bye with irritation in his voice.

As soon as he was gone Monsieur Blaizot looked up over his ledgers, and settling his spectacles, said to my excellent master :

"I have been a bookseller for forty years at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, and it is always a fresh pleasure to me to listen to the converse of the learned men who meet in my shop. But I do not greatly care for discussions on public affairs. People get heated, and quarrel to no purpose."

"Moreover," said my good master, "in this subject there is little solid principle."

"There is, at least, one that no man will do well to contest," replied Monsieur Blaizot the bookseller, "and that is that he must be a bad Christian and a bad Frenchman who would deny the virtue of the holy Ampulla of Rheims, by whose unction our kings are made vicars of Jesus Christ for the kingdom of France. Here is the basis of monarchy, which shall never be shaken."

IV

THE AFFAIR OF THE MISSISSIPPI

IT is well known that during the year 1722 the Parliament of Paris sat in judgment on the Mississippi affair, in which were implicated, along with the directors of the Company, a minister of State, secretary to the King, and many sub-inspectors of provinces. The Company was accused of having corrupted the officers of the King and his dominions, who had in reality stripped it with the greed usual to people in office under weak governments. And it is certain that at this period all the springs of government were slackened and warped.

At one of the sittings of this memorable action, Madame de la Morangère, wife of one of the directors of the Mississippi Company, was called before the members of Parliament in the upper chamber. She gave evidence that a Monsieur Lescot, secretary to the

Lieutenant-Criminel,* having sent for her to come in secret to the Châtelet, made her understand that it lay with her entirely to save her husband, who was a fine man and of comely aspect. He said to her, nearly in these terms: "Madame, what vexes the true friends of the King in this business is that the Jansenists are not implicated in it. Jansenists are enemies to the Crown as well as to religion. Help us, Madame, to convict one of them and we will acknowledge the service to the State by giving you back your husband with all his possessions."

When Madame de la Morangère had reported this conversation, which was not intended for the public, the President of the Parliament was obliged to call Monsieur Lescot to the upper chamber, who at first tried to deny it. But Madame de la Morangère had beautiful ingenuous eyes, whose gaze he could not meet. He grew troubled and was confounded. He was a big, villainous-looking, red-haired man like Judas Iscariot. This affair, noticed by the Press, became the talk of Paris. It was spoken of in the salons, on the public walks, at the barbers', and in the coffee-houses. Everywhere Madame de la Morangère gained as much sympathy as Lescot caused disgust.

Public curiosity was still rife when I accompanied

* A stipendiary magistrate.

my good master Monsieur Jérôme Coignard to Monsieur Blaizot's, who, as you know, is a bookseller in the Rue St. Jacques, at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*. In the shop we found Monsieur Gentil, private secretary to one of the ministers of State, whose face was hidden in a book newly come from Holland, and the celebrated Monsieur Roman, who has treated of systems of State in various estimable works. Old Monsieur Blaizot was reading his paper behind the counter.

Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, always avid of news, slid up to him to glean what he could across his shoulder. This man, learned and of so rare a genius, owned nothing of the goods of this world, and when he had drunk his pint at the *Petit Bacchus* he had not a halfpenny left in his pockets to buy a newssheet. Having read the depositions of Madame de la Morangère over Monsieur Blaizot's shoulder, he cried out that it was well, and that it pleased him to see wickedness topple from its high seat under the weak hand of woman, as in wonderful examples witnessed to in Holy Writ.

"This lady," he added, "although allied with public men of whom I do not approve, may be likened unto those strong women lauded in the Book of Kings. She pleases by an uncommon mixture of

straightforwardness and finesse, and I applaud her telling victory."

Monsieur Roman interrupted him :

" Take care, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, stretching out his arm, " take care how you look at this affair from an individual and personal point of view, without troubling yourself as you should do with the public interests that are bound up in it. There are reasons of State in all this, and it is clear that this supreme reason demanded that Madame de la Morangère should not speak, or that her words should not find credence."

Monsieur Gentil lifted his nose from his book. " The importance of this incident," said he, " has been much exaggerated."

" Ah, Mr. Secretary," retorted Monsieur Roman, " we cannot believe that an incident that will lose you your place can be without importance. For you will fall by it, sir, you and your master. For my part, I am full of regrets. But what consoles me for the fall of the Ministry now reeling under the shock is that they were powerless to prevent it."

Monsieur Gentil made us understand by a slight wink that on this point he saw eye to eye with Monsieur Roman.

The latter continued :

"The State is like the human body—all the functions it accomplishes are not noble. Some there are indeed that one must needs hide, I may say the most necessary."

"Ah, Monsieur," said the Abbé, "was it then necessary that Monsieur Lescot should so behave to the unfortunate wife of a prisoner? It was infamous!"

"Oh," said Monsieur Roman, "it was infamous when it was known. Before, it was of no importance. If you wish to enjoy the benefit of being governed, which alone raises mankind above the animals, you must leave, to those who govern, the means of exercising power, and the first of these means is secrecy. That is why popular government, which is the least secret of all, is also the weakest. Do you then think, Monsieur l'Abbé, that you can govern men by virtue? That is a wild dream!"

"I do not think so," replied my good master, "I have noticed in the varied chances of my life that men are evil beasts; one can only control them by force and cunning. But one must be measured and not offend the small amount of good tendencies which mingles with the evil instincts in their minds. For after all, Monsieur, man, all cowardly, stupid, cruel, as he is was made in God's

image, and there remain to him still certain features of his primal shape. "A government drawn from the common stock of average honesty, and that yet scandalises the people, should be deposed."

"Speak lower, Monsieur l'Abbé," said the Secretary.

"The King can do no wrong," said Monsieur Roman, "and your maxims are seditious, Monsieur l'Abbé. You deserve, you and your like, not to be governed at all."

"Oh!" said my good master, "if, as you give us to understand, government consists in swindling, violence, and exactions of all kinds, there is not much fear that this threat will take effect, and we shall find, for long enough yet, ministers of State and governors of provinces to carry on our affairs. Only I should much like to see others in place of these. The new-comers could not be worse than the old, and who knows but that they may be even slightly better?"

"Take care!" said Monsieur Roman, "take care! What is admirable in a state, is succession and continuity, and if there is no perfect state in this world, it is because, according to my idea, the flood in the time of Noah disordered the trans-

mission of crowns. It is a confusion we have not quite set straight to this day."

"Monsieur," retorted my good master, "you are amusing with your theories. The history of the world is full of revolutions. One sees but civil wars, tumults, and seditions, caused by the wickedness of princes, and I know not which to admire the most nowadays, the impudence of the rulers, or the patience of the people."

The secretary complained then that Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard overlooked the benefits of royalty, and Monsieur Blaizot represented to us that it was not fitting to contend about public matters in a bookseller's shop.

When we were outside, I pulled my good master by the sleeve.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I said, "have you then forgotten the old woman of Syracuse, that you now want to change the tyrant?"

"Tournebroche, my son," answered he, "I acknowledge with a good grace that I have fallen into a contradiction. But this ambiguity, that you justly point out in my words, is not as evil as that called antinomy by the philosophers. Charron, in his book on 'Wisdom,' affirms that antinomies exist which cannot be resolved. For my part, I am

no sooner plunged in meditations of the kind than I see in my mind's eye half a dozen of these she-devils take each other by the nose and make pretence to tear each other's eyes out, and one sees at once that one would never come to the end of reconciling these obstinate shrews. I lose all hope of making them agree, and it is their fault if I have not much advanced metaphysics. But in the present case the contradiction, my son, is merely apparent. My reason always sides with the old woman of Syracuse. I think to-day what I thought yesterday. Only I have let my feelings run away with me and have yielded to passion as do the vulgar."

V

EASTER EGGS

MY father kept a cook-shop in the Rue St. Jacques opposite to St. Benoît-le-Bétourné. I do not pretend that he had any affection for Lent; the sentiment would not have been natural in a cook. But he observed the fasts and days of abstinence like the good Christian that he was. For lack of money to buy a dispensation from the Archbishop he supped off haddock on fast-days, with his wife, his son, his dog, and his usual guests, of whom the most assiduous was my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard. My pious mother would not have allowed Miraut, our watch-dog, to gnaw a bone on Good Friday. That day she put neither meat nor fat in the poor animal's mess. In vain did Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard represent to her that this was doing the wrong thing, and that in all justice, Miraut, who had no

share in the sacred mysteries of redemption, ought not to suffer in his allowance.

"My good woman," said this great man, "it is fitting, that we, as members of the Church, should sup off haddock; but there is a certain superstition, impiety, temerity—nay even sacrilege—to associate a dog, as you do, with these mortifications of the flesh, made infinitely precious by the interest God Himself takes in them, and which that interest apart would be contemptible and ridiculous. It is an abuse, which your simplicity renders innocent, but which would be criminal in a Divine, or even in a judiciously minded Christian. Such a practice, my good lady, leads straight to the most shocking heresy. It tends to no less than the upholding of the theory that Jesus Christ died for dogs even as for the sons of Adam. And nothing is more contrary to the Scriptures."

"That may be," replied my mother. "But if Miraut ate meat on Good Friday I should fancy to myself that he was a Jew, and have a horror of him. Is that committing a sin, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

My excellent master answered gently, taking a drink of wine:

"Ah dear creature, without deciding at this moment if you sin or if you do not, I can tell you for a

certainty that there is no malice in you, and I believe more surely in your eternal salvation than in that of five or six bishops and cardinals of my acquaintance, who have nevertheless written fine treatises on the canon law."

Miraut swallowed his mess sniffing at it, as if he did not like it, and my father went off with Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard to take a stroll to the *Petit Bacchus*.

Thus passed the holy time of Lent at the *Sign of the Reine Pédauque*. But from early Easter morn, when the bells of St. Benoît-le-Bétourné announced the joyful Resurrection, my father spitted chickens, ducks, and pigeons by the dozen, and Miraut, in the corner by the glowing fire-place, sniffed the good smell of fat, wagging his tail with grave and pensive joy. Old, tired, and nearly blind, he still relished the joys of this life, whose ills he accepted with a resignation which made them less unkind for him. He was a sage, and I am not surprised that my mother associated such a reasonable creature in her good works.

Having heard High Mass we dined in the savoury-smelling shop. My father brought to this repast a pious joy. He had commonly, as companions, a few attorneys' clerks, and my good master Monsieur

l'Abbé Coignard. This year of grace 1725, at Easter-tide, I remember, my good master brought Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, whom he had dragged from a loft in the Rue des Maçons, where this learned man wrote, day and night, news of the republic of letters for Dutch publishers. On the table a mound of red eggs rose from a wire basket. And when Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard had said the Benedicite, these eggs formed the topic of conversation.

"One reads in Ælius Lampridus," said Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, "that a hen owned by the father of Alexander Severus laid a red egg on the birthday of that child destined to Empire."

"This Lampridus, who had not much intelligence," said my good master, "had better have left such a tale to the old wives who have spread it abroad. You have too much good sense, sir, to deduce from this ridiculous fable the Christian custom of serving red eggs on Easter Day?"

"I do not indeed believe," replied Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, "that this usage is derived from the egg of Alexander Severus. The only conclusion that I wish to draw from the fact, as reported by Lampridus, is that a red egg, among the heathen, presaged supreme power. For the rest," he added,

"that egg must have been reddened in some manner, for hens do not lay red eggs."

"Excuse me," said my mother, who was standing by the fire-place decorating the dishes, "in my childhood I saw a black hen who laid eggs shading into brown; that is why I am ready to believe that there are hens whose eggs are red, or of a colour approaching red, as for instance brick-colour."

"That is quite possible," said my good master, and Nature is more diverse and varied in her productions than we commonly believe. There are oddities of every sort in the generating of animals, and one sees in natural-history collections far stranger monsters than a red egg."

"For instance, they keep a calf with five feet, and a child with two heads, in the King's collection," said Monsieur Nicolas Cerise.

"They can better that at Auneau, near Chartres," said my mother, putting on the table, as she spoke, a dozen strings of sausages and cabbage, whence a pleasing odour rose up to the joists of the ceiling. "I saw there, gentlemen, a new-born infant with goose-feet and a serpent's head. The midwife who received it got such a shock that she threw it in the fire."

"Be careful," said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "be careful, for man is born of woman to serve

God, and it is unimaginable that he could serve Him with a serpent's head, and it follows therefore that there are no children of the kind, and that your midwife was dreaming or making fun of you."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, with a slight smile. "You have seen as I have, in the King's collection, a bi-sexual fœtus with four legs, preserved in a jar filled with spirits of wine, and in another jar, a child without a head and with an eye over the navel. Could these monsters serve God any better than the child with the serpent's head our hostess speaks of? And what is one to say of those who have two heads, so that one does not know whether they have two souls? Acknowledge, Monsieur l'Abbé, that nature, while amusing herself with such cruel sport, puzzles the theologian no little?"

My good master had already opened his mouth to speak, and doubtless he would have entirely demolished the objection of Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, had not my mother, whom nothing could stop when she wanted to speak anticipated him by saying very loudly that the child at Auneau was no human creature, and it was the devil himself who had fathered it on a baker's wife. "And the proof is," she added, "that no one thought

of having it baptized, and that it was buried in a napkin at the bottom of the enclosed garden. If it had been a human being it would have been buried in consecrated ground. When the devil fathers a child it takes the shape of an animal."

"My good woman," replied Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "it is marvellous that a villager should know more of the devil than a Doctor of Divinity. I admire the way you interest yourself in the matron of Auneau, to the extent of knowing if such fruit of a woman is one with mankind, redeemed by the blood of God. Believe me, these devilries are but unclean fancies which you should purge from your mind. It is not written in the Fathers that the devil fathers children on poor girls. All these tales of satanic fornication are disgusting imaginings, and it is a disgrace that the Jesuits and Dominicans have written treatises on them."

"You speak well, Abbé," said Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, impaling a sausage from the dish. "But you give no answer to what I said, that the children born without heads are far from being adapted to the destiny of mankind, which, the Church tells us, is to know God and to serve Him and to love Him, and in that, as in the amount of germs which

are wasted, nature is not, speaking plainly, sufficiently theological and Christian. I may add that she exhibits no religious spirit in any of her acts, and seems to ignore her God. That is what frightens me, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Oh!" cried my father, waving on the end of his fork a drum-stick of the chicken he was carving, "Oh! this is indeed gloomy and dreary talk, ill-suited to the feast we celebrate to-day. And it is my wife who is to blame, who offers us a child with a serpent's head as if it were an agreeable dish for honest company. That out of my beautiful red eggs should come so many diabolical tales!"

"Ah, mine host," said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard. "It is true that everything comes out of the egg. From this idea the heathens have drawn many philosophical fables. But that from eggs, so Christian under their antique purple as those we have just eaten, should escape such a flight of wild impieties, that is what amazes me."

Monsieur Nicolas Cerise looked at my good master, winking his eye, and said, with a thin laugh:

"Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, these eggs, whose beetroot-tinted shells lie scattered on the floor under

our feet, are not in their essence as Christian and Catholic as it pleases you to think them. Easter Eggs, on the contrary, are of heathen origin, and recall, at the time of spring equinox, the mysterious burgeoning of life. It is an ancient symbol which has been preserved in the Christian religion."

"One might equably reasonably uphold," said my good master, "that it is a symbol of the Resurrection of Christ. I, for one, have no wish to load religion with symbolical subtleties. I would most willingly believe that the pleasure of eating eggs, denied to us during Lent, is the sole reason why on this day they appear on the tables with honour and clothed in royal purple. But no matter, these are mere trifles, serving to amuse the learned and the book-men. What is worth considering in your talk, Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, is that you bring into opposition nature and religion, and you want to make them inimical to each other. Impiety! Monsieur Nicolas Cerise. And so horrible that this good fellow of a cook trembles at it without understanding it. But I am not a whit disturbed; and such arguments cannot, even for one minute, seduce a mind which knows how to govern itself.

"In truth, Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, you have proceeded by that rational and scientific route which

is but a narrow, short, and dirty blind-alley, on coming to the end of which we break our noses ingloriously. You argue in the manner of a thoughtful apothecary, who thinks he understands nature because he can smell some of her manifestations. And you have concluded that natural generation producing monsters is no part of the secret of God, Who creates men to celebrate His glory, '*Pulcher hymnus Dei homo immortalis*': It was very generous of you to omit mention of the new-born who die as soon as they see the light, of the mad, and the imbecile, and all creatures who are not, from your point of view, what Lactantius calls a worthy hymn to God, *Pulcher hymnus Dei.* But what do you know of it all, and what do we know of it all, Monsieur Nicolas Cerise? You take me for one of your readers at Amsterdam or at the Hague, to wish to make me believe that the unintelligibility of nature is an objection to our holy Christian faith. Nature, sir, shows to our eyes but a succession of incoherent images in which it is impossible for us to find a meaning, and I grant you, that according to her, and in tracking her footsteps, I fail to discern in the child that is born either the Christian, the man, or even the individual; and the flesh is an absolutely indecipherable hieroglyphic.

But that matters nothing, and we are looking at the wrong side of the tapestry. Do not let us fix our gaze on that, but understand that from that side we can know nothing. Let us turn entirely to the understandable, which is the human soul united to God.

"You are amusing, Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, with your nature and your generation. You are, to my mind, like some good fellow who thinks he has surprised the King's secrets because he has seen the paintings which decorate the council chamber. In the same way that the secrets are to be found in the conversation of the King and his ministers, so is the fate of man in the thought which proceeds alike from the created and the Creator. All the rest is but folly and amusement, fit to divert the loungers, of whom one sees many in the Academies. Do not talk to me of nature, except of what one sees at the *Petit Bacchus* in the person of Catherine the lace-maker, who is plump and well-made.

"And you, mine host," added Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "give me to drink, for I have a thirst on me, all the fault of Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, who thinks nature an atheist. And, by a thousand devils, so she is, and perforce must be, to some extent; and if at all times she declares the glory of God,

it is without knowing it, for there is no knowledge, save in the mind of man, which alone proceeds from both the finite and the infinite. Give me to drink!"

My father poured out a brimming glass for my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, and for Monsieur Nicolas Cerise, and forced them to clink their glasses, which they did right heartily, for they were good fellows.

VI

THE NEW MINISTRY

R. SHIPPEN, who practised the trade of a locksmith at Greenwich, dined every day, during his short stays in Paris, at the *Sign of the Reine Pédauque*, in the company of his landlord and of my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard.

That day, at dessert, having called for a bottle of wine as was his custom, lighted his pipe, and drawn from his pocket the London Gazette, he set himself peaceably to smoke, drink, and read ; then folding his paper, and placing his pipe on the edge of the table, he said :

" Gentlemen, the Government is defeated."

" Oh ! " said my good master, " it is of no consequence."

" Pardon me," said Mr. Shippen, " it *is* a matter of consequence, for the former ministry being Tory,

the new one will be Whig, and moreover, everything that happens in England is of importance."

"Sir," replied my good master, "We have seen greater changes than that in France. We have seen the four officials known as Secretaries of State replaced by six or seven Councils of ten members apiece, and the Secretaries of State hewn in ten pieces and then re-established in their original shape. At each of these changes there were some who swore that all was lost, and others that all was saved. And rhymes were made about it all. For my part, I take little interest in what is done in the King's cabinet, for I notice that the course of life is in no way changed, and after reforms men are as before, selfish, avaricious, cowardly, cruel, stupid and furious by turns, and there is always a nearly even number of births, marriages, cuckolds, and gallows-birds, in which is made manifest the beautiful ordering of our society. This condition is stable, sir, and nothing could shake it, for it is founded on human misery and imbecility, and those are foundations which will never be wanting. The whole edifice gains from them a strength which defies the efforts of the worst of princes, and of the ignorant crowd of officials who assist them."

My father, who, larding-pin in hand, was listening

to this conversation, made this amendment with deferential firmness : that good ministers are to be found, and that he could remember one, who had recently died, as the author of a very wise regulation protecting cooks against the devouring ambitions of butchers and confectioners.

"That may be, Monsieur Tournebroche," retorted my good master, "and it is a matter to discuss with confectioners. But what is necessary to consider is that empires subsist, not by the wisdom of certain Secretaries of State, but by the needs of millions of men, who, to live, work at all sorts of lowly and ignoble arts such as industry, commerce, agriculture, war, and navigation. These individual hardships make up what is called the greatness of a people, and neither prince nor ministers have a part in them."

"You are mistaken, sir," said the Englishman, "ministers do their part by making laws, of which a single one may enrich or ruin the nation."

"Oh, as for that," replied the Abbé, "it is a risk that must be run. Since the affairs of the State are so widespread that the intelligence of a single man cannot embrace them, we must forgive ministers for working blindly thereat, and harbour no resentment against the good or evil they do, but suppose that they moved as in a game of blind-man's buff.

Moreover, this evil and this good would seem less to us if estimated without superstition, and I doubt, sir, if a general order could have the effect that you mention. I judge by the women of the town, who are themselves alone, in a year, the object of more regulations than are put forth in a century for all other classes in the kingdom, and who, none the less, carry on their business with an exactitude based on the forces of nature. They laugh at the simple blackening which a magistrate named Nicodème * meditates in regard to them, and make fun of Monsieur Baiselance, the mayor † who has formed, along with several attorneys and treasury officials, an impotent association for their ruin. I can tell you that Catherine, the lace-maker, is ignorant of the very name of Baiselance, and that she will remain ignorant of it until her end, which will be a Christian one—at least I hope so. And I infer that all the laws with which a minister swells his portfolio, are but useless papers which neither enable us to live nor prevent us from living."

"Monsieur Coignard," said the locksmith from Greenwich, "it is easy to see by the baseness of your

* *Vide post*, p. 174.

† Monsieur Baiselance or Baisselance, succeeded Montaigne, considerably later, as Mayor of Bordeaux. [A. F.]

talk that you are accustomed to servitude. You would speak differently of statesmen and laws if you had, as I have, the happiness to enjoy a free Government."

"Mr. Shippen," said the Abbé, "true liberty is that of a soul enfranchised from the vanities of this world. As for public liberty, I do not care a cherry-stone for it! It is an illusion which flatters the vanity of the ignorant."

"You confirm me in the idea," said Mr. Shippen, "that the French are mere monkeys."

"Allow me," said my father, brandishing his larding-pin, "there are lions also to be found amongst them."

"Only citizens fail you then," retorted Mr. Shippen. "All the world discusses public matters in the Tuileries Gardens, without one reasonable notion resulting from their squabbles. Your population is but a turbulent wild-beast show."

"Sir," said my good master, "it is true that when human societies attain to a certain degree of refinement, they turn aside from the manners of a menagerie, and that it is evidence of progress to live in a cage, instead of wandering miserably in the woods. And this tendency is common to all the countries of Europe."

"Sir," said the Greenwich locksmith, "England

is no menagerie, for she has a Parliament on which her Ministers depend."

"Sir," said the Abbé, "it may be that one day France will also have Ministers obedient to a Parliament. Better still. Time brings many changes in the constitution of empires, and one can fancy that, in a century or two, France may adopt popular government. But, sir, secretaries of State, who count for little in our day, will then no longer count for anything. For instead of depending on the King, from whom they derive their period and power, they will be subject to public opinion, and will share its instability. It is to be remarked that statesmen only exercise their power, with any force, in absolute monarchies, as is seen in the example of Joseph the son of Jacob, Pharaoh's Minister, and in that of Haman, Minister to Ahasuerus, who played a great *rôle* in the government; the first in Egypt, the second among the Persians. It needed the coincidence of a strongly established crown and a weak king, in France, to strengthen the arm of a Richelieu. Under popular government, ministers will become so impotent that even their wickedness and stupidity will do harm no more.

"They will receive from the general assemblies only an uncertain and precarious authority; unable

to indulge in far-flung hopes and vast schemes, they will spend their ephemeral existence in wretched expedients. They will grow jaundiced in the unhappy effort to read their orders on the five hundred faces of a crowd, ignorant and at cross-purposes; they will languish in restless impotence. They will become unused to foresee anything or prepare anything, and they will only study intrigue and falsehood. They will fall from so low that their fall will do them no harm, and their names, chalked on the walls by little scribbling school-boys, will make the bourgeois laugh."

Mr. Shippen shrugged his shoulders at this speech.

"It's possible," he said, "I can well enough imagine the French in such a state."

"Oh," said my good master, "in that state the world will go on its way. We shall still have to eat, it is the great need which gives rise to all others."

Mr. Shippen said, shaking out his pipe:

"In the meanwhile they promise us a minister who will favour the farmers, but who will ruin trade if he has his way. I must look to it, for I am a locksmith at Greenwich, and I shall call all the locksmiths together and address them."

He put his pipe in his pocket and went out without saying good-night to us.

VII

THE NEW MINISTRY (*concluded*)

AFTER supper, as it was a fine night, Abbé Jérôme Coignard took a turn in the Rue St. Jacques where the lamps were being lighted, and I had the honour to accompany him. He stopped under the porch of St. Benoît-le-Bétourné, and pointing with a plump hand, shaped equally well for scholastic demonstration and for delicate caress, at one of the stone benches ranged on either side beneath the antique statues fouled with obscene scrawls. "Tournebroche, my son," said he, "if you are of the same turn of mind we will take the air for a moment or two on one of these well-polished old stones where so many beggars before us have rested from their troubles. Perchance some of those countless poor creatures have here held quite excellent talk among themselves. . . . We shall run the risk of catching fleas. But you, my son, being at the

amorous age, may believe they are Jeannette, the viol player's, or Catherine, the lace-maker's, who are in the habit of bringing their gallants here at dusk ; and their bite will seem sweet to you. That is an illusion permitted to your youth. For me, who am past the age of these charming follies, I shall tell myself that one must not give way too much to the weakness of the flesh, and that a philosopher must not trouble about fleas which, like all else in the world, are among God's mysteries."

So saying, he sat down, taking care not to disturb a small Savoyard and his marmoset who were sleeping their innocent sleep on the old stone bench. I sat down by his side. The conversation which had occupied the dinner-hour came back to my mind :

" Monsieur l'Abbé," I asked this good master, " you were speaking a while ago of ministers. Those of the King did not impress you by their clothes, nor by their coaches, nor by their genius, and you judged them with the freedom of a mind which nothing astonishes. Then, considering the lot of these officials in a popular state (should it ever be established), you showed them to us as wretched to excess and less worthy of praise than of pity. Are you then, perhaps, opposed to free governments as revived from the republics of antiquity ? "

"I am personally inclined to love popular government, my son," answered my good master. "My humbleness of condition draws me towards it, and Holy Writ, of which I have made some study, confirms me in this preference, for the Lord said in Ramah: 'The people of Israel desired a king that I should not reign over them.' And He said, 'Now this will be the manner of king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them for himself and for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariot. And he will take your daughters to be confectioners and to be cooks and to be bakers.' *Filias quoque vestras faciet sibi unguentarias et focarias et panificas.* That is said expressly in the Book of Kings, and one still sees that the monarch brings his subjects two grievous gifts: war and tithes. And if it be true that monarchies are of Divine institution it is equally true that they present all the characteristics of human imbecility and wickedness. It is credible that Heaven has given them to the people for their chastisement: *Et tribuit eis petitionem eorum.*

'Often in His anger He accepts our sacrifice
His gifts are often the penalty of our crimes.'

I could quote, my son, many fine passages from old authors where the hatred of tyranny is described with

admirable vigour. Finally, I think I have always shown some strength of soul in disdaining the pride of the flesh, and have, quite as much as the Jansenist Blaise Pascal, the disgust for swashbucklers. All these reasons speak to my heart and to my intelligence in favour of popular government. I have made it the subject of meditations, which one day I shall put down in writing, in a work of that kind of which they say that one must break the bone to find the marrow. I want you to understand from that, that I shall compose a new *Praise of Folly* which will appear frivolity to the frivolous, but the wise will recognise wisdom under the cap and bells. In short, I shall be a second Erasmus; following his example I shall teach the people by a learned and judicious playfulness. And you will find, my son, in one chapter of this treatise, every enlightenment on the subject that interests you; you will acquire a knowledge of the condition of statesmen placed in dependence on popular states or assemblies."

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé!" I cried, "how impatient I am to read this book! When do you think it will be written?"

"I do not know," replied my good master, "and truth to tell I think I shall never write it. Plans made by man are often thwarted. We have no

power over the smallest particle of the future, and this uncertainty, common to Adam's race, is carried to extremes in my case by a long series of misfortunes. That is why, my son, I despair of ever being able to compose this respectable jest. Without giving you a political treatise, seated on this bench, I will tell you at least how I came to have the idea of introducing into my imaginary book a chapter wherein would appear the weakness and spite of servants taken on by good man Demos when master, if he ever become so, of which I am not quite decided, for I do not meddle in prophecy, leaving this preoccupation to maidens who vaticinate after the manner of the sibyls such as the Cumean, the Persian, or the Tiburtine, '*quarum insigne virginitas est et virginitatis præmium divinatio.*' Let us then turn to our subject. It is nearly twenty years since I lived in the pleasant town of Séez, where I was librarian to the Bishop. Some travelling actors, who chanced to pass, gave a fairly good tragedy in a barn; I went to it and saw a Roman emperor appear whose wig was decorated with more laurels than a ham at the fair of Saint Laurence. He seated himself in a curule chair; his two ministers, in court dress with their impressive insignia, took their place on either side on stools, and the three formed a

Council of State before the footlights, which stank exceedingly. Eventually, during the course of their deliberations, one of the councillors drew a satirical portrait of the consuls during the latter period of the Republic. He showed them as impatient to use and abuse their temporary power—enemies of the public good, and jealous of their successors, in whom they were only assured of seeing accomplices to their robbery and peculation. This is how he spoke :

'These little monarchs, reigning for a year,
Seeing the limit of their rule so near,
Spoil the green fruit, of fairest seed and growth,
Rather than leave what they to leave are loath.
Since they have little part in what they wield,
Take a full harvest from the public field,
Assured of pardon, for their easy heirs
Hope for like treatment when the turn is theirs.' *

"Well, my son, these lines which, by their sententious precision recall the quatrains of Pibrac, are more excellent as regards meaning than the rest of

* Ces petits souverains qu'on fait pour une année,
Voyant d'un temps si court leur puissance bornée,
Des plus heureux desseins font avorter le fruit,
De peur de le laisser à celui que les suit.
Comme ils ont peu de part aux biens dont ils ordonnent,
Dans le champ du public largement ils moissonnent,
Assurés que chacun leur pardonne aisément,
Espérant à son tour un pareil traitement.

the tragedy, which smells a little too much of the pompous frivolities of the princes' Fronde, and is altogether spoilt by the heroic love-affairs of a kind of Duchesse de Longueville, who appears under the name of Émilie. I took care to remember them so as to meditate upon them. For one finds beautiful maxims even in works written for the theatre. What the poet says in these eight lines, on consuls of the Roman Republic, applies equally well to ministers of democracies whose power is precarious.

" They are weak, my son, because they depend on a popular assembly, incapable equally of the large and profound views of a politician, and of the innocent stupidity of an idle king. Ministers are only great if they second, as did Sully, an intelligent prince, or if, like Richelieu, they take the place of the monarch. And who does not feel that Demos will have neither the obstinate prudence of a Henry IV, nor the favourable inertia of a Louis XIII? Even supposing he knows what he wants he will not know how to carry out his wishes, nor even if they be feasible. Ordering ill, he will be badly obeyed, and will always believe himself betrayed. The deputies he will send to his States-General will keep up his illusions by ingenious lies up to the moment of falling under his unjust or

legitimate suspicions. These states will perpetuate the same confused mediocrity as the mob from which they spring. They will revolve multiple and obscure thoughts. They will give the heads of government the task of carrying out vague wishes of which they themselves are not conscious, and their ministers, more unhappy than Œdipus in the fable, will be devoured, each in turn, by the Sphinx with a hundred heads for not having guessed the riddle of which the Sphinx herself was ignorant. The source of their greatest unhappiness will be their enforced resignation to impotence, and to talk instead of action. They will become rhetoricians and very bad rhetoricians, for talent, bringing some clarity with it, will be their undoing. They will have to train themselves to speak without saying anything, and the least foolish amongst them will be condemned to lie more than all the others. So, the most intelligent will become the most despicable. And if any are to be found clever enough to conclude treaties, regulate finance, and see to business, their knowledge will serve them nothing, for time will fail them, and time is the stuff of great undertakings.

"These humiliating conditions will discourage the good and lend ambition to the bad. From all sides, ambitious incompetence will rise from the depth of

struggling villages to the first posts in the State, and as probity is not natural to mankind, but must be cultivated with great care and long-continued artifice, we shall see clouds of peculators fall on the public treasury. The evil will be much increased by the outburst of scandal, for, as it is difficult to hide anything under popular government, by the fault of some all will become suspect.

"I do not conclude from this, my son, that people will be more unhappy then than they are now, I have told you often enough in our former conversations that I do not think the fate of a nation depends on its prince and its ministers, and it is ascribing too much virtue to laws to make them the source of general prosperity or unhappiness. Nevertheless, the multitude of laws is grievous, and I also fear that the States-General will abuse their legislative powers.

"It is the harmless foible of Colin and Jeannot to frame laws while they keep their sheep, and to say: 'If I were king!' When Jeannot is king he will promulgate more edicts in a year than the Emperor Justinian codified during all his reign. It is in that direction, it seems to me, that Jeannot's reign will prove formidable. But that of kings and emperors was usually so bad one could not fear a worse, and Jeannot, no doubt, will not commit

many more follies, nor wickednesses, than all those princes girt with the double or triple crown, who, since the deluge, have covered the world with blood and destruction. His very incapacity and turbulence will have this much good in them that they will render impossible those learned correspondences between country and country we call diplomacy, which end in nothing but in the artistic lighting-up of useless and disastrous wars. The ministers of good man Demos unceasingly kicked, hustled, humiliated, thrown down and assailed with more rotten apples and eggs than the worst harlequin in a booth at a fair, will have no leisure to prepare carnage politely, in the secrecy and peace of the cabinet, on the board of green cloth, by conferences in regard to what is called the balance of Europe, which is but the happy hunting-ground of the diplomat. There will be no more foreign policy, and that will be a great thing for unhappy humanity."

At these words my good master rose up, and continued as follows : "It is time to go in, my son, for I feel the dew penetrate by reason that my clothes are in holes in various places. Also, by remaining any longer under this porch, we risk frightening away the lovers of Catherine and Jeannette, who here await the hour of tryst."

VIII

THE CITY MAGISTRATES

HAT evening we betook ourselves, my master and I, to the arbour of the *Petit Bacchus*, where we found Catherine the lace-maker, the lame cutler, and the father who begot me. They were all seated at the same table before a jug of wine, of which they had taken enough to be pleasant and sociable.

Two magistrates had just been elected according to form, out of four, and my father was talking of it, according to the measure of his lights and his talents.

" The pity is," said he, " that these city magistrates are gentlemen of the long robe, and not cooks, and that they hold their magistracy from the king, and not from the tradesmen, notably not from the corporation of Parisian cooks of which I am the banner-bearer. If they were of my choosing they

would abolish tithes and the salt tax, and we should all be happy. . . . At any rate, if the world does not walk backwards like a crab, a day will come when magistrates will be elected by the tradesmen."

"No doubt," said Monsieur l'Abbé, "magistrates will one day be elected by the masters and their apprentices."

"Mind what you are saying, Monsieur l'Abbé," said my father anxiously, and drawing his brows together. "When apprentices mix themselves up with the election of magistrates all will be lost. In the days when I was apprenticed I thought of nothing but of misappropriating my master's wife and goods. But since I own a shop and a wife I attend to the public interest, in which my own is bound up."

Lesturgeon, our landlord, brought a jug of wine. He was a small, red-haired man, quick, and rough.

"You speak of the new magistrates," he said, his hands on his hips, "I only wish them as much wisdom as the old ones, who were nevertheless not very knowing about the public welfare. But they were beginning to learn their business. You know, Monsieur Léonard (he spoke to my father), the school where the children of the Rue St. Jacques go to learn their alphabet, is built of wood, and a slow match and a few shavings would suffice to make it

blaze like a veritable midsummer night's bonfire. I warned the gentlemen of the Hôtel de Ville about it. My letter did not err in style for I had it written for sixpence by a scrivener who has a stall under the Val-de-Grace. I represented to the magistrate that all the small boys of the neighbourhood were in daily danger of being grilled, like chitterlings, which was a matter for thought, having regard to the sensibility of mothers. The magistrate who has to do with the schools answered politely, after a year had elapsed, that the danger run by the small boys of the Rue St. Jacques roused all his solicitude, and that he was eager to remove it, and, in consequence he was sending a fire-engine to the afore-mentioned pupils. 'The king,' he added, 'having in his goodness built a fountain in commemoration of his victories, at two hundred paces from the school, water would not be lacking, and the children will learn in a few days to manage the engine which the town consents to grant them free.'

"On reading this letter I jumped to the ceiling. And returning to Val-de-Grace I dictated a reply to the scrivener as follows:

"'Honoured City-magistrate—Sir, in the schoolhouse of the Rue St. Jacques are two hundred youngsters, of whom the oldest is but seven years of

age. These are fine firemen, sir, to work your fire-engine. Take it back again, and have a school-house built of stone and rubble.'

"This letter, like the former one, cost me sixpence, including the seal. But I did not lose my money, for, after twenty months had passed, I received a reply in which the magistrate assured me that the youngsters of the Rue St. Jacques were worthy of the care of the Parisian magistrates, who would prudently watch over their safety. We remain there. If my magistrate leaves his post I shall have to begin all over again, and pay a shilling once more to the scrivener in the Val-de-Grace. That is why, Monsieur Léonard, although I am firmly convinced there are faces at the town-hall which would be better fitted to play the buffoon at a fair, I have not the slightest desire to see new faces there, and I particularly wish to keep him of the fire-engine."

"For my part," said Catherine, it is the *Lieutenant-Criminel* I have a grudge against. He allows Jeannette, the viol player, to prowl about every day, at twilight, under the porch of St. Benoît-le-Bétourné. It is a disgrace. She walks through the streets with a kerchief tied round her head, and trails her dirty skirts through every gutter in the place. The public

places should be reserved for girls well turned-out enough to show themselves with credit."

"Oh! I reckon the pavement belongs to all the world," said the lame cutler. "And one of these days I shall follow the example of our landlord, Lesturgeon, and go to the scrivener in the Val-de-Grace to get him to draw up, in my name, a fine petition in favour of poor hawkers. I cannot push my cart into a good position but I am at once bothered by the police, and as soon as a lackey or a couple of servant-girls stop at my stall, a big, black rascal turns up and orders me, in the name of the law, to go and undo my bundle elsewhere. Sometimes I am on ground rented by the market people, at others, I find myself a near neighbour of Monsieur Leborgne, sworn cutler. Another time I must yield the pavement to the carriage of a bishop or a prince. And there I am, getting into my harness and pulling at the straps, happy if the lackeys and the chamber-maids have not carried off without payment, profiting by my awkwardness, a needle-case, some scissors, or a fine blade from Chatellerault. I am sick of suffering tyranny. I am sick of experiencing the injustice of the justiciaries. I feel a great desire to revolt."

"I know from that sign," said my good master, "that you are a magnanimous cutler."

"I am not at all magnanimous, Monsieur l'Abbé," modestly replied the cripple, "I am vindictive, and resentment has pushed me to sell, in secret, songs written against the king, his mistresses, and his ministers. I keep a fairly good assortment in the tilt of my cart. Do not betray me. That of the twelve reed-pipes is admirable."

"I will not betray you," answered my father, "a good song is worth a glass of wine to me, and even more, I do not say anything either about the knives, and I am glad, my good fellow, that you sell yours, for all the world must live. But acknowledge that one cannot allow wandering hawkers to enter into competition with tradesmen who rent a shop and pay taxes. Nothing is more contrary to law and order. The impudence of these draggle-tails is unspeakable. How far would it not go were it not checked. Last year did not a peasant from Montrouge come to a stop in front of the *Reine Pédauque* with his little cart full of pigeons that he was selling, ready cooked, for two liards and a sou cheaper than I sell mine! And the bumpkin cried, in a voice fit to crack the windows of my shop, 'Beautiful pigeons for five sous.' I threatened him twenty times with my larding-pin. But he answered me, stupidly, that the street belonged to all the world. I made a complaint to the *Lieutenant-*

Criminel who saw justice done, and rid me of the villain. I do not know what has become of him, but I owe him a grudge for the harm he did me, for the sight of my usual customers, buying his pigeons, by couples, nay even by half-dozens, gave me an attack of jaundice, from the effect of which I became melancholy for a long time. I wish they'd stick as many feathers on his body, with glue, as he had plucked from the winged creatures he sold ready-cooked in my very face, and that thus be-feathered from head to foot he was led through the streets at the tail of his cart."

"Monsieur Léonard," said the lame cutler, "you are hard on poor people. It is thus the unfortunate are driven to desperation."

"Master Cutler, I counsel you," said my good master, laughing, "to order at the Innocents by some paid writer, a satire on Maitre Léonard and to sell it along with your songs on the twelve pipes of King Louis. Our friend here should be celebrated a little, who, in a semi-servile state, aspires, not to freedom but to tyranny. I conclude from all your talking, gentlemen, that the policing of towns is a difficult art, that one must try and reconcile diverse and often contrary interests, that the public welfare is made up of a large number

of private and individual woes, and that in fact, it is already rather wonderful that people shut up within walls do not devour one another. It is a blessing one must attribute to their poltroonery. Public peace is founded simply on the feeble courage of citizens who hold each other in respect by reason of their reciprocal fear. And the prince, in inspiring all with awe, assures to them the inestimable benefit of peace. As to your magistrates, whose power is weak, and who are incapable of serving or of injuring you much, and whose merits consist chiefly in their tall canes and wigs, do not complain overmuch that they are chosen by the king and ranked, or little short of it, since the last reign, with officers of the Crown. Friends of the prince, they are vaguely inimical to all citizens, and this enmity is rendered bearable to each by the perfect equality with which it bears upon all. It is like rain, of which one with another we receive but a few drops. One day, when they are elected by the people (as they tell us they were in the early days of the monarchy) magistrates will have friends and foes in the town. Elected by the shop-people, paying rent and tithes, they will ill-use the hawkers. Elected by the hawkers, they will ill-use the tradesmen. Elected by the artisans, they will be in oppo-

sition to the masters, who make the artisans work. It will be an incessant cause of dispute and quarrels They will form a turbulent council where each will agitate for the interests and passions of his electors. Nevertheless, I fancy they will not make the present magistrates regretted who only depend on the prince. Their clamorous vanity will amuse the citizens who will see themselves as in an enlarging mirror. They will employ mediocre powers after a mediocre fashion. Risen from the mass of the people they will be as incapable of fostering it as of restraining it. The rich will be frightened at their audacity, and the poor will blame their fearfulness, whereas they will really display only noise and impotence. For the rest, they may be equal to common tasks, and to administering the public wealth with that insufficient sufficiency which they always attain to and never get beyond."

"Ouf!" said my father, "you have spoken well, Monsieur l'Abbé—now drink!"

IX

SCIENCE

HAT day we tramped as far as the Pont Neuf, my good master and I, where the recesses were covered with those trestles on which the second-hand booksellers expose a conglomeration of romances and books of devotion. There one may find at twopence apiece the complete *Astrée* and the *Grand Cyrus*, worn and thumbed by provincial readers, with the "Ointment for Burns," and divers works of the Jesuits. My good master was accustomed, in passing, to read some pages of these works, of which he made no purchase, being out of funds, and wisely keeping for the *Petit Bacchus* the sixpence he happened by a rare chance to have in his breeches' pocket. For the rest, he did not thirst to possess the good things of this world, and the best works did not make him envious so long as he could get acquainted with the noble passages in

them, on which he expatiated afterwards with admirable wisdom. The trestles of the Pont Neuf pleased him in that the books were impregnated with the smell of frying from the near neighbourhood of the hot-potato sellers, and this great man inhaled at the same time the welcome fragrance of cooking and of science.

Adjusting his spectacles, he examined the display of a second-hand dealer with the contentment of a happy soul, to which all things are gracious, for all things gain a grace from their reflection in it.

"Tournebroche, my son," he said to me, "there are books to be found on the stall of this good man, fashioned in the days when printing was, so to speak, in its swaddling-clothes, and these books still suffer from the effects of the roughness of our forbears. I find a barbarous chronicle of Monstrelet, an author said to have been more frothy than a pot of mustard, and two or three lives of Ste. Marguerite, which the gossips of old put as a compress on their stomachs during the pains of childbirth. It would be inconceivable that men could be so idiotic as to write and to read similar absurdities, if our holy religion did not teach us that they are born with a germ of imbecility. And as the light of faith has never failed me, not even, happily, in the sins of the couch or of

the table, I can more easily understand their past stupidity than their present intelligence, which, to speak frankly, appears to me illusory and deceptive, as it will seem to future generations, for man is in his essence a stupid animal, and the progress of his mind is but the empty consequence of his restlessness. That is the reason, my son, that I mistrust what they call science and philosophy, which are, to my mind, but an abuse of visions, and fallacious figures, and, in a certain sense, the advantage gained by the evil spirit over the soul. You will understand that I am far from believing all the devilries with which popular credulity frightens itself. I think with the Fathers that temptation is within us, and that we are to ourselves our own demons and bedevilments. But I bear a grudge against Monsieur Descartes and against all the philosophers who, following his example, have searched for a rule of life and the principles of conduct in the knowledge of nature. For, after all, Tournebroche, my son, what is knowledge of nature if it be not a fantasy of the senses? And what does science add to it, I ask you, with its savants, from the time of Gassendi, who was no donkey, and Descartes and his disciples, down to that precious fool, Monsieur de Fontenelle? Large spectacles, my son, spectacles like those which sit on my nose.

All the microscopes and telescopes which we make a show of, what are they but glasses a little clearer than these of mine, that I bought last year at the fair of St. Laurence, of which the glass for the left eye, the one I see the best with, was unhappily cracked this winter by a footstool flung at my head by the lame cutler, who fancied I was kissing Catherine the lace-maker, for he is a coarse man, and utterly obfuscated by his visions of carnal desires. Yes, Tournebroche, my son, what are these instruments with which the savants and the curious fill their galleries and their cabinets? What are spectacles, astrolabes, compasses, if not the means of helping the senses to keep their illusions, and to multiply our fatal ignorance of nature while we multiply our relations with her? The most learned among us differ merely from the ignorant by the faculty they acquire of amusing themselves with manifold and complicated errors. They see the world in a faceted topaz, instead of seeing it as does Madame, your mother, for instance, with the naked eye the good God has given her. But they do not alter their eyes in donning spectacles; they do not alter dimensions in using apparatus proper to the measurement of space; they do not alter the weight of things in using very sensitive scales. They discover new

appearances merely, and are but the plaything of new illusions. That is all! If I were not convinced, my son, of the holy truths of our religion, there would be left to me in this conviction, which I hold, that all human knowledge is but a progress in phantasmagoria, nothing but to throw myself from this parapet into the Seine, which has seen many others drown since she began to flow, or to go and ask of Catherine that form of oblivion from the ills of this world which one finds in her arms, and for which it would be indecent for me to look, in my position, and above all, at my age. I should not know what to believe in the midst of all this apparatus, whose powerful deceptions would increase immeasurably the falsehood of my outlook and I should be an entirely miserable academician."

My good master was talking in this fashion before the first recess to the left, counting from the Rue Dauphine, and he was beginning to frighten the dealer who took him for an exorcist, when he suddenly picked up an old geometry, illustrated with sufficiently bad cuts by Sebastien Leclerc.*

* The geometry of which Jacques Tournebroche speaks is decorated with designs by Sebastien Leclerc which I, on the contrary, admire for their precise elegance and delicate exactitude, but one must endure contradiction (ANATOLE FRANCE).

"Perhaps," he said, "instead of drowning myself in love or in water, if I were not a Christian and a Catholic, I should decide to throw myself into the study of mathematics where the mind finds the aliment of which it is most in need, to wit: sequence and continuity. And I vow that this little book, quite ordinary as it is, gives me a certain good opinion of man's genius."

At these words he opened the treatise by Sebastien Leclerc so widely, at the section concerning triangles, that he nearly broke it clean in two. But soon he flung it down in disgust.

"Alas," he murmured, "numbers depend on time, lines on space, and these again are but human illusions. Without man there is neither mathematics nor geometry, and it is, after all, but a form of knowledge which does not draw us out of ourselves, although it affects an air of quite magnificent independence."

Having spoken, he turned his back on the relieved bookstall-keeper, and drew a long breath.

"Ah! Tournebroche, my son," he continued, "you see me suffering from an ill that I have brought on myself, and burnt with the fiery tunic with which I have been at such pains to clothe and deck myself."

He spoke thus in a fanciful fashion, being in reality clad in a shocking old overcoat generally held together by two or three buttons which, moreover, were not even fastened in their own button-holes, and, as he was accustomed to say laughingly, when one spoke to him of it, it was an adulterous connection, a presentation of city manners ! "

He spoke with warmth :

" I hate science," said he, " for having loved it too much, after the manner of voluptuaries who reproach women with not having come up to the dream they formed of them. I wanted to know everything, and I suffer to-day for my culpable folly. Happy," added he, " oh ! very happy are those good people assembled round that vendor of quack medicines."

And he pointed with his hand to the lackeys, the chambermaids, and the porters of St. Nicolas, forming a circle round a practitioner who was giving a demonstration with his attendant.

" Look, Tournebroche," said he, " they laugh heartily when that funny fellow kicks the other man's behind. And in truth it is a pleasant sight, quite spoilt for me by thinking about it, for when one looks for the essence of this foot and the rest of it, one laughs no more. I ought, being a Christian,

to have recognised earlier the malignity of that heathen saying, 'Happy is he who knows the cause of things.' I ought to have shut myself in holy ignorance as in an enclosed garden, and remained as the little children. I should not truly have been amused with the coarse play of this Mondor (this Molière of the Pont Neuf would have had little attraction for me when his prototype already appears to me too scurrilous *), but I should have found pleasure in the plants of my garden, I should have praised God in the flowers and fruit of my apple-trees.

"An immoderate curiosity has led me astray my son; I have lost, in the intercourse with books and learned men, the peace of heart, holy simplicity, and that purity of the simple-minded, all the more admirable in that it falters neither in the tavern nor in the hovel; as may be seen in the example of the lame cutler, and, if I dare say so, in that of your father, the cook, who retains much innocence though drunken and debauched. But it is not thus with him who has studied books. They leave, eternally, a bitter superiority, and a proud sadness."

Talking thus, his speech was cut off by the roll of drums.

* It is a priest speaking thus (ANATOLE FRANCE).

X

THE ARMY

SO, being on the Pont Neuf, we heard the roll of drums. It was the call to attention of a recruiting-sergeant, who, hand on hip, was strutting in an open space in front of a dozen soldiers, who were carrying bread and sausages spiked on the bayonets of their guns. A circle of beggars and youngsters looked on open-mouthed.

He twirled his moustache and made his proclamation.

"Do not let us listen to him," said my good master to me. "It would be waste of time. This sergeant speaks in the king's name. He has no talent for speaking. If it would please you to hear a clever discourse on the same subject you should go into one of those bakehouses on the Quai de la Ferraille, where the crimps cajole the lackeys and bumpkins. These crimps, being rascals, are bound

to be eloquent. I remember, in my youth, in the time of the late king, having heard the most wonderful harangue from the mouth of one of these dealers in men, who kept shop in the Unhappy Valley, which you can see from here, my son. Recruiting men for the Colonies: 'Young men who surround me,' said he, 'you have no doubt heard tell of the Land of Cockayne; it is to India you must go to find this land of fortune, where one is in clover. Do you wish for gold, pearls, diamonds? The roads are paved with them, one has but to stoop to pick them up. And you need not even stoop. The savages will pick them up for you. I do not even mention the coffee, the lemons, pomegranates, oranges, pine-apples, and the thousand delicious fruits which grow without cultivation as in an earthly paradise. Did I speak to women and children I might extol all these dainties, but I am talking to men.' I omit, my son, all that he said about glory, but you may believe he equalled Demosthenes in vigour and Cicero in fluency. The result of his discourse was the sending of five or six unhappy beings to die of yellow fever in the swamps, so true is it that eloquence is a dangerous weapon, and that talent for the arts exercises its irresistible force for evil as well as for good. Thank God, Tournebroche, in

that, not having given you talents of any kind, He does not expose you to become one day the scourge of nations. One recognises the favourites of God by their lack of wit, and I have experienced that the fairly quick intelligence heaven has given me has been but an unceasing cause of danger to my peace in this world and in the next. What would it be if the heart and thought of a Cæsar dwelt in my head and my breast? My desires would recognise no sex and I should be untouched by pity. I should light the fire of inextinguishable war at home and abroad. And yet the great Cæsar had a delicate soul and a certain gentleness. He died decently under the dagger of his virtuous assassins. Day of the Ides of March! Ever fatal day, when sententious brutes destroyed this charming monster! I am fain to weep over the divine Julius along with Venus, his mother, and if I call him a monster it is from affection, for in his equable soul nothing was excessive save power. He had a natural feeling for rhythm and proportion. He found equal pleasure in his youth in the beauties of debauchery or those of grammar. He was an orator, and his beauty doubtless ornamented the purposed dryness of his speeches. He loved Cleopatra with that geometric exactitude that he brought to all his doings. He

put in his writings and in his actions his talent for clarity. He was the friend of order and peace, even in war, sensitive to harmony, and so able a maker of laws that we still live, barbarians as we are, under the majesty of his rule, which has made the world what it is to-day. You see, my son, I am not sparing in praise or love for him. Commander, dictator, sovereign-pontiff he moulded the world with his beautiful hands. And I—I, have been professor of eloquence at the college of Beauvais, secretary to an opera-singer, librarian to my Lord Bishop of Séez, public-writer at the cemetery of the Holy Innocents, and tutor to the son of your father at the sign of the *Reine Pédauque*. I have made a beautiful catalogue of precious manuscripts, I have written some pamphlets, of which it is best not to speak, and set down on wastepaper certain maxims scornfully declined by the booksellers. Nevertheless, I would not change my existence for that of the great Cæsar. It would cost my innocence too much. And I would rather be an obscure man, poor and despised, as indeed I am, than rise to the height whence new destinies are opened to the world through paths of blood.

"This recruiting-sergeant, whom you can hear from here promising these vagabonds a halfpenny a

day, with bread and meat, fills me, my son, with profound reflections on war and armies. I have worked at all trades save that of a soldier, which has always filled me with disgust and terror, by the characteristics of servitude, false glory, and cruelty, attached to it, which are in direct opposition to my peaceful temper, to my wild love of freedom, and to my turn of mind, which, judging sanely of glory, estimates at its rightful worth that attainable by a musketeer. I am not speaking at all of my incorrigible leaning to meditation which would have been exceedingly thwarted by sword and gun exercise. Not desirous of being Cæsar you will easily understand that neither do I wish to be a La Tulipe or Brin-d'Amour. And I own to you, my son, that military service seems to me to be the most terrible pest of civilised nations.

"This is the opinion of a philosopher. There is nothing to show that it will ever be shared by a large number of people. And in actual fact, kings and republics will always find as many soldiers as they want for their parades and their wars. I have read Machiavelli's treatises at Monsieur Blaizot's, at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, where they are all very nicely bound in parchment. They deserve it my son, and, for my part, I hold an

infinitely high opinion of the Florentine secretary, who was the first to remove from political action the legendary foundation of justice, on which they set up nothing but highly respectable villainies. This Florentine, seeing his country at the mercy of its hireling defenders, conceived the idea of a national and patriotic army. He says somewhere in his books that it is right that all citizens should unite for the safety of their country and all be soldiers. I have likewise heard this theory sustained at Monsieur Blaizot's by Monsieur Roman, who is very zealous, as you know, for state rights. He has no care save for the general, and the universal, and will never be content until the day when every private interest is sacrificed to the public interest. Thus Machiavelli and Monsieur Roman wish us all to be soldiers, since we are all citizens. I do not say, as do they, that it is just, nor do I say that it is unjust, because justice and injustice are matter for debate, and it is a subject which only sophists can decide."

"What! my good master," I cried in sorrow and surprise, "you hold that justice depends on the reasoning of a sophist, and that our actions are just or unjust according to the arguments of a clever man! Such a maxim shocks me more than I can say."

"Tournebroche, my son," replied Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "you must consider that I speak of human justice, which is different from God's justice, and generally opposed to it. Men have never upheld the idea of justice and injustice save by eloquence which is prone to embrace the for and against. Perhaps, my son, you would seat justice on sentiment, but beware lest on this petty site you merely raise some humble domestic hovel, some cabin of old Evander, or hut for a Philemon and Baucis. But the palace of law, the tower of State institutions, needs other foundations. Ingenuous nature alone could not support such weight of inequity, and these redoubtable walls rise from a foundation of most ancient falsehood, by the subtle and fierce art of law-givers, magistrates, and princes. It is folly, Tournebroche my son, to enquire if a law be just or unjust, and it is the same of military service as of other institutions of which one cannot say if they be good or bad on principle, since there is no principle saving God, from Whom all things come. You must protect yourself, my son, against this kind of slavery to words, to which men submit themselves with such docility. Know then, that the word justice has no meaning, if it be not in theology, where it is terribly expressive. Recognise

that Monsieur Roman is but a sophist when he demonstrates to you that one owes service to a prince. Nevertheless, I think if the prince ever orders all citizens to become soldiers, he will be obeyed, I don't say with docility, but light-heartedly. I have noticed that the profession most natural to man is that of a soldier; it is the one to which he is drawn the most easily by his instincts, and by his tastes, which are not always good. And beyond some rare exceptions, of which I am one, man may be defined as an animal with a musket. Give him a fine uniform with the hope of fighting, and he will be happy. Also, we make the military calling the noblest, which is true, in a sense, for it is the oldest calling, and the earliest of mankind made war. The military calling, moreover, has this appropriateness to human nature, that it never thinks, and clearly we are not made for thought.

"Thought is a malady peculiar to certain individuals which cannot propagate itself without promptly ending the race. Soldiers live in company, and man is a sociable animal. They wear blue-and-white, blue-and-red, or grey-and-blue coats, ribbons, plumes, and cockades, which give them the same advantage over women as the cock over the hen. They march to war and pillage and man

is naturally thievish, libidinous, destructive, and easily touched by glory. The love of glory decides us Frenchmen, above all, to take up arms. And it is certain, that in public opinion, military glory eclipses all. To be assured of this, read history. La Tulipe may be held excused if he was no more a philosopher than Titus Livius."

XI

THE ARMY (*continued*)

MY good master continued in these terms:

"One must consider, my son, that men joined one to another in the succession of the ages by a chain of which they see but a few links, attach the notion of nobility to customs whose origin was lowly and barbarous. Their ignorance feeds their vanity. They found their glories on old, unhappy, far-off things, and the nobility of the profession of arms is due entirely to that savagery of early times of which the Bible and the poets have preserved the remembrance. And what, in fact, is this military nobility flaunted with so much pride over us, if not the debased legacy of those unfortunate hunters of the woods whom the poet Lucretius has depicted in such a way that one does not know if they be men or beasts? It is wonderful, Tournebroche,

my son, that war and the chase, of which the thought alone should overwhelm us with shame and remorse when we recall the wretched needs of our nature and our inveterate wickedness, serve on the contrary, as matter for vain-glory to men, that Christian peoples should continue to honour the profession of butcher and executioner, when it is of old standing in families, and that finally one estimates among refined people the celebrity of citizens by the quantity of murders and carnage that they bear so to speak, in their veins."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I said to my good master, "do you not think that the profession of arms is looked upon as noble because of the danger one runs therein and the courage that it is necessary to display?"

"Truly, my son," answered my good master, "if the state of man is noble in proportion to the danger that he runs I do not fear to state that peasants and labourers are the noblest men in the kingdom for they risk death every day by fatigue or hunger. The perils to which soldiers and commanders expose themselves are less in number and in duration, they last but a few hours in a lifetime, and consist in facing cannon-balls and bullets which kill less surely than poverty. Men must

needs be light and frivolous, my son, to give more honour to a soldier's doings than to the work of a labourer and to place the destruction of war at a higher price than the arts of peace."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I asked again, "do you not consider that soldiers are necessary to the safety of the state and that we should honour them in recognition of their usefulness?"

"It is true, my son, that war is a necessity of human nature and one cannot imagine nations who will not fight, that is to say, who are neither homicides, pillagers, nor incendiaries. Neither can you conceive a prince who is not in some measure a usurper. They would reproach him too much on that score, and they would despise him for it as one who was no lover of glory. For war is necessary to men; and is more natural to them than peace which is but war's interval. Thus one sees princes hurling their armies on one another on the worst of pretexts, and for the most futile of reasons. They invoke their honour, which is excessively touchy. A mere breath suffices to make a stain on it which cannot be washed save in the blood of ten, twenty, thirty, or a hundred thousand men, in proportion to the population of the contending principalities. If only one thinks

of it, it is inconceivable that the honour of a prince can be cleansed by the blood of these unhappy beings, or rather one realises that it is a mere form of speech, void of meaning; but for words men go willingly to their death. What is yet more wonderful, is that a prince gains much honour from the theft of a province and the outrage that would be punished by death in the case of some daring private individual becomes praiseworthy if it is carried out with the most outrageous cruelty by a sovereign with the help of his hirelings."

My good master, having thus spoken, drew his box from his pocket and sniffed up a few remaining grains of rappee.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I said, "are there no wars that are just, and fought for a good cause?"

"Tournebroche, my son," he answered me, "civilized nations have much overstrained the injustice of war and they have rendered it very iniquitous as well as very cruel. The first wars were undertaken for the establishment of tribes on fertile lands. Thus the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan. Hunger forced them to it. The advancement of civilization extended war to the conquest of colonies and foreign markets, as is seen in the example of Spain, Holland, England and France. Lastly, one has seen kings and

emperors steal provinces of which they had no need, which they ruined, which they made waste, without profit to themselves and without other advantage than to raise pyramids and triumphal arches. And this abuse of war is the more odious as one must believe that nations are becoming more and more wicked by the advancement of the arts, or rather that war, being a necessity to human nature, is waged for its own sake when there is absolutely no reason for waging it.

"This reflection grieves me deeply, for I am disposed by my condition and inclination to the love of my fellow creatures. And what puts the finishing touch to my sadness, Tournebroche, my son, is that I find my snuff-box is empty, and want of snuff is where I feel my poverty the most."

As much to distract his thoughts from this personal trouble as to instruct myself in his teaching, I asked him if civil war did not seem to him the most detestable kind of war there was?

"It is odious enough," he replied, "but not so very inept, for members of a state when they come to blows between themselves have more chance of knowing why they fight than in the case where they go to war against a foreign people. Seditious and intestinal quarrels are usually born of the

extreme wretchedness of the people. They are the result of despair, and the only issue left to the unhappy beings who may obtain thereby better conditions and sometimes even a hand in the game of ruling. But it is to be remarked, my son, that the more unhappy, and therefore excusable, are the insurgents, the less chance they have of winning the game. Starved and stupefied, armed but with their rage, they are incapable of great plans or of prudent considerations so that they are easily reduced by the prince. He has more difficulty in putting down rebellion among the great, which is to be detested, for it has not the excuse of necessity. In fine, my son, whether civil or foreign, war is execrable, and has a malignity that I detest."

XII

THE ARMY (*concludea*)

"I WILL show you, my son," said my good master, "in the condition of these poor soldiers who are going to serve their king, both man's shame and his glory. In fact, war sets us back and drives us to our natural savagery. It is the result of the ferocity that we have in common with the beasts; not only with lions and cocks, who bring a gallant bearing to it, but with little birds, such as jays and tits, whose ways are very quarrelsome, and even with insects, such as wasps and ants, who fight with a bloodthirstiness of the like of which the Romans themselves have left no example. The principal causes of war are the same in man and animal, who struggle with one another to gain or keep their prey, to defend their nest or their lair, or to gain a mate. There is no distinction in all this, and the rape of the Sabines perfectly

recalls those duels between stags which make the woods bloody of a night. We have merely succeeded in lending a certain colouring to base and natural motives by the notions of honour with which we cover them, and without great exactitude at that. If we believe that we fight for very noble motives in these days, the nobility of them dwells entirely in the vagueness of our sentiments. The less the object of war is simple, clear, and precise, the more war itself is odious and detestable. And if it be true, my son, that we have come to killing one another for honour's sake, it is beyond all bounds. We have surpassed the cruelty of wild beasts, who do each other no injury without good reason. And it is only right to say that man is wickeder and more unnatural in his wars than are bulls or ants in theirs. But that is not all, for I detest armies less for the death they sow, than for the ignorance and stupidity that follow in their train. There is no worse enemy of the arts than a captain of mercenaries or marauders, and as a rule commanders are as unfitted for letters as are their soldiers. The habit of imposing his will by force makes your old soldier very awkward in speech, for eloquence has its source in the necessity of persuasion. Also, military men affect a disdain of speech and fine attainments. I remember having

known at Séez in the days when I was librarian to the Bishop, an old captain, who had grown grey in harness and passed for a gallant man, wearing proudly a large scar across his face. He was an old ruffian, and had killed many a man and violated more than one nun quite good-humouredly. He understood his business fairly well and was very particular regarding the appearance of his regiment, which marched past better than any other. In short, a brave man and a good comrade, when it was question of draining a pot as well I saw at the inn of the *Cheval Blanc*, where many a time I held my own against him. Now it happened one night that I accompanied him (for we were good friends) while he was instructing his men how to find their way by the stars. He first let me have Monsieur de Louvois' ordinance on the subject, and as he had repeated it by heart for the last thirty years, he made no more mistakes than in his *Pater* or *Ave*. He started off by saying that the soldiers must begin by searching the heavens for the pole-star, which is fixed in relation to the other stars, which turn round it in the contrary direction to the hands of a watch. But he did not understand all he said. For after having repeated his sentence two or three times in a sufficiently imperious voice, he stooped and said in my ear :

'Show me this beggar of a pole-star, Abbé. The devil take me if I can distinguish it in this mess of candle-ends with which the sky is littered!'

"I told him at once the way to find it, and pointed it out with my finger. 'Oh! Oh!' cried he, 'the silly thing is perched very high! From where we are we cannot see it without straining our necks.' And he immediately gave orders to his officers to withdraw the men fifty paces so they should more easily see the pole-star. What I am telling you, my son, I heard with my own ears, and you will agree that this wearer of a sword had a sufficiently naïve notion of the system of the universe, particularly of the stellar parallaxes. Yet he wore the king's orders on a fine embroidered coat, and was more honoured in the state than a learned divine. It is this uncouthness that I cannot endure in the army."

My good master having stopped to take breath at these words, I asked him if he did not think, despite this captain's ignorance, that one must have much intelligence to win battles? He answered me in these words:

"Taking into consideration, Tournebroche, my son, the difficulty that there is in getting together and leading armies, the knowledge necessary in the

attack or the defence of a place, and the ability demanded for a good order of battle, one easily admits that only a genius nearly super-human, such as that of a Cæsar, is capable of such an undertaking, and one would be astonished that minds were to be found capable of holding all the qualities proper to a true fighting-man. A great commander does not only know the configuration of a country, but its manners and customs, and also the industries of its inhabitants. He keeps in his mind an infinity of little circumstances from which he forms in the end large and simple views. The plans which he has slowly meditated and traced out beforehand, he may change in the midst of action by a sudden inspiration, and he is at the same time, very prudent and very bold; his thoughts move, now with the dull slowness of the mole, now soar up with an eagle's flight.

"Nothing is truer than this. But bethink you, my son, that when two armies are in sight of one another, one of them must be conquered; from which it follows that the other will necessarily be victorious, without its chief in command having all the qualities of a great commander, or without his even having one of them. There are, I take it, clever commanders; there are also lucky ones, whose glory is no less. How, in these astounding collisions,

are we to disentangle the effect of art from the result of luck? But you are leading me from my subject, Tournebroche, my son, I want to show you that war is man's disgrace nowadays, but that in other days it was his pride. Of necessity the arbitrament of empires, war has been the great school-mistress of the human race. It is by her that men have learnt patience, firmness, disdain of danger, the glory of sacrifice. The day that the herdsmen first rolled pieces of rock to form an enclosure behind which they defended their women and cattle, the first human society was founded, and the progress of the arts assured. This great good that we enjoy, our native land, that august thing the Romans adored above all their gods, the town, 'Urbs,' is the daughter of war.

"The first city was a fortified enclosure, and it was in that rough and bloody cradle that were nursed august laws, flourishing industries, science and learning. And that is why the true God wishes to be called the God of battles.

"What I tell you on this subject, Tournebroche, my son, does not mean that you should sign your engagement to this recruiting-sergeant and be seized with the desire to become a hero as the recipient of sixty strokes of the rod on your back every day, on an average.

"War is, moreover, in our time but an inherited evil, a prurient return to savage life, a criminal puerility. The princes of our day, and especially the late king, will for ever bear the notoriety of having made war the sport and amusement of courts. It saddens me to think that we have not yet seen the end of this preconcerted slaughter.

"As to the future, the unfathomable future, let me, my son, dream of it as more in accord with the spirit of sweetness and equity which dwells in me. The future is a place where there is room for dreams. It is there, as in Utopia, that it pleases the wise men to build. I should like to believe that nations will one day cultivate the virtues in peace. It is in the increasing size of armaments that I flatter myself I see a far-distant presage of universal peace. Armies will augment unceasingly in strength and number. Whole nations will be swallowed up by them. Then the monster will perish from his surfeit. He will burst from too much fatness."

XIII

ACADEMIES

E learnt that day that the Bishop of Séez had just been elected a member of the *Académie Française*. Twenty years ago he had delivered a panegyric on St. Maclou, which was considered rather a good thing, and I am willing to believe that there were some excellent passages in it; for my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, had put a hand to it before quitting the Bishop's palace with Madame de la Baillive's chambermaid. Monseigneur de Séez was descended from the best Norman aristocracy. His piety, his cellar, and his stable, were justly vaunted throughout the kingdom, and his own nephew dispensed the ecclesiastical patronage all over the country. His election surprised nobody. It was approved by all the world, save by the "grey-stockings" of the *Café Procope*, who are never content. They are grumblers.

My good master blamed them gently for their contradictory temper.

"Of what does Monsieur Duclos complain?" said he. "Since yesterday, he is the equal of Monseigneur de Séez, who has the handsomest clergy and the finest pack of hounds in the kingdom. For academicians are equal by virtue of the statutes.*

It is true that it is the insolent equality of revellers, which ceases, when, the meeting over, my lord bishop steps into his chariot, leaving Monsieur Duclos to splash his woollen stockings in the gutter. But if he does not want thus to be put on a par with my lord Bishop of Séez, why does he rub shoulders

* *Cf.* SAINT-EVREMONT (*Les Académiciens*):

GODEAU. Good-day, dear Colletet.

COLLETET (*throwing himself on his knees*). Say, my lord of Grasse,
What I must do when I before you pass.
Should I not kiss, perhaps, your hallowed shoon?

GODEAU. We are all equal, all Apollo's own.
"Rise up, my Colletet—"

COLLETET. "Does your worship's grace
Permit the liberty, to your very face!"

GODEAU. "Our intercourse is nothing changed, elsewhere
You see me bishop; *Godeau*, simply, here."

Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, lived under the old régime. In those days it was said that the French Academy had the merit of establishing perfect equality between its members, an equality not recognised in law. Nevertheless, it was destroyed in 1793 as "the last refuge of aristocracy."

with the badge bedecked. Why does he not hie him to a tub, like Diogenes, or like me, to a stall at the Innocents? It is only in a tub, or in a stall, that one can lord it over this earthly grandeur. It is only there that one is a real prince, and a real lord. Happy is he who has not fixed his hopes on the Academy! Happy is he who lives exempt from fears and desires, and who knows the emptiness of all things! Happy is he who knows that it is equally a vanity to be an Academician, or not to be one. Such a one leads, untroubled, a life obscure and unseen. Fair liberty follows him everywhere he goes. He celebrates in the shade the stilly offices of wisdom, and all the Muses smile on him as on one initiated into their service."

Thus spoke my good master, and I admired the pure enthusiasm which swelled his voice and shone in his eyes. But the restlessness of youth fermented in me. I wanted to take sides, to throw myself into the fight, to declare myself for or against the Academy.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I asked. "Should not the Academy call to itself the best minds in the kingdom, rather than the uncle of the man who has the ecclesiastical patronage in his gift?" * I asked my good master.

* He means the bishop whom the king had appointed distributor of ecclesiastical patronage.

"My son," he answered gently, "if Monseigneur de Séez appears austere in his ordinances, great and gallant in his life, and if he is in fact, a paragon among prelates, and pronounced that panegyric on St. Maclou, the exordium of which, relative to the healing of the King's evil by the King of France, seemed to be noble, do you want the Society to turn him out for the sole reason that he has a nephew as powerful as he is amiable? That would be showing a truly ferocious virtue, and punishing Monseigneur de Séez inhumanly for the grandeur of his family. The Academy wished to forget that. That alone, my son, is sufficiently magnanimous."

I was daring enough to make reply to this speech, so carried away was I by the fire of youth.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said I, "allow my feelings to oppose your arguments. All the world knows that Monseigneur de Séez has only become considerable by the suppleness of his character and his manners, and what one admires in him is his skill in detaching himself from both parties. . . . We have seen him glide gently between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, tincting his pale prudence with the roses of Christian charity. . . . He thinks he has done enough when he has displeased no one, and all his care is to sustain his position. Thus it is not his

great heart which has gained for him the suffrages of the King's illustrious *protégés.** Neither is it his great mind. For, with the exception of this panegyric on St. Maclou, which he had (as all the world knows) but the trouble of reading, this peace-loving bishop has only let us hear the depressing instructions issued to his clergy.

"He recommends himself by the amenity of his language and the politenes of his conversation. Are these sufficient titles to immortality?"

"Tournebroche," answered Monsieur l'Abbé, civilly, "you reason with the simplicity given to you by Madame, your mother, at your birth, and I see that you will keep your natural candour for long enough. I congratulate you upon it. But innocence must not make you unjust; it is enough that it leaves you ignorant. The immortality that they have bestowed on Monseigneur de Séez does not call for the attainments of a Bossuet or a Belzunce; it is not graven in the heart of an astounded people—it is inscribed in a big book; and you can well understand that these paper laurels only suit the heads of such heroes.

"If, among the Forty, there are persons of more gentility than genius, what harm do you see in it?

* The king was protector of the Academy.

Mediocrity triumphs in the Academy. But where does it not? Do you see it less powerful in Parliament or in the royal Council, where doubtless it is less fitted to find place? Must one be an exceptional man to work at a dictionary which wishes to regulate custom, and can only follow it?

"Academicians, or academists, were instituted, as you know, to fix the best usage in matters of speech, to purge the language of all archaisms and vulgar impurities, and to see that a second Rabelais, or a second Montaigne, does not arise, smelling of the rabble, of pedantry, or of the provinces. They assembled, to this end, gentlemen, who knew good usage and writers who were interested in knowing it. That gave rise to alarm lest the assembly should, tyrannically, reform the French language. But it was soon recognised that these fears were vain, and the academists, far from imposing custom, obeyed it. In spite of their veto we continue to say as before, 'I shut my door.' *

* It is true that the Academy condemned this expression:

"Custom, too strong, as oftentime before,
Makes us, improperly, say *Shut the Door*,
Usage will, daily, authorise a word,
Natheless employed in manner quite absurd.
Would you escape December's cold and gloom,
You must *Push to the Door* and *Shut the Room*."

SAINT-EVREMONT (*Les Académiciens*).

The Assembly soon resigned itself to entombing the progress of usage in a big dictionary. It is the sole care of the Immortals.* When they are not sitting they find leisure for recreation with one another. For that they need pleasant companions, easy and affable, amiable colleagues, well-informed men, and men who know the world. This is not always the case with men of great talent. Genius is sometimes unsociable. An exceptional man is rarely a man of resource. The Academy could do without Descartes and Pascal. Who says that it could do well without Monsieur Godeau or Monsieur Conrart, or any other person of a supple, complacent, and circumspect turn of mind?"

"Alas!" I sighed, "then it is no senate of divine beings, or council of immortals, no august Areopagus of poetry and eloquence?"

"By no means, my son. It is a society which teaches manners, and which has gained a great reputation for that among foreign nations, and particularly among the Muscovites. You have no idea what admiration the *Académie Française* inspires among German barons, colonels of the Russian Army and English milords. Europeans rate nothing higher than our Academicians and our dancers. I

* In those days the Academy awarded no prizes.

knew a Sarmatian princess of great beauty who, passing through Paris, impatiently sought for an academician, whoever he might be, to make him a present of her virtue."

"If it be thus," I cried, "why do the academicians risk compromising their good reputation by these unfortunate selections which are so universally blamed?"

"Stop, Tournebroche, my son, do not say anything evil of unfortunate selections," replied my master. "To begin with, in all human undertakings one must take into consideration the part played by chance, which is, upon the whole, the part played by God on earth, and the only occasion where Divine Providence manifests itself clearly in this world. For you well understand, my son, that what we call the absurdity of chance and the caprice of fortune, are, in reality, but the revenge taken in sport by Divine justice on the counsels of the would-be wise. In the second place, it is suitable in assemblies to give some play to caprice and fancy. A perfectly reasonable society would be a perfectly unbearable one. It would languish under the cold rule of justice. It would not have any belief in its own power or freedom if it did not taste, from time to time, the delicious pleasure of braving public opinion and

good sense. It is the darling sin of the powers of this world to be taken with bizarre caprices. Why should not the Academy indulge in whims just as much as the Grand Turk or a pretty woman ?

"Many opposite passions unite to inspire these unfortunate selections which vex simple souls. It is a pleasure for good people to take an unfortunate mortal and make an academician of him. Thus the God of the psalmist takes the poor man from his dunghill. *Erigens de stercore pauperem, ut collocet eum cum principibus, cum principibus populi sui.* These are strokes which astonish the nations and those who deal them must think themselves armed with a mysterious force and terrible power. And what pleasure to drag the poor soul from his dunghill, while leaving, meanwhile, some intellectual despot in the shade ! It is to quaff, at a draught, a rare and delicious mixture of charity fulfilled and jealousy satisfied. It is enjoyment in every sense and content for the whole man. And you want the academicians to resist the sweetness of such a philtre !

"We must take into consideration again, that in procuring for themselves this very sophisticated pleasure, the academicians act for the best in their own interests. A society formed exclusively of

great men would not be numerous, and would appear rather depressing.

"Great men cannot endure one another, and they have little wit. It is good to let them mix with smaller fry. It amuses them. The small fry benefit by their neighbourhood, the great by the comparison with the small, and there is profit for both one and the other. Let us admire by what skilful play, what ingenious contrivance, the *Académie Française* passes on to some of its members the importance it gains from others. It is a collection of suns and planets, where all shine with their own or with a borrowed effulgence.

"I go even further. Unfortunate selections are necessary to the existence of this society. If, in the elections, the Academy did not take the side of weakness and error, if it did not have the air of choosing haphazardly at times, it would make itself so hated by all that it could no longer continue to exist. In the republic of letters it would be as a tribunal set in the midst of condemned men. Infallible, it would appear odious. What an affront for those who were not chosen, were the elected one always the best! The daughter of Richelieu must seem a little volatile, so as not to appear too insolent. What saves her is that she takes fancies. Her

injustice proves her innocence. It is because we know her capricious that she can reject us without wounding us. It is sometimes so advantageous to her to deceive herself that I am tempted to believe, notwithstanding appearances, that she does it on purpose. She has admirable ruses for dealing tactfully with the self-love of the candidates she sets aside. An election of such a kind disarms envy. It is in her apparent faults that you must admire her true wisdom."

XIV

SEDITION-MONGERS

Y good master and I having paid our accustomed visit at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, we found in the shop the famous Mr. Rockstrong, mounted on the highest rung of the ladder ferreting out the old books, of which he is a connoisseur. For it pleases him, as is well known, in his troubled existence to collect precious books and fine prints.

Condemned by the English Parliament to imprisonment for life for taking part in Monmouth's Rebellion, he lives in France, whence he is continually sending articles to the gazettes of his country.*

My good master, as his habit was, let himself down on to a stool, then raised his eyes to the ladder where Mr. Rockstrong was turning about

* I have not found this Mr. Rockstrong mentioned in the memoirs relating to Monmouth's Rebellion. (ANATOLE FRANCE.)

with the squirrel-like agility he has preserved in his declining years.

"God be thanked!" said he, "I see, *Monsieur le Rebelle*, you are as well and as young as ever."

Mr. Rockstrong turned on my good master the glowing eyes that light up his sallow countenance.

"Why do you call me a rebel?" he asked, "you fat Abbé!"

"I call you a rebel, Mr. Rockstrong, because you have failed. One is a rebel when one is vanquished. Victors are never rebels."

"Abbé, you speak with a disgusting cynicism."

"Beware, Mr. Rockstrong; that maxim does not come from me. It comes from a very great man. I found it among the papers of Julius Cæsar Scaliger."

"Well, Abbé, those are villainous papers. And it is an infamous saying. Our loss, due to the irresolution of our chief, and to an indolence which he paid for with his life, does not alter the goodness of our cause. And honest people conquered by rogues, remain honest people."

"It pains me to hear you talk of honest people and rogues, in public matters, Mr. Rockstrong. These simple expressions might suffice to indicate the good and the bad side in those combats of angels which were fought in Heaven before the

creation of the world; and which your fellow countryman, John Milton, has sung with very great barbarity. But, on this terraqueous globe, camps are not, however desirable it might be, so equally divided that one can discriminate, without prejudice or compliance, between the army of the pure and the impure; nor even distinguish the side of the just from the unjust. So that, success must necessarily remain the only witness to the goodness of a cause. I annoy you, Mr. Rockstrong, by telling you that one is rebel when one is vanquished. Yet when it happens to you to climb to power, you will not suffer rebellion."

"Abbé, you do not know what you are saying. I have always hastened to the side of the vanquished."

"Truly, Mr. Rockstrong, you are a natural and constant enemy of the State. You are hardened in your enmity by the force of your genius, which finds pleasure in destruction and ruin."

"Abbé, do you call me a criminal?"

"Mr. Rockstrong, if I were a statesman, or a friend of the prince, like Monsieur Roman, I should take you for a remarkable criminal. But I am not a sufficiently fervent believer in the religion of politics to be very terrified at the murmur of

your crimes, or of outrages which make more noise than they do harm."

"Abbé, you are immoral!"

"If it be only at such a price one can afford to be indulgent, Mr. Rockstrong, do not blame me too severely."

"I have no use, my fat Abbé, for an indulgence that you share between me, the victim, and the scoundrels in Parliament, who condemned me with such revolting injustice."

"It is amusing to hear you talk of the injustice of the lords, Mr. Rockstrong."

"Is it not a crying injustice?"

"It is quite true, Mr. Rockstrong, that you were convicted, on a ridiculous charge, by the Lord-Chancellor for a collection of libels, none of which came in particular under the ban of the English law; it is true that in a country where one is allowed to write anything and everything, you were punished for some pungent writings; it is true that they used, as weapons, obsolete and out-of-the-way forms whose imposing hypocrisy poorly dissimulated the impossibility of getting at you by legal methods; it is true that the milords who judged you were interested in your ruin, since Monmouth's, and your success would infallibly have dragged them from

their seats. It is true your ruin was decided on beforehand in the royal Councils. It is true you escaped by flight, from a mediocre kind of martyrdom in truth, but a painful one. For imprisonment for life is a penalty even if one may reasonably hope to escape from it soon. But there is no justice nor injustice there. You were condemned for State reasons—which is extremely honourable. And more than one of the lords who condemned you had conspired with you twenty years before. Your crime was to have frightened those in office—and it is an unpardonable one. Ministers and their friends invoke the safety of the State when danger threatens their fortunes or their posts. And they are willing to believe themselves necessary for the preservation of the empire, for they are for the most part interested parties and no philosophers. But that does not make bad men of them. They are human beings and that is quite enough to explain their pitiable mediocrity, their stupidity and their avarice. But whom do you set up against them, Mr. Rockstrong? Other men of equal mediocrity, and yet more greedy, because they are hungrier. The people of London would have borne with them as they bear with the others. They awaited your victory or your defeat to declare themselves,

wherein they gave proof of remarkable sagacity. The people are well advised when they judge that they have nothing to gain or lose by change of masters."

Thus spoke Abbé Coignard, and Mr. Rockstrong with inflamed countenance, eyes on fire, and wig starting from his head, shouted at him with gestures from the top of his ladder: "Abbé, I understand thieves and all types of rogues in Chancery and Parliament. But I do not understand you, who, without any personal interest in the matter, out of pure malice, propound maxims that they themselves profess but for their own profit. You must be wickeder than they, for you have nothing to gain in the matter. It is beyond me, Abbé!"

"It is a sign of my being a philosopher," gently replied my good master. "It is in the nature of wise men to irritate the rest of mankind. Anaxagoras was a celebrated example of it. I do not speak of Socrates who was but a sophist. But we see that in all times and in all countries the opinions of meditative minds were subjects of scandal. You think yourself very different from your enemies, Mr. Rockstrong, and that you are as lovable as they are odious. Allow me to tell

you that this is but the effect of your pride and of your high courage. In actual fact, you share in common with those who condemned you, all human weaknesses and passions. If you are more honest than many of them, and even if you are a man of incomparable vivacity of mind, you are filled with a talent for hatred and discord which renders you very inconvenient in a well-regulated country. The calling of a journalist, in which you excel, has raised to the highest degree of perfection the wonderful partiality of your mind, and though a victim of injustice, you are yourself not just. What I have just said embroils me both with you and with your enemies, and I am very certain I shall never obtain a fat living from the minister who has them in his gift. But I prize freedom of mind more highly than a fat abbey or a cosy priory. I shall have succeeded in vexing all the world, but I shall die in peace, and in contentment of heart."

"Abbé," half-laughingly, replied Mr. Rockstrong, "I forgive you, because I think you a little mad. You make no difference between rogues and honest men, and you would not rather have a free country than a despotic and shuffling government. You are a lunatic, and of no ordinary kind."

"Let us go and drink a pot of wine at the *Petit Bacchus*, Mr. Rockstrong," said my good master, "and I will explain to you, while emptying my glass, why I am totally indifferent to forms of government, and why I do not trouble myself about any change of masters."

"Very willingly," said Mr. Rockstrong, "I shall be interested to drink in company with such a bad arguer as you."

He sprang lightly down from his ladder, and we all three repaired to the inn.

XV

REVOLUTIONARY MEASURES

MR. ROCKSTRONG, who was a sensible man, bore my good master no malice for his sincerity of speech. When the landlord of the *Petit Bacchus* had brought a pot of wine, the pamphleteer lifted his glass and drank to Abbé Coignard's health, calling him a rogue, a friend of robbers, a tool of tyrants and an old scamp! all with quite a jovial air.

My master returned his compliments with a good grace, congratulating him on the fact that he drank to a man whose natural humour had remained unaffected by philosophy.

"As for myself," he added, "I feel that my intelligence is quite spoilt by reflection. And as it is not in the nature of mankind to think with any profundity, I own that my leaning to thought is an odd mania and highly inconvenient. In the first

place it makes me unfit for any undertaking, for our actions result from a limited outlook and narrow way of thinking. You will be astonished, Mr. Rockstrong, if you picture to yourself the simple-mindedness of the men of genius who have stirred the world. Conquerors and statesmen, who have changed the face of the earth, have never reflected on the essence of the beings they handled so roughly. They shut themselves up altogether in the pettiness of their grand projects and the wisest see but very few things at a time. Such as you see me, Mr. Rockstrong, it would be impossible for me to work like Alexander at the conquest of India, or to found and govern an empire, or, generally speaking, to throw myself into any one of those vast undertakings which tempt the pride of the impetuous. Reflection would hamper me, from the outset, and I should find reasons for coming to a stop at every move I made."

Then turning to me my good master said sighing :

"Thought is a great infirmity, God keep you from it Tournebroche, my son, as He has kept His greatest saints, and the souls for whom He cherishes a singular predilection, and for whom He reserves eternal glory. Men who think little, or who think not at all, go about their business happily

in this world and the next, whilst the meditative soul is incessantly menaced with its temporal and spiritual loss. Such malice lies in thought! Reflect and tremble, my son, at the thought that the serpent of Genesis is the oldest of philosophers and their everlasting prince."

Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard drank a great draught of wine and went on in a low voice:

"As regards my salvation, that is a subject to which I have never applied my intelligence. I have never exercised my reason on the truths of the Faith. Unhappily, I have meditated the deeds of men and the ways of cities; therefore I am no longer fit to govern an Island, as was Sancho Panza."

"That is a very good thing," retorted Mr. Rockstrong, laughingly, "for your isle would be a retreat for bandits and vagabonds where the criminal would judge the innocent, if perchance there were any."

"I well believe it! Mr. Rockstrong, I well believe it!" answered my good master! "It is quite possible that, if I were to govern another island of Barataria, manners would be as you say. With one stroke you have depicted all the empires of the world. I feel that mine would be no better than

the rest. I have no illusions about mankind, and, so as not to hate them, I despise them. I despise and pity them, Mr. Rockstrong. But they bear me no good-will for it. They want to be hated. One vexes them when one shows them the gentlest, the most indulgent, the most charitable, most human and gracious of all feelings that they could inspire: contempt. Nevertheless, mutual contempt means peace on earth, and if men would only thoroughly despise one another they would do themselves no further harm and live together in an amiable tranquillity.

"All the ills of civilised societies originate in people thinking too highly of each other, and raising honour, like a monster, above the wretchedness of the flesh and the spirit. This feeling makes them both proud and cruel, and I detest the pride that wants honour to be shown to it and to others, as if anyone descended from Adam could be worthy of honour! An animal which eats, drinks (give me something to drink), and makes love, is worthy of pity, interesting perhaps, even sometimes pleasant and agreeable.

"He can only be honourable by the effect of a most absurd and headstrong prejudice in his favour. This prejudice is the source of all the ills from which

we suffer. It is a detestable kind of idolatry. And to assure to humanity a sweetening of their existence you must begin by recalling them to their natural humility.

"They will be happy, when, brought back again to a true appreciation of their condition, they despise one another without there being a single exception to this most excellent contempt."

Mr. Rockstrong shrugged his shoulders.

"My fat Abbé," said he, "you are a pig."

"I am but a man," replied my master, "you flatter me, and I feel in me the germs of that bitter pride that I detest, and that vain-glory which leads the human race into duels and into war. There are times, Mr. Rockstrong, when I would have my throat cut for my opinions; which would be an act of madness. For who can prove that I reason better than you, you, who reason excessively badly! Give me something to drink!"

Mr. Rockstrong courteously filled my good master's glass.

"Abbé, you talk nonsense," he said, "but I love you, and I should much like to know what you find blameworthy in my public behaviour, and why you side against me with tyrants, forgers, thieves, and dishonest judges?"

" Mr. Rockstrong, allow me first of all to diffuse over you and your friends, with a sweet impartiality, that single sentiment which gently puts an end to quarrels, and brings pacification. Bear with me if I respect neither the one nor the other enough to consign them to the vengeance of the law and to call down punishment on their heads. Men, whatsoever they do, are always silly sheep, and I leave to milord-chancellor, who condemned you, the Ciceronian declamations on state crimes. I have little taste for Catiline orations from whichever side they come. I am merely sad to see a man like you occupied in changing forms of government. It is the most frivolous and empty method of using one's intelligence, and to fight people in office is folly, unless it is a way of earning one's bread and getting on in the world. Give me something to drink! Bethink you, Mr. Rockstrong, that these startling changes in the State, meditated by you, are merely displacements of particular men, and that men taken in the mass are one like another, average in evil as well as in good ; so that to replace two or three hundred ministers, governors of provinces, colonial agents, and bonneted presidents of courts, by two or three hundred others, is as good as doing nothing, and is simply putting Philip and Barnabas in place of Paul

and Xavier. As to changing the condition of people at the same time, as you hope to do, that is quite impossible, for that condition does not depend on the ministers, who count for nothing, but on the earth and its fruits, industry, commerce, money amassed in the kingdom, the cleverness of the townfolk in trade and exchange —all things, which be they good or bad, are not kept going by either the prince or the officers of the crown."

Mr. Rockstrong quickly interrupted my good master :

"Who does not know," he exclaimed, "that the condition of industry and commerce depends on the government, and that only under a free government can you have good finance ?"

"Liberty," continued Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, "is but the result of the wealth of citizens, who free themselves as soon as they are powerful enough to be independent. People take all the liberty they can enjoy, or, to put it more plainly, they imperiously clamour for institutions in recognition and guarantee of the rights which they have acquired by their industry.

"All liberty emanates from them and their several actions. Their most involuntary movements enlarge

the mould of the state which shapes itself on them. *

* In the time of Abbé Coignard the French already thought themselves free. The sieur d'Alquié wrote in 1670 :

"Three things make a man happy in this world, to know the charm of intercourse, dainty meats, and liberty, perfect and entire. We have seen in what way our illustrious kingdom has fulfilled the two first, so it remains for us merely to show that the third is not lacking to it, and that liberty is no less a fact than the two preceding advantages. The thing will appear true to you if, to start with, you will consider attentively the name of our state, the matter of its foundation, and its usual customs : for one sees at the start that the name of *France* means nothing else than *Franchise* or liberty, conformably to the designs of the founders of this monarchy, who, having noble and generous souls, and being unable to bear either slavery or the least servitude, resolved among themselves to throw off the yoke of all kinds of captivity and to be as free as men may be ; this is why they came to the land of the Gauls, which was a country whose people were neither less warlike nor less jealous of their *Franchise* or liberty than they themselves were. As to the second point, we know that beyond the inclinations and plans they had in founding this state, they were always their own masters ; they made laws for their sovereign which, limiting their powers, still preserved their privileges to them, in such wise that if anyone wishes to deprive them of them, they become enraged and rush to arms with such speed that nothing can hold them back when this point is involved. As to the third point, I declare that France is so enamoured of liberty that she cannot endure a slave, so that Turks and Moors and still less Christian people, may never wear irons nor be loaded with chains once in her country, and thus it comes about, that when slaves come to be in France they are no

"So that one may say that detestable as tyranny is, every tyranny is necessary, and despotic governments are but the strait-waistcoat on a feeble and dwindled body. And who does not see that the outward appearance of government is like the skin which reveals the structure of an animal without being the cause of it?

"You seize hold upon the skin without troubling yourself about the viscera, in which you show little natural philosophy, Mr. Rockstrong."

"So you make no difference between a free state and a tyrannical government, and all that you regard as nothing but the hide of the beast, my fat Abbé. And you fail to see that the expenditure of the prince and the depredations of ministers can ruin agriculture and wear out trade by raising the taxes."

"Mr. Rockstrong, there cannot be at the same period and for the same country more than one possible form of government, any more than an animal can have more than one pelt at a time.

sooner on her territory than, full of joy, they cry: Long live France and her belovéd liberty!"

Les delices de la France . . . by François Savinien d'Alquié, Amsterdam 1670.

Chapter XVI. entitled "France is a land of freedom for all sorts of people."

From which it results, that we must leave to the care of Time, who is a courtly person, the changing of empires and the remaking of laws. He works at it slowly, untiringly, and kindly."

"And you don't think, my fat Abbé, that we ought to help the old man who figures on the clocks with a scythe in his hand? You do not believe that a revolution, such as that of the English or that in the Low Countries, can have any effect on the condition of the people. No? You old idiot! you deserve to be crowned with a fool's cap!"

"Revolutions come about in conservation of good things already acquired, and not to gain new. It is the folly of nations, it is your own, Mr. Rockstrong, to found great hopes on the downfall of princes. People assure unto themselves, by revolting from time to time, the preservation of their threatened liberties. They have never gained new liberties thereby. But they are fooled with words. It is remarkable, Mr. Rockstrong, that men will easily let themselves be killed for words of no meaning. Ajax made the remark long ago: 'I thought in my youth' the poet makes him say, 'that deeds were more powerful than words, but I see to-day that the word is the stronger of the two.' Thus said Ajax, son of Oileus. Mr. Rockstrong, I am very thirsty!"

XVI

HISTORY

 ONSIEUR ROMAN placed half a dozen volumes on the counter.

"I beg of you, Monsieur Blaizot," said he, "to send me these books.

"There are 'Mother and Son,' the 'Memoirs of the Court of France,' and the 'Testament of Richelieu.' I should be grateful if you will add to them anything new you have received lately in the way of history, and more particularly, anything treating of France since the death of Henry IV. . . . All these are works in which I am extremely interested."

"You are right, Monsieur," said my master. "Books on history are full of light stuff very suitable to amuse an honest fellow, and one is sure of finding a great number of pleasant stories."

"Monsieur l'Abbé," answered Monsieur Roman, "what I look for from the historians is not frivolous

amusement. It is a serious study, and I am filled with despair if I find fiction mingled with fact. I study human actions in relation to the conduct of nations, and I seek for maxims of government in history."

"I am not ignorant of that, Monsieur," said my good master. "Your treatise on 'Monarchy' is renowned enough for us to know that you have conceived a political system drawn from history."

"In such sort," said Monsieur Roman, "I have been the first to draw rules for princes and ministers which they cannot avoid without danger."

"And we behold you, Monsieur, on the frontispiece of your book, in the likeness of Minerva, presenting to a youthful king the mirror handed you by the muse, Clio, hovering above your head, in a study decked with busts and pictures. But allow me to tell you, Monsieur, that this muse is a story-teller, and that she holds out to you a mirror of falsehood. There are few truths in history, and the only facts on which all agree are those we get from a single source. Historians contradict one another every time they meet. Even more! We see that Flavius Josephus, who has pourtrayed the same incidents in his 'Antiquities' and in his 'Wars of the Jews,' records them differently in each of these works. Titus Livius is but a collector of fables; and Tacitus, your

oracle, gives me the impression of an unsmiling deceiver who flouts all the world under a pretence of gravity. I have a sufficient esteem for Thucydides, Polybius, and Guicciardini. As for our own Mézeray, he does not know what he is saying, any more than do Villaret and Abbé Vély. But I am accusing historians; it is history itself I should attack.

"What is history? A miscellany of moral tales, or an eloquent medley of narratives and speeches, according as the historian is a philosopher or a spouter. You may find eloquent passages, but one must not look for the truth there, because truth consists in showing the necessary relation of things, and the historian does not know how to establish this relation, because he is unable to follow the chain of effects and causes. Consider that every time that the cause of an historical fact lies in a fact that is not historical, history fails to see it. And as historical facts are intimately allied to non-historical facts, it comes about that events are not linked after their natural order in history, but are connected one with another by mere artifices of rhetoric. And I ask you also to notice that the distinction between facts which appear in history and facts which do not is entirely arbitrary. It results from this that, far from being a science, history is condemned by a vice in its essence

to the chaos of untruth. Sequence and continuity will always be lacking to it, and without these there can be no true knowledge. You see also that one can draw no prognostic as to the future of a nation from its past history. Now, the peculiarity of science is to be prophetic, as may be seen by those tables where the moon's periods, tides, and eclipses are to be found calculated beforehand, whilst revolutions and wars escape calculation."

Monsieur Roman explained to Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard that he merely asked of history facts, somewhat confused it is true, uncertain, mingled with errors, but infinitely precious, through their subject, which is man.

"I know," he added, "how human annals are curtailed and mixed with fable. But, though a strict sequence of cause and effect fails us, I see in it a kind of plan that one loses and then finds again, like the ruins of temples half-buried in the sand. That alone is of immense value to me. And I flatter myself that, in the future, history, formed from abundant material and treated with method, will rival in exactitude the natural sciences."

"Do not reckon on that," said my good master, "I should rather believe that the growing abundance of memoirs, correspondence, and filed records,

will render the task more difficult to future historians. Mr. Elward, who gives up his life to the study of the revolution in England, assures me that one man's lifetime would not suffice in which to read the half of what was written during the disturbances. It reminds me of a story told to me by Monsieur l'Abbé Blanchet on this subject, which I will tell you as I remember it, regretting that Monsieur l'Abbé Blanchet is not here to tell it you himself, for he is a man of wit.

"Here is the apologue:

"When the young prince Zémire succeeded his father on the throne of Persia, he called all the academicians of his kingdom together, and said:

"'The learned Zeb, my instructor, has taught me that monarchs would be liable to fewer errors if they were enlightened by past experience. Therefore I wish to study the history of nations. I order you to compose a universal history and to neglect nothing to make it complete.'

"The wise men promised to carry out the prince's desire, and having withdrawn they set to work immediately. At the end of twenty years they appeared before the king, followed by a caravan composed of twelve camels each bearing 500 volumes. The secretary of the academy, having prostrated

himself on the steps of the throne, spoke in these terms :

"'Sire, the academicians of your kingdom have the honour to place at your feet the universal history that they have compiled at your majesty's behests. It comprises 6000 volumes and contains all that we could possibly collect regarding the customs of nations and the vicissitudes of empires. We have inserted the ancient chronicles which have been luckily preserved, and we have illustrated them with abundant notes on geography, chronology, and diplomacy. The prolegomena are alone one camel's load, and the paralipomena are borne with great difficulty by another camel.'

"The king answered:

"'Gentlemen, I thank you for the trouble that you have taken. But I am very busy with the cares of state. Moreover, I have aged while you worked. I am arrived, as says the Persian poet, half-way along the road of life, and even supposing I die full of years, I cannot reasonably hope to have the time to read such a lengthy history. It shall be placed in the archives of the kingdom. Be good enough to make me a summary better fitted to the brevity of human life.'

"The Persian academicians worked twenty

years; then they brought to the king 1500 volumes on three camels.

"'Sire,' said the permanent secretary, in a weakened voice, 'here is our new work. We believe we have omitted nothing essential.'

"'That may be,' answered the king, 'but I shall not read it. I am old; lengthy undertakings do not suit my years; abridge it further and do not be long about it.'

"They lingered so little that at the end of ten years they returned followed by a young elephant bearing 500 volumes.

"'I flatter myself I have been succinct,' said the permanent secretary.

"'You have not yet been sufficiently so,' answered the king.

"'I am at the end of my life. Abridge, abridge, if you want me to know the history of mankind ere I die.'

"The permanent secretary reappeared before the palace at the end of five years. Walking with crutches, he held by the bridle a small donkey which bore a big book on its back.

"'Hasten,' said the officer to him, 'the king is dying.'

"The king in fact was on his death-bed. He

turned on the academician and his big book his nearly expiring gaze, and said with a sigh :

"'I shall die, then, without knowing the history of mankind ! '

"'Sire,' replied the learned man, who was almost as near death as himself, 'I will sum it up for you in three words : *They were born, they suffered, they died !* '

"Thus did the king of Persia learn the history of the world in the evening of his life."

XVII

MONSIEUR NICODÈME

HILE, at the sign of the *Image de Sainte Catherine*, my good master, seated on the highest rung of the ladder, was reading Cassiodorus with great pleasure, an elderly man came into the shop, of an arrogant air, and severe aspect. He went straight to Monsieur Blaizot, who smilingly stretched his head over the counter.

"Monsieur," he said, "you are sworn bookseller, and I must take you for a well-conducted man. Nevertheless, in your display of goods a volume of the works of Ronsard is open at the frontispiece, which represents a naked woman. And it is a thing not fit to be looked at."

"Pardon me, Monsieur," replied Monsieur Blaizot, gently, "it is a frontispiece of Léonard Gautier's who, in his day, was considered a very able draughtsman."

"It matters little to me," replied the elder, "that the draughtsman was clever. All that I take into consideration is that he represented nudities. This figure has nothing on but its hair, and I am grievously surprised, Monsieur, that a man of age and prudence, such as you appear, should expose it to the gaze of the young men who frequent the Rue St. Jacques. You would do well to burn it, following the example of Father Garasse, who expended his means in acquiring, in order to burn them, a number of books opposed to public decency and to the Society of Jesus. At least, it would be more decent in you to hide it in the most secret recess of your shop, which conceals, I fear, many a book calculated to excite minds to vice, not only by their text, but by their plates."

Monsieur Blaizot replied, reddening, that such a suspicion was unjust, and it grieved him coming from a worthy man.

"I must tell you who I am," said the elder. "You see before you Monsieur Nicodème, the President of the Purity League. The end that I pursue is to outdo in niceness in the matter of modesty the regulations of the *Lieutenant de Police*. I busy myself, with the help of a dozen Parliamentary councillors, and two hundred churchwardens

from the principal parishes, in clearing away nudities exposed in public places, such as squares, boulevards, streets, alleys, quays, courts, and gardens. And, not content with establishing modesty in the public way, I exert myself to spread its dominion even into the salon, the study, and the bedroom, whence it is but too often banished. Know, Monsieur, that the Society that I have founded has trousseaux made for young married people, containing long and ample night-garments which permit these young spouses chastely to go about the execution of God's commandment relative to increase and multiplication. And, to mingle charm, if I may say so, with austerity, these garments are trimmed with pleasing embroidery. I plume myself on having thus invented garments of an intimate nature so well designed to make another Sarah and Tobias of all our young couples, and to cleanse the sacrament of marriage from the impurities which unfortunately have clung to it."

My good master, who, his nose in Cassiodorus, had been listening to their discourse, replied with the utmost gravity from the top of his ladder, that he thought the invention admirable, and praiseworthy, but that he had a still more excellent one of the kind.

"I would that our young spouses," said he, "were rubbed from head to foot with blacking before they met, making their skin like boot-leather, which would greatly damp the criminal ardours of the flesh, and be a grievous obstacle to the caresses, kisses, and endearments that lovers practise too generally between the sheets."

Monsieur Nicodème, lifting his head at these words, saw my good master on the ladder, and saw also from his demeanour that he was laughing at him.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, with sadness and indignation, "I would forgive you did you merely laugh at me. But you ridicule at the same time, decency and public morals, and there you are much to blame. In spite of wicked jokes, the Society that I have founded has already done good and useful work. Crack your jokes, sir! We have fixed six hundred vine or fig-leaves on the statues in the king's gardens."

"Admirable indeed, sir," responded my good master, adjusting his spectacles, "and at that rate every statue will soon have its leaf. But (seeing that objects have no meaning for us save by association of ideas) in placing vine-leaves and fig-leaves on statues, you transfer the quality of indecency to

the leaves; so that one can no longer see vine or fig-tree on the countryside without conceiving them as sheltering some indecency; and it is no small sin, my good sir, to fix immodesty on these innocent plants. Allow me to tell you further that it is a dangerous thing to make a study, as you do, of everything that may cause disquietude and uneasiness to the flesh, without reflecting that if a given shape be such as to scandalise souls, each of us who bears the original of that shape will scandalise himself, except he be less than a man—a thing one does not like to contemplate."

"Monsieur," responded the aged Nicodème, rather heatedly, "I gather from the language you hold that you are a libertine and a debauchee."

"Monsieur," said my good master, "I am a Christian, and as for living in debauchery, I could not think of such a thing, having enough to do to gain my daily bread, wine, and tobacco. Such as you see me, Monsieur, I know no orgy but the silent orgies of meditation, and the only feast I sit down to is the feast of the Muses. But I, as a wise man, consider that it is a bad thing to outbid in shamefacedness the teachings of the Catholic religion, which on this subject allows a good deal of liberty, and adjusts itself easily to people's

customs and prejudices. I take you to be tainted with Calvinism and to be leaning to the heresy of iconoclasm. For, in truth, one does not know whether your zeal will not go so far as to burn images of God and the saints, from hatred of the humanity evident in them. Such words as modesty, decency, and shame, which come so readily from your mouth, have as a matter of fact no precise and constant meaning. Custom and nice feeling can alone define them with truth and moderation. I only acknowledge poets, artists, and pretty women, as judges in these delicate matters. What an extraordinary notion, to set up a row of attorneys in judgment on Grace and Pleasure!"

"But, Monsieur," replied the aged Nicodême, "we have nothing to do with Smiles or Graces, still less with images of God and the saints, and you are maliciously fastening a quarrel on us. We are decent people, who wish to turn aside the eyes of our sons from improper sights, and one knows well enough what is decent and what is not. Do you wish, Monsieur l'Abbé, that our young people should be open to every temptation of the streets?"

"Ah! Monsieur," replied my good master. "We must all be tempted. It is the lot of men and Christians on this earth. And the most

formidable temptation comes from within—not from without. You would not take so much trouble to remove from the shop windows any sketch of nude women if, as I have done, you had studied the lives of the Fathers of the desert. There you would have seen how, in a frightful wilderness, far from any carved or painted shape, torn with hair-shirts, macerated with penance, faint from fasting, tossing on a bed of thorns, the anchorites were penetrated to the very marrow with the prickings of carnal desire. In their wretched cells they saw visions a thousand times more voluptuous than this allegory which offends you in Monsieur Blaizot's window.

"The devil, or, as free-thinkers would say, nature, is a better painter of lascivious scenes than Giulio Romano himself. He surpasses all the Italian and Flemish masters in grouping, movement, and colour. Alas! one is powerless against his glowing pictures. Those that shock you are of small account in comparison, and you would do wisely to leave to the care of the *Lieutenant de Police*, as your fellow citizens are willing it should be left, the guardianship of public decency. Truly your ingenuousness astonishes me; you have little notion what a man is, and what society is, and of the fever and insurgence of a great city. Oh! the silly grey-

beards, who in the midst of all the uncleanness of a Babylon where every lifted curtain shows the eye or the arm of a courtesan, where busy humanity touch and quicken one another in the public squares, fall a-groaning and complaining of a few naughty pictures hung up on book-sellers' stalls; and carry their lamentations even to the very Parliament of the kingdom when a woman has shown her legs to some fellows in a dancing-saloon—just the most ordinary sight in the world for them."

Thus spoke my good master from the top of his ladder. But Monsieur Nicodème stopped his ears in order not to hear him, and cried out on his cynicism.

"Heavens!" he sighed, "what can be more disgusting than a naked woman, and how shameful to compromise, as does this Abbé, with an immorality which is the ruin of a country, for people can only exist by purity of morals."

"It is true, Monsieur," said my good master, "that peoples are strong only so long as they preserve their morals; but by that is understood a community of rules, opinions, and interests, and a generous-minded obedience to law; not trifles such as occupy you. Beware, moreover, lest shamefacedness, failing as a charm, become but a piece of

stupidity, and less the artless dullness of your fears present a ridiculous spectacle and one not a little indecent."

But Monsieur Nicodème had already left the place.

XVIII

JUSTICE

MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ COIGNARD, who should rather have been nourished at the Prytaneum by a grateful republic, gained his bread by writing letters for servant-girls in a stall near the cemetery of the Innocents. There he happened to serve in the office of secretary to a Portuguese lady who was crossing France, with her nigger-boy. She gave him a *liard* for a letter written to her husband, and an *écu* of six *livres* for another to her lover. It was the first *écu* my good master had handled since the feast of St. John; and since he was open-handed, even to magnificence, he straightway took me to the *Pomme d'Or*, on the Quai de Grève, close to the Town-hall, where the wine is not doctored, and the sausages are of the best. And the big dealers, who buy apples on the Mall, go there ordinarily towards midday to try to best one another. It was

spring-time, and sweet to be alive on such a day. My good master had our table spread on the embankment, and we hearkened, as we dined, to the lapping of the water under the oars of the boatmen. A light caressing breeze laved us with gentle breath, and we were glad to be alive and in the sunlight. While we were eating our fried gudgeons a noise of men and horses at our elbow made us turn round.

Guessing what made us curious a dingy little old man, at the next table, said, with an obliging smile:

"It is nothing, gentlemen—a servant-girl whom they are taking to be hanged for stealing some bits of lace from her mistress."

And indeed, as he spoke, we saw, seated at the tail of a cart between two mounted police-sergeants, a girl, quite pretty, her appearance bewildered, her bosom forced into relief by the drag of her arms, which were bound behind her back. She passed in a moment, and yet I shall always see before my eyes that vision of a white face, and that look that already stared out upon nothing.

"Yes, gentlemen," said the dingy little old man, "she is the servant of Madame Josse, the councillor's wife, and to make herself smart when going with her lover to Ramponneau's stole from her mistress a lace head-dress in *point d'Alençon*, and then,

having committed the theft, ran away. She was taken in a house by the Pont-au-Change, and at once confessed her crime. Accordingly she was not put to the torture for more than an hour or two. What I tell you, gentlemen, I know to be true, as I am beadle at the court where she was tried."

The dingy little old man attacked his sausage, for it was getting cold, and continued :

"She should be at the scaffold by now, and in five minutes, perhaps a little more, perhaps a little less, the pretty rogue will have given up the ghost. Some of the hanged give no trouble to the executioner. No sooner is the cord round their neck than they quietly expire. But there are others who positively live at the rope's end, and make a furious to-do about it. The most demoniacal of all was a priest, who was sentenced last year for forging the Royal signature on lottery tickets. For more than twenty minutes he fought like a carp on the end of a line.

"He ! He !" chuckled the little old man, "the Abbé was modest and did not want the honour of a step up in the world. I saw him when they took him out of the cart. He cried and struggled so that the hangman said to him : 'Do not be a child, Monsieur l'Abbé !' But the oddest thing was, that,

there being another thief along with him, he was, at first, taken for the chaplain, and that by the executioner, whom the police-officer had the greatest difficulty in undeceiving. Wasn't that amusing?"

"No, Monsieur," replied my good master, "letting the fish, he had held to his lips for some moments, fall on his plate. "No, it is not amusing, and the thought that that nice-looking girl is at this moment yielding up her soul spoils the taste of my gudgeons for me, and the joy of seeing the sky above, which smiled on me but a moment back."

"Ah, Monsieur l'Abbé," said the little official, "if you are so sensitive as all that, you could never have witnessed without fainting what my father saw with his own eyes, when yet a child, at Dijon, his native town. Have you ever heard speak of Hélène Gillet?"

"Never," said my master.

"In that case I will tell you her story, as my father, many a time, told it to me."

He drank off his wine, wiped his lips with a corner of the cloth, and recounted the history I here repeat.

XIX

THE BEADLE'S STORY

N the year 1624, in the month of October, Hélène Gillet, aged twenty-two, daughter of the governor-royal of Bourg-en-Bresse, who was still under the paternal roof, along with her brothers yet of tender years, showed such visible signs of being with child that it was the talk of the town, and the young girls of Bourg ceased to associate with her. It was noticed next that her figure went down, and such comments were made that the *Lieutenant-Criminel* ordered her to be examined by a jury of matrons. These latter reported that she had been with child and that her confinement had taken place at least fifteen days before. On their report, Hélène Gillet was put in prison and was questioned by the Court of First Instance. She there made a confession:

"'Some months ago,' she told them, 'a young

man from the neighbourhood, who was staying at my uncle's house, came to my father's to teach the boys to read and write. He possessed me but once. It was through a servant who locked me up in a room with him. There he ravished me.' And when they asked her why she had not cried for help, she replied that surprise had taken away her voice. Pressed by the judges, she added, that in consequence of this violation she became with child and was delivered prematurely. Far from having helped on the birth, she would not have known what it was, had not a servant revealed to her the true nature of the occurrence.

"The magistrates, dissatified with her replies, did not know, all the same, how to contradict them, when an unexpected witness came forward to furnish certain proofs of the accusation. A soldier, who happened to pass when out walking by the garden of Monsieur Pierre Gillet, the governor-royal, father of the accused, saw in a ditch, at the foot of the wall, a raven trying to pull away a cloth with its beak. He went up to it to see what it was and found the body of a little child. He immediately informed the authorities. The child was wrapped in a chemise marked with the letters H. G. on the neck. It was proved to have been a full-term child, and Hélène

Gillet, convicted of infanticide, was condemned to death according to custom. On account of the honourable post held by her father she was permitted to enjoy the privilege accorded those of noble birth, and the sentence ran that her head should be cut off.

"An appeal having been made to the Parliament of Dijon, she was conducted under the guard of two archers to the capital of Burgundy, and shut in the conciergerie of the Palace. Her mother, who had gone with her, withdrew to the house of the Bernardine nuns. The case was heard by the members of Parliament on Monday the 12th of May, the last sitting before Whitsuntide. On the report of Counsellor Jacob the judges confirmed the sentence of the Bourg Court of First Instance, ordering that the condemned should be led to execution with the cord round her neck. It was generally remarked that this circumstance of infamy was added in a strange and unusual fashion to the punishment of a noble, and such severity, which was against all rules, was greatly blamed. But the decree admitted of no appeal, and had to be carried out immediately.

"And indeed, on the same day, at half-past three in the afternoon, Hélène Gillet was led to the scaffold, the bells tolling the while, in a procession, heralded by trumpets, which sounded such a peal that all the

good folk of the town heard it in their houses, and falling on their knees prayed for the soul of her who was about to die. The deputy King's-attorney advanced on horseback followed by his attendants. Then came the condemned woman in a cart, the cord round her neck according to the decree of Parliament.

"She was attended by two Jesuit fathers and two Capuchin brothers, who held up before her Jesus dying on the Cross. Near by stood the headsman with his sword and the headswoman with a pair of shears. A company of archers surrounded the cart. Behind pressed a crowd of curious people where might have been discerned many small tradesmen, bakers, butchers, masons, from whom a great tumult arose.

"The procession stopped on the place called Place Morimont not, as might be thought, because it was the place of public execution, but in remembrance of the mitred and croziered abbots of Morimont, who formerly had their house there. The wooden scaffold was set up on some stone steps adjoining a humble chapel where the monks were wont to pray for the souls of the victims.

"Hélène Gillet ascended the steps with the four religious, the headsman, and his wife the heads-

woman. The latter, having withdrawn the cord which encircled the victim's neck, cut her hair with shears half a foot long and bandaged her eyes; the religious prayed aloud. The headsman, however, began to tremble and turn pale. He was one, Simon Grandjean, a feeble-looking man, and as gentle and timorous of appearance as his wife, the headswoman, was savage. He had taken communion that morning in prison, and yet he felt upset and without courage to put this child to death. He leant over towards the crowd :

"'Your pardon, all of you,' he said, 'if I do what I have to do badly. I have a fever on me I have been unable to shake off for three months.'

"Then tottering, wringing his hands, lifting his eyes to heaven, he fell on his knees before Hélène Gillet, and twice asked her pardon. He asked a blessing from the priests, and when the headswoman had arranged the victim on the block he lifted his sword.

"The Jesuits and the Capuchins cried out 'Jesus! Mary!' and a groan went up from the crowd. The blow, which should have severed the neck, made a large gash on the left shoulder, and the poor creature fell over on her right side.

"Simon Grandjean, turning to the crowd, exclaimed :

"'Let me die!'

"Hooting arose, and some stones were thrown on the scaffold where the headswoman was replacing the victim on the block.

"Her husband again took his sword. Striking a second time, he deeply gashed the neck of the poor girl, who fell on the sword, which slipped from the hands of the executioner.

"This time the uproar from the crowd was terrible, and such a hail of stones showered on the scaffold that Simon Grandjean and the Jesuits and the Capuchins jumped down. They managed to gain the low-roofed chapel and shut themselves in. The headswoman, left alone with the victim, looked for the sword. Not seeing it, she took the cord with which Hélène Gillet had been led there, knotted it round the neck, and setting her foot on her chest tried to strangle her.

"Hélène, seizing the cord with both hands, defended herself, all bleeding as she was ; whereupon the woman Grandjean dragged her by the cord, head downwards, to the edge of the platform, and, having got her to the stone steps, she cut her throat with the shears.

"She was at it when the butchers and the masons, upsetting the archers and the police, rushed the approaches of the scaffold and chapel: a dozen strong arms lifted Hélène Gillet and carried her, insensible, to the shop of Maître Jacquin, the barber-surgeon.

"The crowd of people which flung itself on the chapel-door would soon have forced it. But the two Capuchin brothers and the two Jesuit fathers opened it, being terrified. And holding up their crosses with outstretched arm, they made a way with great difficulty through the riot.

"The headsman and his wife were stoned, and struck down with hammers, and their bodies dragged through the streets. Hélène Gillet, however, recovering consciousness at the surgeon's, asked to drink. Then, while Maître Jacquin was dressing her wound, she said:

"'Shall I not have anything more to suffer?'

"It was found that she had suffered two blows with the sword, six cuts from the shears, which had slashed her lips and throat, and that her loins had been deeply cut by the sword, over which the headswoman dragged her while trying to strangle her; and finally that her whole body was bruised by the stones the crowd had thrown on the scaffold.

"Nevertheless she was healed of all her wounds.

Left in the hands of Jacquin the surgeon, under guard of a sheriff's officer, she asked continually :

" 'Is it not over ? Will they kill me ?'

" The surgeon, and some charitable people who stood by her, were urgent in reassuring her. But only the king could grant her her life. Févret, the advocate, drew up a petition which was signed by many notables of Dijon, and carried to his Majesty. Festivities were being held at the court at that moment on account of the marriage of Henrietta-Maria of France with the King of England. On the score of this marriage, Louis the Just granted the favour asked.

" He gave a full pardon to the poor girl, deeming, as the letters of remission said, that she had suffered tortures which equalled, nay even surpassed, the penalty of her sentence.

" Hélène Gillet, restored to life, withdrew into a convent at Brest where she practised up to the time of her death, the strictest piety. Such," said the little official, " is the true history of Hélène Gillet, as every one in Dijon knows. Do you not find it entertaining, Monsieur l'Abbé ? "

XX

JUSTICE (*continued*)

"ALAS!" said my good master, "I cannot stomach my food. My heart is as sick at this horrible scene, which you have described so cold-bloodedly, sir, as at the sight of this servant of Madame Josse's whom they are taking to be hanged, when something better might be made of her."

"But, Monsieur," retorted the beadle, "have I not told you that this girl has stolen from her mistress; and do you not wish thieves to be hanged?"

"Certainly," said my good master, "it is customary; and as the force of custom is irresistible, I pay no attention to it in my ordinary course of life. In the same way Seneca, the philosopher, who nevertheless inclined to mildness, put together treatises of consummate elegance, even while

near to him, at Rome, slaves were crucified for the smallest fault, as we see in the case of the slave Mithridates, who died, his hands nailed to the cross; merely guilty of having blasphemed the divinity of his master, the infamous Trimalchio. We are so made that nothing usual or customary either troubles or wounds us. And habit wears away, if I may say so, our indignation as well as our astonishment. I wake up every morning without thinking, I own, of the unhappy beings who are to be hanged or broken upon the wheel during the day. But when the thought of torture becomes more perceptible to me my heart is troubled, and the sight of this handsome girl led to her death contracts my throat to the point of refusing passage to this little fish."

"What is a handsome girl?" said the beadle. "There is not a street in Paris where they don't make them by the dozen every night. Why did this one steal from her mistress, Madame Josse?"

"I know nothing of that, Monsieur," gravely answered my good master, "you know nothing, and the judges who condemned her knew no more, for the reasons of our actions are obscure, and their springs remain deeply hidden. I hold man free as regards his deeds, as my religion teaches me to

believe, but beyond the doctrine of the Church, which is sure, there is so little ground for believing in the freedom of mankind, that I tremble when I think of decrees of justice punishing actions whose mainspring, sequence, and causes, all equally escape us, where the will plays often but a small part, and which are sometimes accomplished without consciousness. If, finally, we are responsible for our acts, since the system of our holy religion is founded on the mysterious accord between human free-will and divine grace, it is an error to deduce from this obscure and delicate liberty all the troubles, all the tortures, and all the suffering of which our laws are prodigal."

"I perceive with sorrow, Monsieur," said the dingy little man, "that you are on the side of the rogues."

"Alas! Monsieur," said my good master, "they are part of suffering humanity, and members like ourselves of Jesus Christ who died between two thieves. I seem to perceive cruelties in our laws which will appear more distinctly in the future, and over which our posterity will wax indignant."

"I do not agree with you, Monsieur," said the other, drinking a little gulp of wine. "All the gothic barbarity has been pared away from our laws

and customs, and justice is to-day restrained and humane to excess. Punishment is exactly proportioned to crime, and you see thieves hanged, murderers broken on the wheel, traitors torn by four horses, atheists, sorcerers, and sodomites burnt, coiners boiled alive; in all which criminal law exhibits extreme moderation and all possible mildness."

"Monsieur, in all times judges have believed themselves to be benevolent, equitable, and gentle. In the gothic ages of St. Louis, and even of Charlemagne, they admired their own benignity, which appears to us to-day as savage. I divine that, in their turn, our sons will judge us as savage, and that they will find still something more to pare away from the tortures and punishments which we inflict."

"Monsieur, you are not speaking as a magistrate. Torture is necessary to extract confessions unobtainable by gentle means. As to punishments, they are reduced to what is necessary to assure safety of their life and goods to citizens."

"You acknowledge then, Monsieur, that justice has for its object not what is just, but what is useful, and that it is inspired only by the interests and prejudices of peoples. Nothing is more true, and faults are punished not in proportion to the malice attached to

them, but in view of the harm they cause, or which it is believed they cause, to society in general. Thus, coiners are put into a copper of boiling water, although, in reality, there is little malice in striking false coins. But the public, and financiers in particular, suffer a marked damage therefrom. It is this loss for which they avenge themselves with pitiless cruelty. Thieves are hanged, less for the perversity that lies in taking bread, and clothes, which is, by the way, excessively small, than for the reason of the natural attachment men have for their possessions. It is expedient to restore human justice to its true reason —which is the material interest of men, and to disengage it from all high philosophy—with which it pompously and hypocritically veils itself."

"Monsieur," replied the little official, "I do not understand you. It appears to me that justice is the more equitable the more useful it is, and this usefulness itself, which makes you disdain it, ought to render it august and sacred to you."

"You do not understand me," said my good master.

"Monsieur," said the little official, "I notice that you are drinking nothing. Your wine is good if I may judge by the colour of it. May I not taste it?"

It is true that for the first time in his life my good

master had left some wine at the bottom of the bottle. He poured it into the little official's glass.

"Your health, Monsieur l'Abbé," said the beadle. "Your wine is good, but your arguments are worthless. Justice, I repeat, is the more equitable the more useful it is, and this usefulness itself, which, you say, is in its origin and foundation, should make it appear to you as august and sacred. But you must acknowledge that the essence of justice is to be *just*, as the word implies?"

"Monsieur," said my good master, "when we have called beauty beautiful, truth true, and justice just, we shall have said nothing at all. Your Ulpian, who spoke with precision, asserted that justice is the firm and perpetual desire to attribute to each what belongs to him, and that laws are just when they sanction this desire. The misfortune is, that men have nothing of their own, and thus the equity of law does but guarantee to them the fruit of their inherited, or recent, rapine. They resemble those childish agreements wherein after having won some marbles, the winners say to those who wish to win them back again, 'That is not fair play.' The sagacity of judges limits itself to differentiating between usurpations which are not fair play and those which were agreed upon in starting, and this dis-

tinction is equally childish and thin. Above all, it is arbitrary. The strapping young woman who at this very moment is hanging at the end of a hempen rope, had stolen, you say, a lace head-dress from Councillor Josse's wife. But on what do you found your belief that this head-dress belonged to Councillor Josse's wife? You will tell me that she bought it with her own money, or found it in her wedding-chest, or received it from some lover—all good ways of acquiring lace. But however she may have acquired it I merely see that she had the enjoyment of it, as one of those gifts of fortune one finds, or loses perchance, and over which one has no natural right. Nevertheless, I own that the lappets belonged to her conformably to the rules of this game of possession, which human society can play as children play at hop-scotch. She valued her lappets, and in fact she had no less right to them than any other. Well and good. It was justice to return them to her, but without putting such a high price on them that for two wretched lappets of *point d'Alençon* a human creature should be destroyed."

"Monsieur," said the little official, "you keep in view but one side of the justice of the matter. It was not enough to do right by Councillor Josse's wife by giving her back her lappets. It was necessary

also to do right by the servant in hanging her by the neck. For justice is to render to each what is due to him. In which lies its majesty."

"In that case," said my good master, "justice is wickeder even than I thought. This belief that she owes punishment to the guilty is ferocious in the extreme. It is gothic barbarity."

"Monsieur," said the little official, "you misunderstand justice. Justice strikes without anger, and it has no hatred for this girl it sends to the gallows."

"A good thing, too," said my good master. "But I should prefer that judges confess that they punish the guilty from pure necessity, and only to make impressive examples. In that case they would merely hold by what was actually necessary. But if they think, in punishing, to give the guilty his due, one sees to what this delicate discrimination will lead them, and their probity itself will make them inexorable ; for one knows not how to refuse people what is due to them. This maxim horrifies me, Monsieur. It was laid down with the greatest severity by an able philosopher of the name of Menardus, who pretends that to fail to punish an ill-doer is to do him wrong, and wickedly to deprive him of the right to expiate his fault. He held that

the Athenian magistrates had done excellently well by Socrates the sage, and that they worked for the purification of his soul when they made him drink the hemlock. But those are odious thoughts. I ask that criminal justice should tend less to the sublime. The notion of pure revenge attached more commonly to the punishment of malefactors, although base and bad in itself, is less terrible in its consequences than the overweening virtue of ingenuous philosophers. I knew in former days, in Séez, a jovial and good sort of fellow, who took his children on his knee every evening and told them tales. He led an exemplary life, went to the sacraments, and prided himself on his scrupulous honesty in the corn business he had carried on for more than sixty years. Now he happened to be robbed by his servant of some doubloons, ducats, rose-nobles, and some fine gold coins, which he, curious of such things, kept in a case at the back of a drawer. As soon as he discovered this loss he carried complaint to the police, whereupon the maidservant was questioned, tried, condemned, and executed. The good man, who knew his rights, exacted that the skin of the thief should be given to him, of which he made a pair of pantaloons ; and he would often smack his thigh and cry, 'The hussy! the hussy!' The girl had taken

his gold pieces, he had taken her skin; anyway he had his unphilosophical revenge in all the simplicity of his rustic savagery. He had no notion of fulfilling a lofty duty when he slapped his hand light-heartedly on his garment of human skin. Better is it to acknowledge that if one hangs a thief it is for prudence' sake, and with the object of frightening the others by his example, and not at all on the philosophical plea for the sake of giving each man his due. For in true philosophy nothing belongs to anyone if we except life itself. To pretend that we owe expiation to criminals is to fall into mysticism of a ferocious description, worse than naked violence and open anger. As to the punishment of thieves, it is a right which has its origin in force, not in philosophy. Philosophy teaches us, on the contrary, that all we possess is acquired by violence or by cunning. And you see also that judges approve of our being deprived of our possessions if the ravisher be powerful enough. Thus it is permitted to the king to take our silver-plate to make war, as was seen under Louis the Great, when the requisition was so exacting that they even took away the fringe of the bed-hangings, to use the gold woven with the silk. This prince put his hand on the goods of individuals and on the treasures of the Church, and

twenty years ago, performing my devotions in Notre-Dame-de-Liesse in Picardy, I heard the complaints of an old verger, who deplored that the late king had taken away and melted down all the treasures of the church, and ravished even the jewelled breast of gold, placed there some time before in great pomp by the Princess Palatine, after she had been miraculously cured of cancer. Justice seconded the prince in his requisition, and punished severely those who hid away any article from the king's commissaries. Evidently she did not think that these things belonged so peculiarly to their possessors that nothing could separate them."

"Monsieur," said the little official, "the commissaries acted in the name of the king, who, possessing everything in the kingdom, can dispose of it to his liking, either for war, or for naval armaments, or in any other way."

"That is true," said my good master, "and that is one of the rules of the game. The judges go about it as in the game of 'goose,' following one another and looking at what is written in the rules. The sovereign's rights, upheld by the Swiss Guard, and by all sorts of soldiers, are written there. And this poor girl, who has been hanged, had no Swiss Guard to inscribe in the rules of the game that she

had the right to wear Madame Josse's lace. That is just how it is."

"Monsieur," said the little official, "I hope you do not liken Louis the Great, who took his subjects' plate to pay his soldiers, to this creature who stole a head-dress to deck herself."

"Monsieur," said my good master, "it is less innocent to make war than to go to Ramponneau's in a lace head-dress. But justice gives to every one what is his, according to the rules of this game played by man, which is the wickedest, the most absurd, and the least amusing of all games. And 'tis our misfortune that every man is obliged to take a hand in it."

"It is necessary," said the little official.

"Laws are also of use," said my good master. "But they are not just and can never be so, for the judge assures to his fellow men the enjoyment of the goods that belong to them, without distinction between the beneficial and the hurtful: this distinction is not found in the rules of the game, but in the book of Divine justice only, wherein no one may read. Do you know the story of the angel and the anchorite? An angel came down to earth with the face of a man and the dress of a pilgrim; making his way through Egypt. He knocked, at

eventide, at the door of a good anchorite, who, taking him for a traveller, gave him supper, and wine from a golden cup. Then he made him lie down on his bed whilst he laid himself on the ground on some handfuls of maize-straw. While he slept his celestial guest rose up, took the cup out of which he had drunk, and, hiding it under his cloak, fled away. He acted thus, not meaning any ill-will towards the good hermit, but, on the contrary, in the interest of the host who had given him such a charitable welcome. For he knew that this cup would have been the undoing of the holy man, who had put his heart into its keeping, whereas God desires us to love none but Him and does not brook that a man, devoted to religion, should attach himself to the things of this world. The angel who had his share of Divine wisdom, distinguished between goods that are good and goods that are not. Judges do not make this distinction. Who knows but what Madame Josse may not lose her soul along with the lappets of lace her servant took, and which the judges have given back ?"

"In the meanwhile," said the little official, rubbing his hands, "there is now a hussy the less in this world."

He shook the crumbs from his coat, bowed to those present, and went off jauntily.

XXI

JUSTICE (*continued*)

MY good master, turning to me, continued in this manner :

"I only related the story of the angel and the hermit to show the abyss which separates the temporal from the spiritual. Now it is only in things temporal that human justice is exercised, and it is on a low plane where high principles are not in favour. The cruellest offence that could be possibly be done our Lord Jesus Christ is to place His image in the courts of law, where judges pardon Pharisees who crucified Him, and condemn the Magdalene whom He raised up with His Divine hands. What does He—the Just One—among these men, who are unable to show themselves just, even should they wish to, because their melancholy duty is to consider the actions of their fellows, not for what they are in their essence, but merely from the point of view of the social

interest; that is to say, on account of this mass of egoism, avarice, error, and abuse which go to the making of cities, and of which they are the purblind guardians. In weighing a fault they add to it the weight of fear or anger it inspired in the cowardly public. And all this is written in their book in such wise that the ancient reading and dead letter stand in the stead of intelligence, heart, and a living soul. And all these regulations, some of which go back to the infamous time of Byzantium and Theodora, agree on this one point only, that all must be perpetuated—virtues and vices alike, in a society which has no desire for change. A fault, in itself, is of so little account in the eyes of the law, and the surrounding circumstances are so considerable, that the self-same act allowable in one case becomes unpardonable in another, as is shown in the instance of a slap in the face, which, given by one man to another appears simply, in the case of a bourgeois, the effect of an irascible temper, but, for a soldier, becomes a crime punishable by death. This barbarity, which still exists, will be our shame in centuries to come. We reck little of it, but one day they will ask each other what sort of savages we can have been to send a man to his death for a generous warmth of blood springing from his heart when he is bound by law

to suffer the perils of war and the miseries of barrack-life. And it is clear that, if there were such a thing as justice, we should not have two codes, one military, the other civil. This military justice, whose results one sees daily, is atrociously cruel; and men, if they ever establish law and order, will never believe that formerly, in times of peace, courts-martial avenged the majesty of corporals and sergeants by the death of a man. They will not believe that unfortunate beings were ordered to be shot for the crime of desertion before the enemy, in an expedition where the government of France itself did not recognise a state of war. What is to be wondered at is that such atrocities are committed by Christian people who do honour to St. Sebastian, a mutinous soldier; and to those martyrs of the Theban legion, whose sole glory is having, in a former age, incurred the severity of courts-martial in refusing to fight against the Bagaudes. But enough of this, let us talk no more of the justice of these gentlemen of the sword, who will perish one day according to the prophecy of the Son of God; let us return to our civil magistrates.

"Judges search not the reins, neither do they read the heart of man, and their justest justice is rude and superficial. All the more then must they cling

to this coarse skin of the law on which the codes are inscribed. They are men—that is to say weak and corruptible, gentle to the strong, and pitiless to the weak. They sanction, by their judgments, the cruellest social iniquities, and it is difficult to distinguish, in this partiality, what comes from their personal baseness from what is imposed on them by their duty to their profession; which duty is, in reality, to uphold the State in what is evil as well as in what is good; to see that public morality remains unaltered, whether excellent or detestable; and to assure the rights of citizens along with the tyrannical desires of the prince, to say nothing of the ridiculous and cruel superstitions which find an inviolable shelter under the lilies of France.

"The most austere magistrate may be brought, by his integrity itself, to decrees as revolting, and perhaps even more inhuman, than those of one who fails in his duty, and I do not know myself, which of the two I should dread the most, the judge who has made a soul for himself out of the text of the law, or he who makes use of a remnant of sentiment to twist the text. The one would sacrifice me to his interests or his passions, the other would immolate me coldly for the written word.

"Again, we must notice that the magistrate is the

defender, through his office, not of new prejudices to which we are all more or less submissive, but of old prejudices which are preserved in our laws while they are fading from our minds and our manners. And there is no one of a thinking and liberal turn of mind who does not feel how much of the barbarous there is in law, whereas the judge has not the right to feel this.

"But I am speaking as if laws, clumsy and barbarous as they are, were at least clear and precise. But much is necessary for them to become so. The 'gramarye' of a wizard would be easy to understand compared with many of the articles in our codes and case-law. This difficulty of interpretation has greatly contributed to the establishing of divers degrees of jurisdiction, and we admit that what the manorial court has not understood the Parliamentary gentlemen will make clear. It is expecting a great deal from five men in red robes and square caps, who even after having recited the *Veni Creator* are still subject to error; and it is better to acknowledge that the highest court judges without further appeal, for the sole reason, that the others were exhausted before recourse was had to this. The prince is himself of this opinion, for he has a judgment-seat* above the Parliament."

* The institution styled *lit de justice*, bed of justice.

XXII

JUSTICE (*concluded*)

MY good master looked sorrowfully at the flowing water, an image of this life, where all things pass and nothing changes. He pondered for some time and then continued in a low voice :

" That point is of itself, my son, an insurmountable perplexity to me, that it is needful that justice should come from judges. It is clear that they are interested in finding guilty the man whom they at first suspected. *Esprit de corps*, so strong among them, pushes them to it, and so you may see throughout their procedure how they brush aside the defence as importunate, and only allow it a hearing when the prosecution has donned its arms and composed its countenance, and has, in fact, contrived to assume the air of the Goddess of Wisdom. By professional feeling they are

inclined to see guilt in every accused person, and their zeal appears so alarming to certain European nations that, in important cases, they give them the help of twelve men, drawn by lot. Whereby, it appears, blind chance is a better guarantee of the life and liberty of the accused than can be the enlightened conscience of a judge. It is true, however, that these bourgeois magistrates, drawn by lot, are kept out of the affair, of which they see but the outside pomp and show. And it is also true that, ignorant of the law, they are not called upon to apply it, but to decide merely, in one word, whether it is a case for applying it. It is said that this kind of assize results sometimes in absurdities, but that the nations who have instituted it are attached to it as a kind of very precious safeguard. I willingly believe that. And I understand their accepting decrees given in such fashion, which may be inept or cruel, but at least whose absurdity and barbarity cannot be imputed to one person, so to speak. Iniquity seems bearable when it is incoherent enough to appear involuntary.

"The little official of a moment ago, who had such a feeling for justice, suspected me of taking the side of thieves and assassins. On the contrary,

I disapprove so strongly of theft and murder that I cannot endure even the authorised copy of them by the law, and it is painful to me to observe that judges have found no better way to punish rogues and homicides than by imitating them; for in truth, Tournebroche my son, what is fine or execution, save theft and murder, perpetrated with majestic punctiliousness? And do you not see that, notwithstanding all its splendour, our justice only attains to the shameful revenge of evil for evil, misery for misery; and to the doubling of crimes and sins for the sake of equilibrium and symmetry? It is possible, in the carrying out of this duty, to exercise a certain probity and disinterestedness. One may show oneself a l'Hospital as well as a Jeffreys, and for my part I know a magistrate who is an honest fellow enough. But to return to the principle of the thing, I have wanted to show the true character of an institution which the pride of the judges and the terror of the people, vying with each other, have clothed in borrowed majesty. I have wanted to show the humble origin of these codes they wish to make august, and which are in reality but an odd heap of expedients.

"Alas! laws emanate from man; a poor and

miserable origin. They are mostly born of occasion. Ignorance, superstition, the pride of princes, the interests of the legislator, caprice, fantasy—these are the sources of the great body of the law, which becomes worthy of veneration when it is no longer intelligible. This obscurity that envelops it, thickened by the commentators, gives it the majesty of the oracles of old. I hear on all sides, and I read in every paper, that nowadays we make laws fitting for the circumstance and the occasion. That is the view of the short-sighted, who fail to see that it is but following an immemorial custom, and that in all times laws have resulted from some chance thing. We complain also of the obscurity and contradiction into which legislators continually fall. And we fail to note that their predecessors were equally dense and confused.

"In actual fact, Tournebroche my son, laws are good or bad less by their nature than in the way we use them, and such and such a provision, extremely wicked though it be, does no harm if the judge does not put it into force. Custom is stronger than law. Refinement of manners, gentleness of mind, are the only remedies one can reasonably bring for legal barbarity. For to correct laws by laws is to take a lengthy and

uncertain road. Centuries alone undo the work of centuries. There is little hope that a French Numa will meet one day in the forest of Compiègne, or among the rocks of Fontainebleau, with another nymph Egeria, who shall dictate wise laws to him."

He gazed for long on the hills which showed blue on the horizon. His air was grave and sad. Then, laying his hand gently on my shoulder, he spoke to me in accents so profound that I was touched to the depths of my soul. He said:

"Tournebroche, my son, you see me, all at once, wavering and embarrassed, stammering and stupid, at the mere notion of correcting what I find detestable. Do not think this timidity of mind. Nothing may give pause to the audacity of my thought. But note well, my son, what I now say to you. Truths, detected by the intelligence, will for ever remain sterile. The heart alone can fertilise its dreams. It pours the water of life on all it loves. Seeds of good are sown in the world by the feelings. Reason has no such virtue. And I confess that up to now I have been too reasonable in my criticism of laws and manners. And so this judgment will fall without fruit, and wither as a tree bitten by April frosts.

To help mankind one must throw aside all reason as an encumbrance, and rise on the wings of enthusiasm. So long as we reason we shall never soar."

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