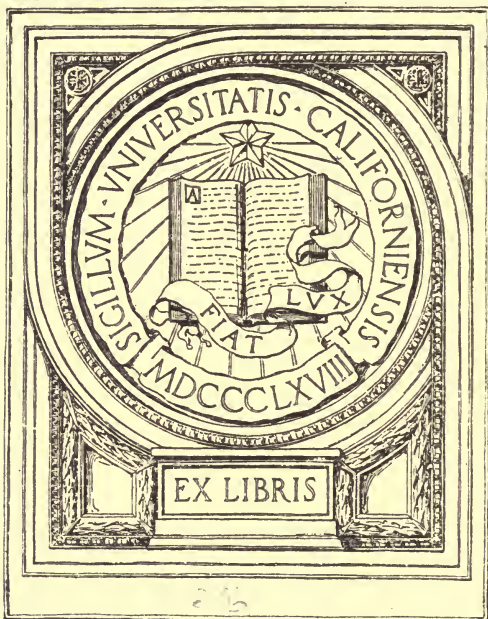


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The Night Cometh

By

Paul Bourget

Translated from the French by

G. Frederic Lees



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The Night Cometh

The Night Cometh

I

LEFT BEHIND

BEFORE these recollections become obliterated, I would set them down. At this *Clinique* in the Rue Saint Guillaume, which upon the outbreak of the war was transformed into a military hospital, my time is fully absorbed; there are forty beds, always occupied, and the cases are very serious. There are two of us doctors upon whom the duties devolve. Did I say two? The surgeon comes only in the morning to perform his operations. He calls again in the afternoon, throws a glance round, and is off, leaving me alone, with a wretched second-year student, excused from military service be-

cause of a weak heart, and so clumsy that I can only just entrust him with an intravenous injection.

This condition of things has been going on for nine months: August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, and April—nine months since I tried to secure permission, in spite of my lameness, to go to the front, to serve at a regimental dressing-station. Once more that glorious afternoon comes back to me (through the irony of Fate such days were very numerous during the tragic summer of 1914) and my arrival at the house of my poor master, Professor Michel Ortègue, who had undertaken to present my application.

“Impossible, my dear Marsal,” he said. “They don’t want you. But I’ve arranged everything otherwise. I’m placing my *Clinique* under military control. Now, you were my pupil at the Beaujon Hospital. Since then you’ve rather betrayed surgery. But your sins are forgiven. I need an assistant on whom I can depend. I’ll take you. . . . Is that settled?”

Whosoever had once worked under a man of so strong a personality as Ortègue ever after regarded him as "the master," one whose orders were beyond discussion. I accepted. I shall, then, spend the entire war in this ancient mansion, paradoxically adapted by Ortègue to the practice of his specialty,—surgery of the nervous system. He took an inordinate pride in this building, which the celebrated architect, Daniel Marot, built in 1690, for the first Duke of Colombières. He loved to relate its annals and to tell about those who had dwelt in it: first of all the above-mentioned Duke of Colombières, then a granddaughter of the great Condé, following her I know not what financier, the son of a barber who became wealthy through Law's system. At the time of the Terror the mansion was used as a prison, but under Napoleon it became the residence of a Marshal; under the monarchy of July it sheltered a foreign embassy, and under the Second Empire, a senator.

Many private dramas must have been

enacted, in the course of those two hundred and twenty-five years, within these walls and in proximity of this peaceful garden, the ancient trees of which, at this very time, are putting forth their fresh spring buds. Their leaves were still green in the month of August. I saw them turn yellow, fade, and fall. Now again I see them put on their verdant dress. Many other eyes have looked on these same trees in hours of anguish, astonished as I am by the contrast between this work of Nature, its perfect rhythm, its perennial slowness, and the grievous frenzy of human agitation.

What, however, were the tragedies in which the occupants of this house were involved compared to the frightful cataclysm whose sinister shadow I see everywhere around me, even when gazing on this vernal garden! Mutilated soldiers drag themselves about in it—one whose arm has been amputated, another who has lost a leg—all of them weak and in search of the caresses of these early gleams of sunshine. Were I to pass through that door, I should see, in room after room,

the bloodless or vulturous faces of wounded men lying back on their pillows, with feverish eyes, pinched nostrils, tight mouths, and, on the bedclothes, scattered newspapers, bearing such headlines, suggestive of worse calamities as: *Violent fighting at Dixmude . . . Fresh bombardment of Rheims . . . Transatlantic liner sunk by a Submarine !*

How many times, during this entire autumn and winter, have I trembled, in the presence of these signs of warfare being waged so near, and at the thought that I am here, not, indeed, useless, but nevertheless, *out of danger !* My infirmity overwhelms me with shame, as though I were not wholly innocent of the chance which ruled that I should be born thirty-two years ago, with a club foot, which could not be made normal even through an operation. When the Taubes and Zeppelins dropped their bombs on Paris, I experienced, in the midst of feelings of revolt and horror, as it were, a sense of appeasement. The danger was certainly insignificant, but it was a danger for all that, and it seemed to me that

I held intercourse with the battle, merely by hearing for a second that bursting of bombs which our heroic soldiers hear daily.

And then I reason with myself. I say that these soldiers are heroic. Why? Because they offer their lives bravely. On what account? In fulfilment of their duty. But what is their duty? Obedience to the law. I examine this idea closely. What is a law to a scientist? A constant and necessary sequence between two facts. If Ortègue had still been in the flesh, he would have given me a very simple definition of heroism. "A fact being taken for granted,—say the existence of a peril; another group of facts being admitted,—a certain temperament, a certain hereditary tendency, a particular education; then this temperament, this heredity, this education will secrete courage, whereas another temperament, a different heredity, an education of another kind will secrete cowardice, as a stomach secretes gastric juice, a liver bile in the presence of such or such a substance."

I should have listened to him. I should not have dared to reply. Nevertheless, I should have retained the opinion that mental phenomena are more complex than such explanations admit. We are not considering a stomach which does or does not secrete gastric juice, a liver which does or does not secrete bile. We are considering a soldier who shows courage, and another who is guilty of cowardice. We do not merely establish the truth of their act. We qualify it. We have a feeling of esteem and enthusiasm for the one, of disdain for the other. Again why? Because this act is not necessary, because it is not constant. It is *obligatory*. It is the difference between the laws which rule our voluntary energy and those which govern our physiological energy.

Again I examine this idea closely. There is a limit to obligation—that of our faculties. No order from any leader, whoever he may be, can compel soldiers to walk on the sea. Why? Because they are physically unable to do it. Our power, then, is the measure of our duty.

I, for instance, could not be an ambulance doctor at the front because of my infirmity. There is no reason for reproaching myself on that account. I have done my best in this hospital. I have adapted my faculties to this war. Have I not wholly fulfilled my duty?

II

AN ORTHODOX SCIENTIST

WHAT a strange turn my reflections have taken, seeing that I am a doctor, entrusted with a doctor's work, amidst undoubted medical surroundings. This preoccupation, this obsession by a moral problem has been and will continue to be the dominant feature of my life during this war. It is indeed on that very account that I have taken these sheets of white paper and commenced to write this "memoir," if one may so call it, in order to get the bearings of my mind, by methodically grouping a whole series of scenes which I happened to witness here, on this very spot. For the moment, distracted by their strangeness, I have not had the strength to look at them intellectually, if I may so express myself. I have felt only their tragic side. At a distance,

I believe I can unravel their abstract meaning, their value as an argument in favour of a certain thesis, or rather of a hypothesis.

How many times, at Beaujon and before the operating table, have I heard this self-same Ortègue, the hero of these painful scenes, repeat, whilst one of us was anæsthetizing the patient: "Every patient is, in the eyes of the true clinical surgeon, an experiment instituted by nature." The events which I would here set down in detail also constitute one of these experiments, and their recital will be but one of those "observations" which Ortègue advised us to write *in extenso*. "Facts," he insisted, "collect facts, more and more facts. Magendie was right: the savant is merely a rag-picker who wanders in the domain of Science, with a basket on his back and a pointed stick in his hand, and who collects all he finds." Yes, but if my unfortunate master were to rise from the sumptuous tomb which he had had prepared for himself at the Passy cemetery and where his poor tortured flesh at last found rest—without mor-

phia—this “observation” would hardly please him.

The facts which I intend to set down here belong to the order of religious psychology, and, for that idolater of facts, those facts had no existence. When you spoke to him about the “religious problem,” he laughed loudly and merrily. It was impossible then to draw from him any other formula—parodied from the *Malade imaginaire*—than this: *Primo purgare, ensuite philosophari*. Purge oneself? Of what? Of any idea of a possible future life, of that unhealthy atavism of mysticism which impels us to follow in the phenomena of nature the trace of a thought, of a will, of an attachment. He would not admit that the divine existed in the world, any more than in man.

Thinking in that manner, he believed he was obeying Magendie’s principle: the submission of the intelligence to the rude fact. He did not perceive that he was dogmatizing in another way, he, the opponent of all dogma. He accepted as facts only the phenomena that

had been sorted beforehand by an orthodoxy, no less systematic and no less partial than the other, namely, scientific orthodoxy. I pointed out to him, timidly, that the religious fact is also a fact, and that it would therefore be scientific, in accordance with the experimental doctrine, to take it into consideration." "*Primo purgare,*" he repeated. "The Supernatural does not exist. Everything which presupposes a personal intention in the universe is null by definition. If you tell me that you have seen an animal without a nervous system which felt and walked, there is no need of my verifying your testimony, I know that it is false. . . ."

Innumerable scientists reason like Ortègue. I myself have reasoned in that manner. I had never met, face to face, that reality against which I have recently been colliding for weeks together. Since that piece of evidence has been vouchsafed me, radical negation of the Supernatural, or, to speak more accurately, of the Spiritual, seems to me too summary. Science, in the issue, is only a hypothesis,

whose value we put to the test by the control of reality. In medicine—on this point Or-tège was no less affirmative—the most logical theories are condemned as soon as clinical surgery contradicts them, the most disconcerting are recognized as exact the moment clinical surgery verifies them. *Action* then is, definitively, the supreme criterion of truth. If it is proved, by facts simply verified, that certain ideas, absolutely opposed to scientific orthodoxy, enable certain men to adapt themselves to life and, on the contrary, that certain other ideas, scientifically orthodox, do not permit that adaptation, it is indisputably proved that that scientific orthodoxy needs revision.

The present "observation" is made with no other object than to furnish this proof for a case very special in its circumstances, but very general as regards its intimate datum. Let us be more exact. Did I say to furnish this proof? No. To suggest it as possible, since I see it so. As a savant, my conscience compels me to record this "observation,"

to investigate this experiment in order to extract whatever truth it may contain. To see clearly into my mind, I said just now. These lucidities constitute the probity of myself and other studious men.

Ortègue would reply, on reading these lines: "But I can see very clearly into your mind. Your father was a professor of philosophy at Montpellier. He was a metaphysician who came into contact with vitalists. Your mother was a devout Catholic. You are taking for granted that the problem to be solved is the postulate of your complex heredity. *Primo purgare.*" But what savant has ever worked with any other instrument than the brain formed by heredity? The whole question is this: Is the result obtained by this instrument valid in itself? If I write down these notes, it is precisely in order to distinguish better, in this adventure, my own personal part and the positive, indestructible remainder, which would be the same for all witnesses.

III

THE APPEAL OF THE SUMPTUOUS

SINCE facts are in question, let us go straight to them, and first of all to the transformation of this private *Clinique* into a supplementary hospital, which took place about the beginning of August, 1914. It was completed rapidly. On August 1st, as soon as the order for mobilization was posted up, the change was decided upon. The following day, Ortègue saw Moreau-Janville, the wealthy manager of the La Rochelle *Forges et Chantiers*. By a most audacious trepanation he had saved the life of the son of this captain of industry, which had been jeopardized in an autocar accident. Moreau-Janville immediately agreed, in the name of the metallurgic company of which he is the head, to meet the expenses of the military

Clinique for the duration of the war. Armed with this promise, Ortègue hastened to the Ministry of War, where he requested that the house in the Rue Saint Guillaume should be attached to the Val-de-Grâce Hospital, in order that he might remain more completely the master of it. His application was granted, and a few days later, on Wednesday, August 5th, we proceeded to make the necessary modifications.

Ortègue showed his promptness of execution in all his acts, whether great or small. He was truly a surgeon, in the complete sense of that beautiful word, composed of two others, likewise as beautiful: χεῖρ, the hand, ἔργον, the work. In his case, to think was to act. There was something direct and immediate in his whole person. When operating, his thin face, framed in the gauze of the mask, astonished the onlooker through the intensity of its concentration, his peculiar gift, in which was absorbed his whole being. You could see he was living to the very ends of the steel instruments which his long fingers, so dexter-

ous, so supple in the india-rubber glove, handled in turn with so much energy and delicacy. And what anatomical sureness of vision he displayed!

A diminutive, slender, swarthy man, his light brown warm eyes revealed—as did his general appearance, his slender bones, and hair that for a long time was intensely black—a foreign and almost exotic atavism. His father, however, was a simple notary of Bayonne. But his name indicates the Spanish origin of the family, and was there not, on the other side of the Pyrenees, a botanist named Ortega, after whom there is even named a plant of the chickweed variety, *Ortegaia*?

“I desire no other survival,” Ortègue often affirmed when mentioning this detail, “than that my name be attached to a scientific discovery, small or great. To determine, like my namesake of Madrid, a vegetable species, or, like Addison, Duchenne of Boulogne, Bright, the syndrome of a disease, is to last as long as Science. That is the only immortality.”

This passionate love of Science, of *his* sci-

ence,—“holy surgery,” he used to call it,—was the fundamental fact about this man with the thin and imperious profile like that of some magician out of the *Arabian Nights*. He added to it a taste, nay a passion for sumptuousness which smacked indeed of the East. This trait in his character, astonishing in the case of a master of the surgery of the nervous system, seemed natural when you looked at him.

His house on the Place des États-Unis was nothing else than a museum filled with rare objects: furniture, stuffs, armour, tapestries, marbles, and bronzes. He had gathered there some twenty pictures—all of them choice, either through chance or thanks to hereditary instinct—of that curious Spanish School which is so badly represented in France. The Catalan master of Saint-Georges, Jacomart Baço, Luis Dalmau, and Jorge Inglés—names of artists known only to the elect—were familiar to the patients of the celebrated professor. Walking up and down in the waiting-rooms, they could spell out at length the disconcerting

syllables at the bottom of ancient frames, which were themselves worthy of the canvases and panels. Classic names were also to be read there. Ortègue possessed a *Holy Ursula* by Zurbaran, a *Saint Francis*, by Murillo, a sketch of a cavalier by Velasquez, and a bull-fight by Goya.

In addition to this, there was a splendid display of flowers in the rooms, and everything else in keeping: servants in livery, silver plate,—what more need I say? three autocars!

This Arabian magician was a Parisian of Parisians, who had his box at the Théâtre Français and at the Opera for every subscription performance and every dress rehearsal. I compared him just now to a personage of the *Arabian Nights*. Morally, he paired rather with Dr. Faust, eager for all the pleasures of life and clasping them all. His extraordinary prestige over us, his pupils, was the result of this duality,—a Prince of Science living in a princely manner. He appeared to us to be the very incarnation of success. A professor at forty years of age, after a brilliant

triumph in the competitive examinations, he had attained every honour. He possessed the power of thought. He was crowned with glory. He had money—people instanced one year in which he had “made a million francs!”—He seemed, up to the time of his terrible malady, to have eternal youth.

At forty-four years of age he had been able, without any one taking it into his or her head to find the union ridiculous, to marry a young lady of twenty, who also bore a name illustrious in the annals of medicine,—the daughter of the physiologist Malfan-Trévis, the favourite pupil of Claude Bernard. During those years—how recent, since this marriage dates only from 1908, and yet how far off they seem—Professor and Mme. Ortègue never entered any place of assembly whatsoever, whether a theatre or an exhibition, without the young wife’s provoking that attention and admiration which fills the heart of the older husband with pride,—until the time comes when it is pricked with jealousy.

IV

THE MARRIAGE OF FORTY-FOUR AND TWENTY

I HAVE just laid down my pen in order to recall this woman, then so happy—now so wretched—in the days when she was the betrothed of my master. With what joyful tones he informed me of the event, which was to us so unexpected. There floated around him a legend of good luck, incompatible, it seemed, with the naïve enthusiasm of such phrases as these:

“Yes, my dear Marsal, I am getting married and I have found the Ideal. Do you hear? The Ideal. You will agree with me when you see Catherine. I call her by her Christian name. I’ve known her since she was that height, and I discovered her this winter. Sometimes I ask myself: Have I been a fool? She might

have married another. . . . But you will see her. . . .”

Mlle. Malfan-Trévis justified his exaltation. At twenty she was a tall and lissom young woman with a face of creamy complexion, of a purity of line almost classic, and crowned with a magnificent head of dark chestnut hair full of golden gleams. Her noble and proud physiognomy expressed at one and the same time passion, gravity, and grace. Her eyes especially, large and wondering, held in their grey pupils a serious fixedness of expression, that gave one the feeling of deep and restrained sensibility. The mouth, reflective when at rest, became child-like when smiling; her somewhat full lips at such times disclosed brilliantly white teeth, the soundness of which indicated in this still fragile creature, an unimpaired reserve of physical strength promising future development of the woman in the happiness of marriage.

An indescribable something, as of over-concentration, added a pathetic charm to this beautiful face, at any rate for those who

knew—Ortègue told me at once—the trials she had undergone. Her father had died of an attack under particularly cruel circumstances, in the open street, and her mother had remarried a year afterwards, under no less cruel conditions. It was only too evident that Mme. Malfan-Trévis was setting right a liaison of long standing. The young girl had felt chilled to the heart in the house of this mother, all of whose faults she had not perhaps understood but had felt.

Did pity for her moral solitude count for something in Ortègue's love? Or was that merely a pretext to excuse the disproportion of their ages in a marriage which was still acceptable in 1908, but which in ten or twenty years might take on another complexion. Was there gratitude in the transport with which the orphan flew towards the saviour who was delivering her from the most painful of situations? Did she love Ortègue for his glory, for the genial strength of his personality, for the prestige exercised over her by a superiority analogous to that with which

the memory of her father remained regretfully surrounded?

Of one thing at least I had proof: this marriage was for her, as for Ortègue, an act, not of reason but of impulse, and the girl's passion was confessed with such ingenuousness that there was but one opinion among those present at the celebration:

“Why, she is still more in love with him than he is with her!”

V

SEVEN YEARS LATER

WAS she still as much in love at the date I resume my narrative, that is to say seven years later, about the beginning of the month of August, 1914? Had not love given place to a feeling perhaps more devoted, better prepared for all sacrifices, but of another order? Why did this question obtrude upon me so forcibly during those days of waiting in the month of August and whilst we were installing our hospital?

Mme. Ortègue had expressed a desire to preside over this work. It was the first time that I had come into close and almost hourly relations with her. She went ceaselessly backwards and forwards, through the bedrooms and along the corridors of the ancient mansion; she was as beautiful as ever, more

beautiful, and so impressive in her pure white nurse's uniform. I ought to have seen in her assiduity in a work which associated her more closely with her husband, and also in her manner of performing it, a proof that she had not changed. Assuredly, Ortègue was the only man who existed for her. Towards the house-surgeons, officers, or myself she never showed the slightest trace of coquetry.

What care, on the other hand, she displayed in carrying out the professor's instructions for the fitting up of the *clinique*! Her feet, which remained pretty and slender in their heelless white shoes, mounted and descended indefatigably the stone steps of the main staircase, hurried from the pharmacy to the linen-room, or from the operating theatre to the sterilization-room. With her slender fingers, on which rings shone no more—not even her wedding-ring, which was pinned to her apron by a little Red Cross trinket—she assisted in unpacking bottles of oxygenated water, *ampoules* of chloroform, and drainage tubes. She arranged the shirts of the wounded,

piled up the rolls of bandages and packets of cotton-wool, verified the dressing-waggon and the glass-cases of shining steel instruments.

She initiated herself into these details of our austere profession with a display of ignorance which revealed what a solid partition the surgeon had set up between his household and the severe side of his professional work. But the zeal which she exhibited also showed how anxious she was, in these grave hours, to share her husband's patriotic activity.

These feverish preparations called up sinister visions, especially as they coincided with the early news of the German rush into Belgium. Other nurses, enrolled in our staff out of charity, shuddered in advance. Not so Mme. Ortègue. By the look with which she questioned the Professor, when he visited his still empty hospital, one could guess her sole desire, namely, to please him. Anxious when he became irritated—as happened too often for one who, formerly, had such a mastery over his nerves—I observed that she was relieved to the point of being radiant when he

said: "Good! Very good!" It would seem that such a desire, such a need to satisfy someone, must be love, and blessed love.

What obscure intuition then caused me to have a presentiment, despite these signs, of a latent tragedy in the lives of these two beings—who, by the way, were childless—one of those dramas of the heart which are enacted without our knowledge and for our future terror in the obscure depths of our unconsciousness? Intuition? No. A piece of evidence: simply that of the seven—to be exact six and a half—years which have elapsed since the afternoon when I heard Ortègue's *confrères* and pupils, in the courtyard of the town hall of the 16th arrondissement, after the civil marriage, envy the attachment he had inspired. My strange master had begged me not to come to the religious marriage.

"It's a concession I've made to my wife's mother—the first I've ever made in my life in that respect. I made it, and I don't esteem myself for it. I desire that my true friends,

those of my own way of thinking, among whom I count you, should not see me at church, acting untruthfully. . . .”

The man who thus spoke to me was still young, notwithstanding his forty-four years. But though less than fifty-one, the Michel Ortègue of the month of August, 1914, was almost an old man. Since the previous winter I had noticed a slow and constant alteration in his *facies*. He was growing thinner. His features were becoming hollow. His naturally dark complexion was becoming swarthier. In April and again in June he had two bilious fevers, followed by jaundice. These slight attacks of icterus had left a yellowness of the conjunctiva and on the palms of the hands. His hair and beard had whitened.

But he remained ever so alert and full of life! He displayed such revivals of energy; and, on the other hand, I was so attached to him. I refused to see the terrible truth which, from his whole appearance, was already apparent to the eyes of a doctor with a certain amount of experience. I was obstinately

bent on considering those two attacks of jaundice as accidents.

I set down his decline to over-work—that convenient back-door for the ignorant. To reassure myself, I mentally reviewed one of the days of this indefatigable worker: in the morning, the Salpêtrière, where a special section had been created for him, then the Rue Saint Guillaume and operations until the hour for luncheon, a luncheon which was hastily swallowed, in view of the fact that patients who had come for consultations were waiting at the door, and visits to the houses of other patients were required; in the evening, society or the theatre; and, in addition, the preparation of lectures, the delivery of the lectures themselves, the writing of original memoirs, journeys to the provinces and abroad, whither he had been summoned to attend some desperate case. The astonishing thing is that Ortègue had resisted up to then. What wear and tear to his whole organism had been endured!

With what sharpness the crude light of the

hospital rooms made apparent to me this contrast between the ever-increasing senescence of the husband and the further and further blossoming of the wife's youth! Never before had I perceived it to such an extent. At his house, in the sumptuous penumbra of the large crowded rooms, Ortègue's haggard face had the striking character of a portrait. Against the light background of the *Clinique*, that face was nothing more than a human wreck, whereas she, with her smooth forehead and cheeks, her supple eyelids, her lips on which lingered the suspicion of a smile, and the pure line of her neck, assumed, between these bare white walls, as it were, the charm of a flower.

Did this married couple realize that their very presence, side by side, amidst these revealing surroundings, might suggest ironical remarks—nay, worse—to malevolent tongues, and also to faithful friends, like myself, sad thoughts, fears, and mistrust? She certainly did not suspect anything. She would not have been so simply filial in her solicitude for

Ortègue, sometimes forcing him to sit down, sometimes closing a window to shield him from the draught, on other occasions inducing him to come in and rest.

But what about Ortègue? Several times during the period to which my recollections now go back, I observed, in the look he gave his young wife, a very strange expression. I seemed to read in it a signal of distress, a savage inquisition, almost cruelty. This man, so long superb, and now prematurely aged, looking in that way upon this beautiful creature, his own possession, in all the opulence of her twenty-sixth year, and this amid the surgical atmosphere incident to the awaited arrival of the wounded from the battlefield, hinted a private drama against the background of the national drama. I foresaw, rather I had a presentiment, of its painful gravity.

It was, as I have said, a matter of intuition, one of those discomfiting conjectures which detect effects by means of causes. Things happen at certain times, as though a sentiment of reality awakened in us, more perspicacious

than any of our senses, than our reason even. A sense it is which appertains to the unconscious, a thought all the more subtle because we are unacquainted with it; the communication perhaps between our personal psychism and its mental *milieu*, that ambient psychism which scientific orthodoxy does not admit. But what does it admit? And how poverty-stricken it is when we apply to it the measure of human reality! How well-grounded was he who said:

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

VI

THE COUSIN FROM THE FRONT

I NOW reach the episode which marks for me the veritable opening of the tragedy of which I had a presentiment. Until its culmination it was to develop parallel to the other—the great and terrible French tragedy. In unravelling the deep meaning of the individual drama of which I was a witness, I think I can see better one of the lessons of the immense collective trial through which we are still passing. But let us not anticipate conclusions which ought to be formed from facts and facts only. Let us return to these facts.

We were still in the first half of the month of August. War had been declared ten days. The fifteen supplementary beds, completing the forty demanded by the Val-de-Grâce, had been installed. We were living in the

midst of the feverish anxiety of historical catastrophes, when the hours seem at once so long and so short. The days of waiting seem endless, and then, when the event occurs, it is so enormous that one is surprised it could have come so quickly.

We experienced first of all a feverish hope, which Ortègue alone did not share. I must do him this justice: he concealed his pessimism from everybody save myself. I had accompanied him to a surgical congress, held in Berlin, and he reminded me of our impressions at that time.

“These people are formidable at organization,” he said. “You will recollect that in nineteen hundred and four we returned from Germany terrified by what we had seen. They have ten years’ more preparation, and we have ten years’ more bungling. Draw your own conclusion.”

“Do you count moral energy and spontaneity as nothing?” I replied. “Look at our entrance into Alsace.”

“They are concentrating, that is all,” he

replied. "As for moral energy, go and precipitate yourself with that against an autocar!"

Then, with his thin face contracting, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"What good is there in this chattering? A doctor's duty is to know the truth, but to hide it from the patient."

This programme of dissimulation was easier to draw up than to observe. The Italians have a trivial but expressive proverb: "The tongue wags where the tooth aches." It was vain for Ortègue to profess admiration for the scientific character of German "Kultur," he was passionately French through the unconscious part of his being—that unconscious part the existence of which in all domains he stoutly denied. He could no longer speak with any one without bursting into an indignant protest against the invasion of Belgium and the early outrages. He who formerly hardly ever opened a newspaper now bought ten, a dozen, fifteen, and, like all of us, threw them aside immediately they were unfolded, disappointed at never finding anything in

them save an incomplete or adulterated truth.

“If the newspapers related only what they knew for certain,” he said to me one day when I showed him a retraction made by an evening sheet of a piece of intelligence which had appeared in its morning edition, “they would appear blank, and there would be no further need of the censorship. But we shall have some exact information to-morrow. You know Ernest Le Gallic, my wife’s second cousin? You’ve met him at my house at dinner, when he was a Saint Cyrian. He’s now a lieutenant in an infantry regiment. He was in Alsace. He is coming to Paris for a few hours, on a mission, and tells me that he will call at the *Clinique* to present his compliments before catching his train. He’s a perfect trooper and no chatterer about his duties. Besides, he hasn’t a very brilliant intellect. But merely by his tone we shall know how things are going, over there.”

I had, indeed, often seen at the end of the table, at the elaborate dinners of the Place

des États-Unis, a young man wearing the uniform of a Saint Cyrian, a rather surprising figure at the house of the non-military Ortègue. The picture of a timid, awkward boy, whose voice I had hardly heard, remained in my mind. I knew his relationship to those in the house through having once left one of those dinners in company with two of Ortègue's rivals in surgery; I had heard them, not without a feeling of disgust, relieve their envy by the following remarks:

“Is the little cousin always there?”

“What an implication! For all that, it's quite natural. Catherine Ortègue's mother was a Mlle. Ferlicot, and the mother of this little Le Gallic was also a Ferlicot. She is dead. I know that family, root and stock. They are people of Tréguier and I'm from Lannion.”

“It's all the same. If I'd been so foolish, like our genial friend, to marry a woman twenty-five years younger than myself, she would have had no little cousin. Do you remember the song?”

“Rather,” replied the other, laughing. “It rejuvenates me. I can imagine myself in the guard-room,” and he began to hum the following lines:

Nous étions trois d'moisell's de magasin,
Bonn's fill's, aimant à rire.
Nous avons chacune un petit cousin,
Un p'tit cousin pour nous conduire. . . .

This malicious insinuation had made me observe the attitude of the Saint Cyrian towards his cousin a little more closely. I had discerned in it only respect, made all the more striking through its being accompanied by a certain familiarity of manner. The two young people addressed each other in the familiar second person singular, like friends of childhood. In the case of Ortègue I had noted a cordiality which excluded any hypothesis of jealousy; this authoritative man disguised his slightest moods badly. As much as the generosity of his altruism made him cordial towards those in whom he took an interest, so much did he freely manifest his

antipathy with that habit of asserting his personality which a master such as he, a veritable dictator in his own department, acquires so quickly.

VII

FAITH AND SCEPTICISM

MY knowledge of this trait in his character nearly started me on quite a wrong track during the visit of "little Le Gallic," as his compatriot of Lannion called him. I was present when the officer entered Ortègue's office at the *Clinique*. So was Mme. Ortègue. We were explaining to the Professor an insignificant detail of our work, on which occasion he had become irritated to the point of an almost morbid violence. The matter in question was a bill for chloroform, an overcharge by the drug manufacturers, contrary to their verbal agreement. Something of this irritation lingered in the almost vexed manner in which, on the new-comer's arrival, he raised his head, and in the suspicion of irony lurking in his first words:

“Is that you, Ernest? . . . Warfare suits you eh? You look prosperous! . . .”

This doubtful compliment hardly suited the young lieutenant's appearance. If he gave the impression of strength and even joy, through every feature of his soldierly face and every attitude of his well-trained body, the fountain head of that strength and joy was other than health. With his already worn-out uniform, his face sunburnt by the opening days of the campaign, and an indescribable stiffness and suppleness manifested at one and the same time in his slightest movements, he truly gave the impression of a war workman who had come out of danger and was about to return to it. There was a flame-like look in his light Breton eyes, which in colour were almost like the bluish grey eyes of his cousin. But it was not the joyous fever of life; it was the ardour of a determined will. The indefinite, undeveloped face of the Saint Cyrian of former days had become wholly manly and appeased. The simplicity and unity of his face—I cannot find a more accur-

ate description—indicated a human being in complete harmony with himself. Le Gallic had a broad forehead, a slightly arched nose, almond-shaped eyes, straight eyebrows, and a strong, serious mouth. His close-shaven face, under short cropped hair, appeared still more intact. Of average stature, he presented so military an appearance that a suggestion of security emanated from him.

“The reason is that I am so happy, Cousin,” he replied to Ortègue’s harsh words. “I have been living through magnificent days. That entry into Alsace was so exciting, and how keenly our men felt it! You don’t know Frenchmen until you have led them into action. And we’ve had some warm encounters already. That is promising. We’ve had two fights, I’ve no right to tell you where, but somewhere,—serious ones, and crowned with victory! . . . If we continue in the same fashion, you will shortly learn that we have crossed the Rhine.”

“Ah! how good it is to hear you talk like that,” said Mme. Ortègue, who, turning to-

wards the Professor, added: "You see, dear, you are wrong in being pessimistic."

"You a pessimist, Cousin?" questioned the officer. "That is very unlike you. I wish you had been present when I completed my preparations at Riom. My orderly said to me, 'You seem to take a pleasure, sir, in going to war?' 'Why, yes, and you?' 'Oh, I'm happy anywhere, provided I follow you, sir. And then, I know that this time we shall get 'em.' That's the sort of men we possess. And we shall get the Germans this time, Cousin. Believe me: I'm sure of it. Shall I tell you why? My view doesn't accord with your ideas, but I see it so clearly that I cannot remain silent. Defeated, France would perish, and she ought not to perish, because she remains the great Catholic country. Yes, in spite of her government, her electors, her codes, her newspapers—in spite of everything.

"Listen; before leaving Riom we celebrated mass. Almost the whole regiment attended, and half received the communion. This mass was said by one of our soldiers. I can assure

you, red trousers under the folds of an alb make a tremendous impression. What a miracle all the same, Cousin!—you who do not believe in them—that that bill relating to the military service of priests, which was to destroy religion, should have resulted in this religious propaganda in the army. A few days ago, on the eve of our first encounter with the enemy, the commander, who is a great Christian, said to our men: ‘My lads, let those who wish to receive absolution kneel down. Monsieur l’Abbé is going to give it us.’ Well, they all went down on their knees. I’m not telling you this story, Cousin, in order to convert you. You know that I would not take the liberty of speaking to you about these things; but you are following this war, and from now I would bring you my testimony. You who believe only in experience, close not your eyes, I beg of you, to this bit of experience. We shall conquer, because God is with us.”

Ortègue listened to this speech without interrupting, but all the while he bit the end

of his moustache. I knew this habit of his manifested itself in moments of nervousness, when, for instance, on visiting in the afternoon a patient on whom he had operated in the morning, he found that patient had a temperature. To this profession of exalted faith he replied in a tone as cutting as the blade of one of his surgical instruments:

“If we are the conquerors, my friend, it will simply be because we have the best guns, the best rifles, the best generals, and the best soldiers.” Then, in response to a gesture from the other, he gave a sort of a sneer and cut the discussion short by quoting two lines, doubtless learnt in his student years, for he did not waste much time now in reading the poets:

Quittons ce sujet-çi, dit Mardoche, je voi
Que vous avez le crâne autrement fait que moi. . . .

Turning towards his wife, he went on to say suddenly:

“Catherine, we must put an end to this chloroform business at once. Marsal will dictate to you a letter that will settle it. You

will type it out in duplicate. . . . Yes, my dear Le Gallic, your cousin has just learnt how to play on that commercial instrument." He pointed to a typewriter. "During the war she will act as secretary to the *Clinique*. You see that we are all of us working here, each according to his or her capacity. And the work will be well done, I assure you, and will be useful, although everything is laical in the Rue Saint Guillaume, from the master and the mistress to the nurses. But you've certainly got a few minutes to give us. I'll show you our installation. It's not bad."

He led away the officer, and I heard him continuing his explanations in the corridor.

"Look. I've had bouquets of flowers painted over each door, and each room named after a flower. The Carnation Room, the Lilac Room, the Rose Room. Are not these pretty names, as good as that of St. Lawrence, who calls up the idea of a gridiron, or that of St. Labre, which is scarcely aseptic? . . ."

VIII

A WIFE'S ANXIETY

DURING this conversation Mme. Ortègue had certainly felt the same uneasiness as I did. This raillery of a common saw-bones was very unworthy of the clever man who allowed himself to use it, and towards whom? However naïve Le Gallic may have appeared in his outburst of religious faith, he had just come from the battlefield. His courage in risking his life was too strong a guarantee of the sincerity of his convictions to permit his being deprived of his right to respect. The ill-concealed irritation to which Ortègue had given way did not arise from the mystic declarations of his interlocutor. A savant of this type, who has reached total and definitive agnosticism, through the operating-theatre and the laboratory, is not annoyed by a be-

liever any more than he would be by a child or a maniac. Le Gallic's mere presence and not his words had produced this irritation. But why?

To this question the sudden, extraordinary agitation of Mme. Ortègue suggested a too plausible reply. While I dictated the letter to the drug manufacturers, her hands trembled. The frequent breaks and renewals of effort in tapping the typewriter suggested the same answer as the mistakes made by her fingers which missed the keys. Had, then, her young cousin, so handsome and so interesting, awakened, when contrasted with the middle-aged husband, too keen a regret in this woman's heart? I thought so at that time. But if that was the case, she certainly did not intend to confess it. For I felt that she was absolutely genuine in the question which she suddenly asked me, when withdrawing the printed sheet from the machine.

"My husband was not very nice to my cousin. Didn't you think so yourself, Marsal? Don't say no. I read your astonishment on

your face. Yet he is very fond of him. This morning, even, he spoke of him to me with the greatest affection. Only . . .” She hesitated. “He gets irritated now over—the slightest thing, and sometimes his irritation is out of all proportion. For instance, this error in a bill—a mere nothing . . .” Again she hesitated. “Formerly he had so equable a temperament. He has changed; he is changing. I have observed him carefully. It is purely physical. Mentally, intellectually, he is the same. . . . So I fear for his health. You, who are a doctor, and have known him so long, what do you think of him?”

“He works a great deal,” I replied, “and perhaps too much. Then, the seriousness of events. . . .”

“Yes,” she exclaimed, “I’ve said that to myself, and I’m frightened. I tell you again I’m frightened—frightened that he has got something the matter with him, something serious; I cannot get him to eat. He is growing terribly thin. Even since his jaundice. He does not appear to have got rid of it.”

Whilst questioning me, her eyes, wider open, more astonished and even more serious than usual, were fixed upon me with a scruti- nizing and penetrating gaze. I now read therein the search for and the fear of a truth, equally insupportable if ignored or known. I also had foreseen, as a possible explanation of this too evident change in Ortègue, a terrible hypothesis. This idea, thrown aside as soon as conceived, was imposed upon me again by this woman's increasing anguish, and, thinking aloud, I was astonished to hear myself echo her cry of alarm.

"There are many times, indeed, when he makes me anxious. . . ."

"You see!" And seizing my arm convul- sively, "What can be the matter with him? Tell me everything. I have the courage to hear it all."

"I have never either questioned or auscul- tated him," I replied, frightened in turn by the agitation into which she had been thrown by a useless and imprudent avowal, which had no real medical justification.

“Well,” she continued, “question him, auscultate him, and not to-morrow but to-day. I have always heard you tell everybody that a good diagnosis, made in time, may prevent catastrophes. . . .”

“Do not say such things, Madam,” I interrupted sharply. “Do not think them. . . .”

“It rests with you to ease my mind,” she replied. “Do not you yourself feel the need to know? For you are fond of my husband. On so many occasions you have shown that you are fond of him. This uncertainty must be intolerable also to you.”

“But,” said I, “you must admit that, considering the Professor’s character, such an inquisition . . .”

“Is very difficult? ” she broke in. “Yes, I acknowledge that. All I ask is that you try. . . .”

“Very good!” I exclaimed, conquered by the spectacle of her anxiety. “I will try.”

“To-day,” she said imperiously. “You must speak to him to-day. Why put it off when the slightest delay is dangerous? And

then, I know him; he is in one of those moods when he has not complete control over himself. Perhaps he will tell you. . . .”

“Very good, Madam—I will try to-day, although . . .”

She stopped me with a look. She bent her head in the direction of the corridor to listen. Owing to her extreme over-excitement she could detect sounds which were still imperceptible to me. She let go my arm, which her hand had continued to grip, and, in a very loud and artificial voice, in which, nevertheless, I felt the trembling of her heart, said laughingly:

“I don't know where my head is to-day. This letter is full of errors. I must rewrite it, so as not to be scolded too much when the Professor returns.”

She had slipped a white sheet into the machine and the tap tap of the little keys was again proceeding when the door opened. Ortègue re-entered, accompanied by Le Gallic. Although Mme. Ortègue's promptitude in mastering herself once more proved to me woman's disconcerting power of restraint, it

never occurred to me that she might be playing a part and placing to the account of a wifely disquietude a trouble caused by another sentiment. Besides, Ortègue's appearance justified too strongly the worst fears. His sorry outline, in juxtaposition with that of the young officer, so vigorous and so supple, seemed still more painful, more obviously marked with the signs of the approaching end. His face, yellower and more emaciated than usual, was contracted, as though a fit of sharp pain was torturing him at that very moment. His wasted body was bent forward, his shrivelled hands were on the pit of his stomach. The courageous man had the energy, however, to approach his wife with a smile.

“Le Gallic's astonishment would have amused you, my dear,” he began. “He had never dreamt of an installation like this. I've told him he must compliment you for it and not me. You have really transformed the *Clinique* during the last ten days. That soldiers' dormitory in the old chapel is a marvellous idea.”

"It is indeed true," insisted the officer, "that the Professor and you have organized an ideal hospital amidst these painted wainscotings, this delightfully fresh garden, these beautiful old trees, these green lawns, and these beds of flowers under all the windows." Then, seriously and with changed accent: "I've only one fault to find with your hospital. One would be too comfortable in it to die."

"It's a good thing you don't belong to the medical department, my gallant Ernest," said Ortègue, now standing upright, for evidently the intensity of the pain was diminishing. Serious in his turn, he added, with singular stress: "You can never make a dying man too comfortable. *My* watchword when face to face with a hopeless case, is: Forward, blessed morphine! For really what is the use of suffering?"

"Atonement," replied Le Gallic in the same tone of profound truth.

"Atonement for what?" asked Ortègue.

"Why, our sins," said Le Gallic. He hesi-

tated a moment before adding: "And those of others."

"Our sins,—that is understandable," exclaimed Ortègue. "And yet! . . ." He also momentarily hesitated before continuing, bitterly: "Our sins? As if we had asked for life. What right then has He who imposed it upon us to require us to render an account? . . ." Then, passionately: "But the sins of others?" He repeated: "Of others? Come now. That is monstrous! . . . Pardon me, my dear Ernest, if I wound you. . . ."

"No," said Le Gallic, "you grieve me. As everything in life ends in suffering and death, if suffering and death have not that significance, that of redemption, what significance have they, and what meaning has life?"

"None," said Ortègue.

There was silence. That word, coming from the mouth of a man evidently so ill, in that room of a war hospital, and in the presence of this officer who would be in action on the morrow, had truly a strange sound.

He who had uttered it was himself embarrassed. He continued:

"We will discuss philosophy and religion when you return a captain, decorated with the Legion of Honour. And once more, do not bear a grudge against me on account of my unbelief any more than I do against you because of your belief. The fact that we do not all possess the same cerebral constitution has never prevented two large-hearted men from loving and esteeming each other, and you know that I love and esteem you much. Even before I saw you, just now, so courageous, so brisk, I was quite sure that, in active service, you would do your whole duty and more. . . . But you are in a hurry. . . . Come, embrace me, and good luck. . . . Send us frequent news; lots of post-cards. . . . Catherine, show your cousin the way, and come up afterwards to the pharmacy. There is a whole arrival up there to be checked. I'm going to look over your letter with Marsal and make the corrections. . . . *Au revoir*, Ernest. You'll excuse me, won't you? . . ."

IX

A MAN DOOMED

ON reaching the threshold, Mme. Ortègue turned round and gave me a look which signified: "Now is the time. Try." That look of loving anxiety, Ernest Le Gallic's perfect naturalness when walking out with his cousin, the simplicity with which Ortègue gave the young people the opportunity of this farewell *tête-à-tête*, everything completed the denial of my first ideas. Later, I came to understand the contradictory and secret meaning of these various scenes: Mme. Ortègue no longer loving her husband with passion, but with affection, with gratitude, and refusing to admit it to herself, too tortured, besides, by the enigma of her husband's health to heed, in her anxiety, the feelings of another;—that other, Ernest Le Gallic, loving

his cousin with a passion too long repressed not to have been mastered; yet, because of his exalted piety, incapable of risking a single word which would have made this last visit a guilty one. Finally, Ortègue, stifling a tragic secret, pricked by envy rather than by jealousy in the tender spot of his heart, through the comparison of his degeneration with the officer's flaunting youth. For in leading Le Gallic away, far from his wife, he had surrendered to a mean impulse, which already made him blush.

How these hidden truths are now made clear to me! At the time, a single impression ruled me,—the consciousness that now, if ever, was the time for my difficult inquiry. Ortègue's change of front and sudden effusion revealed an interior trouble, by which it was wise to profit. But how dare I do so? The very presence of this great man exercised such a hypnotic influence over me that I had not a particle of courage left.

"Catherine is right, there are really too many errors here," he exclaimed, after glanc-

ing at the first copy of the letter. The second hung from the machine, unfinished. His remark proved he had heard the words she had spoken when he was about to re-enter the room. He added: "Where, indeed, were her thoughts?"

His hollow face was contracted in the same manner as before. Doubtless he was again feeling a twinge of distrust—a sharp twinge, notwithstanding its vagueness. I had an intuition of this, but as he sat down, leaning on the table with his hand, his posture expressed such physical suffering, so little disguised, that I cried out instinctively:

"You are not well, *mon cher maître*?"

"Why do you say that?" he replied, raising his head, the head of an Arabian prince, in the customary haughty manner.

"Because you seem to be suffering." Having burnt my boats, I continued. "You are as you were ten minutes ago, when you returned with your hands here." I imitated his bent attitude, doubled in two, with his fists on the epigastrium.

“Ah!” he said, rising; and then, in a weaker voice, he added: “You noticed that?”

He took a few steps up and down the room. Then, walking straight to me, he placed his hands on my shoulders, and, with his eyes fixed on mine, said:

“Marsal, can you give me your word of honour that the disclosure I am going to make to you will remain between us, absolutely—that you will repeat not a word about it to any one, and above all not to my wife? . . .”

“I cannot make that promise, *mon cher maître*,” I replied, “before knowing. . . . You wish to speak to me of your condition, don’t you?”

“Yes,” he said, astonished.

“But the reason why I took the liberty of questioning you just now is that Mme. Ortègue is anxious about your health. She it was who asked me to mention this subject to you. . . .”

“She also!” he groaned, with an accent which cut me to the heart. He buried his face in his hands and remained for perhaps

a minute in that spasm of grief. Then he pulled himself together, and revealing his forehead, his eyes, his mouth illumined by that ardent look of determination which I had so often seen in the course of excessively dangerous operations, he said: "It was bound to happen. You can at least promise to say simply, when she questions you, that you found me ill, but that you do not know what is the matter with me. It's the word which she must not be told—the terrible word. Promise me, on your honour, that you will not state anything precisely. I have urgent need to speak to you. I can do so only on that condition. . . ." And in an imploring voice—imagine Ortègue imploring!—"The dying have their rights, Marsal, and I am a dying man. . . ."

"That cannot be true, *mon cher maître*," I cried, "and I assure you . . ."

"It *is* true," he broke in. "Do you promise?"

"I promise," I stammered.

"Thank you," he said, with evident relief.

And, once more calm, he went on: "Friend, I've not three months to live." He stopped me with a gesture. "You shall judge for yourself."

A sofa, used for examinations, encumbered one of the corners of the little room. He stretched himself upon it, undid his waistcoat, raised his knees, and, guiding my hand, said:

"There, under the floating ribs, feel about. Do you feel the edge of the liver with its little nodus? . . . Yes? Now find the biliary vesicle. . . . Have you got it? . . . Notice that pear-shaped tumour produced by the bile, which no longer circulates. Remember Courvoisier-Terrier's sign. The vesicle is dilated. Therefore it is not a question of a biliary stone. . . . Stop. . . ."

He had removed my hand and was sitting up. For a moment his eyelids trembled.

"I have hurt you," I cried, more and more agitated.

"Not you," he responded very softly. "But the nervous threads invaded by the neoplasma." He indicated a spot on a level

with the last dorsal vertebra. "The pain is here—an intense, terebrating, tearing pain. It irradiates everywhere. The only way I can control it a little is to bend my body forward, in the manner which struck you. When I'm alone, I lie on this sofa, doubled up, like the cock of a gun. It is passing. I will spare you the other symptoms. They are too humiliating. I have observed them all—one by one. You remember my icterus? It was light and fugitive. It is intermittent. Added to the rest, an error is out of the question. My dear Marsal, I have a cancer at the head of the pancreas. I am doomed."

Never, in his most applauded lessons at the Faculty, had he displayed greater clearness of speech, more decision in his look, more certainty in his affirmations. On hearing those words, "I am doomed," I recollected the great Trousseau summing up to Peter, in the same terms, his own diagnosis. That resigned sadness of which Peter writes was before me now. It had been Trousseau's. It was Ortègue's. During those never-to-be-

forgotten minutes scientific verification bestowed on the great surgeon that intellectual serenity in which ancient stoicism sought its strength. Like Trousseau, he detached himself from his personal destiny in order to behold in himself merely the verification of a chapter on internal pathology.

As to his diagnosis, I doubted it no more than Peter had doubted that of Trousseau. In the present case, it was the key to the cryptogram, which revealed the whole meaning with mathematical certainty. The vague observations I had made, or rather which had come to me recently, appeared in a light of sinister truth. I did not even attempt to argue with that heroic and pitiless spirit of the savant. I stood there dumfounded with admiration, if I may say so. Ortègue's sudden calmness in the midst of such a revelation clothed him in my eyes with a grandeur that was impressive to the point of being august. Without uttering a word, I took his hand and pressed it. He returned the pressure with a look which again signified, "Thank you," and continued:

“You will understand now why I had that fit of anger, or what almost amounted to anger, just now, when poor Le Gallic came to display to us the optimism of an incompetent. That he should be wonderstruck through imagining a psychism without a nervous system is excusable. He has never dissected. But he comes from the battlefield. He is returning to the battlefield. That dreadful word War has been construed in his brain, during the past few days, into horrible visions, which he knows to be *real*: shattered limbs, opened stomachs, broken skulls—all the ferocity of the ancestral brute let loose in man—cries, shrieks, death-sobs, death-rattles, and, as the culmination, the charnel-house.

“Well, here’s a fine fellow who learns nothing from these abominations—to whom they represent nothing. He reasons from these facts no more than if he had never encountered them. He comes to talk to us of the kindness of God! He himself is young and robust, a fine lad—you have seen him. He may be killed to-morrow, and at this very

minute in Europe there are millions of young men like him, who throw themselves into this butchery, for nothing, because an idiotic idea of conquest passed through the brain of a degenerate, suffering from a suppurative and incurable otitis. You and I explain this madness very simply by the animal origin of man, by the reappearance in civilized man of the primitive great anthropoid. But he, as you heard, is as firm as a rock in his belief that an all-powerful and perfect being, his God, presides over these massacres. He finds a meaning for them in the justice and goodness of this God!

“At the Hôtel Dieu I had a comrade who found amusement in frightening an old Sister of Mercy by saying to her: ‘If God existed, Sister, he would merit penal servitude.’ Marshal, he was right. For let us suppose that this God exists, and take my own case . . . What? Being good and just, He created me, Michel Ortègue, in order that, at the age of fifty, when wealthy, celebrated, and married to a woman I adore, all this happiness should

be brutally snatched from me, though I have spent the whole of my life in the relief of suffering, in the curing of people condemned to death? Surgery of the nervous system is only that. And I am struck down at the time when I might be more useful than ever! As a result of these modern armaments there are going to be more wounds to the brain and the spinal-cord, in this war, than in any other. And men will die, men will remain paralysed or imbecile, will become blind, because Michel Œrtègue, who would have saved them, will himself die, during that time, of this absurd cancer—caused by what? By the most stupid of accidents,—the bursting of an autocar tyre, while my colleague Salvan and I were on our way to a consultation in the neighbourhood of Versailles. The car capsized. You recollect. The incident was reported in the newspapers at the time. The chauffeur escaped. Salvan escaped. I received a violent blow on the inner side of the abdomen. I was doubtless predisposed, and behold me now! . . .”

There was now a sound of revolt in his voice,

and the rancorous, almost personal hatred against religious consolation which I had ever noted in him. I continued to say not a word. Whereas, shortly before, I had felt the beauty of his attitude, in the presence of his terrible diagnosis, I now experienced merely the tragedy of that diagnosis. The time in which we lived, that threatening entry into a monstrous war, added a more terrifying character to the distress of this illustrious surgeon, condemned to death, and aware of his fate. A flood of pity welled up in my heart, and, taking his hand again, I repeated, impulsively:

“My poor master! My poor master!”

This time he drew away his hand and shook his head impatiently. He objected to be pitied. Pride gave him the same strength as Science had bestowed a few moments before, and he mastered himself again, in order to finish what he had to say:

“I have just been speaking to you like a child, Marsal,—almost as foolishly as Le Gallic. There is nothing absurd in the world, for everything is determinate. But as we do

not seize the concomitance of phenomena, when two series cross each other, we call their meeting an accident. We utter the word mystery. There is no more mystery in chance than there is in death. We are in ignorance, that is all. However, let us leave that question. My reason, friend, for confiding in you in this way is that I want to ask you to do me a service. My money affairs are not what they might be. I have earned a great deal, but I have also been lavish in my expenditure. I have loved life passionately, Marsal. I wanted to proceed as regards enjoyment as far as I have gone in Science—realize in myself the type of the complete man—be a king of my day, in every way. I have never counted the cost. I was conscious of my strength and sure of the morrow. It is slipping through my fingers. There will be no more £2000 operations. If I succeed in working a little in this hospital, that will be all; and how many weeks will that last?

“I have made a few big investments which

run the risk of being endangered in this upheaval. The most solid part of my fortune is this house in the Rue Saint Guillaume, which, fortunately, I finished paying for last winter, and this *Clinique*—my *Clinique*. What will become of it when I am gone? Marsal, when I am no longer here, you must defend it, for the sake of my wife. I cannot bear to think of leaving Catherine in a less easy position. This place, if well managed, will, once this crisis is over, in itself represent ample independence for her. The revenue, added to my insurance, will enable her to continue at the Place des États-Unis. She will not be obliged to curtail her manner of living.

“To accomplish these ends I need someone who will take an interest in this *Clinique*, who will make it his business, who is competent to do so and is an honest man. Will you be that someone? Don't reply immediately. This is a matter of business—I insist on it—in which, of course, your personal interests will be taken care of. If you accept, I shall

have to initiate you into the accounts, which will show you the expenses and the profits. We will draw up a deed of partnership. The essential point is that you have no objection in the main. Have you any?"

"None, *mon cher maître*. I can only thank you for a proof of friendship which, coming after so many others——"

He interrupted me.

"We will return to this project to-morrow. I'm going to give a look round upstairs. Perhaps you will see Mme. Ortègue before I do. Remember your promise. Do not utter the word——"

"But," said I, stopping him in my turn, and as he was moving towards the door, "are you absolutely sure of this diagnosis? You know better than I do."

"Absolutely sure," he replied. "You will remember that I was summoned to Germany six weeks ago to see one of my patients. I took the opportunity to go on to Berlin. Under an assumed name, I went to consult one of the specialists there. He did not hesitate

to pronounce the word, and to advise me, naturally, to undergo Keir's operation, *l'opération en baionnette—en paionnette*," he corrected, imitating the Teutonic pronunciation.

"And then?" I asked.

"Then I decided against it," he replied. "A radical cure is impossible. That operation would give me, perhaps, four or five more months of life, unless I died under the knife. I don't want to run the risk of dying immediately. I love my wife too much to risk losing voluntarily a single one of the hours which are counted for me. I have at least the certainty of spending them with her. No, no, no," he repeated, "I shall not run that risk of going sooner. I shall not play that card. Besides, an operation would render me helpless. I should be incapable of performing here the last few services which I shall have the opportunity to do through this abominable war. I want to perform them. I want to be useful to the end. We must prove to the Le Gallics and other mythologists that we have no need either of their God,

or of their Christ, or of their future life to enable us to perform a work of altruism, without expectations. No, I shall not be operated upon, but I shall operate, as long as this hand has the strength to hold the knife. . . . Only . . .” Again he bent himself double, with his fists against his chest. “Only sometimes I suffer too much. If these paroxysms lasted more than five minutes, they would kill me. . . . But wait. . . .”

I saw him walk towards a little cabinet in which he opened a drawer. He took from it a hypodermic syringe, lit an alcohol lamp, and passed the needle through the flame. He had recovered his professional slowness and method. He filled the syringe from an *ampoule* of morphine, bared his arm, thrust in the needle, and pressed on the piston, every bit as quietly as though he had been giving that injection to another. Then, replacing the instruments of that beneficent yet fatal intoxication, he closed the drawer and said to me:

“I’ve already gone up to ten centigrammes.

Its effects weaken, like the rest, unfortunately.
Keep my wife in ignorance of that also, won't
you? Do you promise?"

"I promise."

X

BENEFACTANT DECEPTION

THAT virtue of beneficent lying is the ABC of the medical profession. Whilst quite young students, from the time of our first visits to the hospital, we trained ourselves for it. With the patients themselves it is easy to practice. Their instinct of preservation conspires with us to deceive them. In the case of those who surround and love them, the task becomes more difficult, especially when it is a question of putting an anxious woman off the track. Mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters possess a divinatory sense which enables them to discern a reticence in our most naturally uttered discourse, and, in the background of our most open look, a peep-hole. Then they question no more directly; they observe and spy. Between you and

their watchfulness there is a duel. There is not one of your gestures, not one of your intonations, not a wrinkle of your face they will not study, and which their anxiety will not interpret precisely in the sense from which you wish to divert them.

I expected this duel. It commenced the very minute I saw Mme. Ortègue again, half an hour after leaving the Professor. I had said to myself: "The cleverest thing will be not to pretend to be easy-minded." Consequently, in answer to her first question: "Have you spoken to my husband?" I thought myself very skilful in replying:

"I have spoken to him. I have questioned him. He did not defend himself. He allowed me even to auscultate him. I support what I said before: overwork, certainly disquieting, especially considering his age. Only, there is no lesion, at least appreciable."

"But what do you say about that icterus, a few months ago, and this relapse?"

"A commonplace jaundice, to which I attach no importance."

“No importance?” she retorted. I saw from this remark that she knew more than she would admit. She was laying a trap for me. “Then why does Dieulafoy write in his *Pathologie* that the prognostic of an icterus must always be reserved? Why does he add: Every icterus accompanied by fever, or which declares itself in the midst of symptoms of weakness, must be regarded with suspicion? . . . I know those lines by heart, so many times have I read and re-read that chapter. I took the book from my husband’s library, that and others too, and since then . . .”

“Madam,” I interrupted in the tone of one scolding a child, but I trembled at the thought of the phrases found in that manual, in which a slight icterus is indicated as a sign of cancer of the pancreas. “Madam, you are the daughter of a doctor, and the wife of a doctor. How many times have you heard your father and your husband repeat in your presence that one of the scourges of our profession is the reading of a medical book by an ignorant person? Permit me to tell you that in matters

so special you are only an unlearned person. I repeat to you that a jaundice of this nature—transient and fugitive as this one was—is without signification, and I beg of you, even for the sake of your husband's tranquillity, never again to open that manual, or any other. If I thought that the Professor was in danger, I should be the first to require him to take care of himself."

She did not reply. I had lied badly. I fully realized it. I sought neither to prolong nor to renew this far too dangerous talk with a woman who had grown up in an atmosphere of medical conversations, and who was certainly capable of seeing through our ordinary craft. She herself, on that and following days, affected, when speaking to me, to avoid the slightest allusion to the anxiety which continued to prey upon her; I guessed it from the automatism of her movements whilst she applied herself to the cares of our installation. This characteristic of a somnambulist, proper to those who are suffering from an obsession, was discernible all the more clearly

as a keen alertness of her whole being awoke the moment she entered any room occupied by her husband.

But was there only one cause for the inward trouble by which I felt she was so violently agitated under her calm exterior? Without returning to my first suspicions, kindled at the time of Le Gallic's visit, I could not help observing that her agitation increased on certain days, and precisely when one of those post-cards, which Ortègue himself had asked the officer to send, arrived. Coming from the front, this "military correspondence" bore no indication of the place of origin. It was indeed the simple agreed-upon bulletin of daily existence.

That Mme. Ortègue did not receive without emotion this square piece of paper, scribbled over by a hand that, at the time the letter reached its destination, was perhaps chilled by death, was only natural; it was only natural too, that the danger to which was exposed her near relative, the companion of her childhood and youth, should agitate still more her

already strained nerves. I understood the situation so well: there was nothing romantic in her quite simple and wholly human emotion. How, moreover, could this woman's heart, in the grip of so cruel and real a drama, have lent itself, even for a minute, to imaginary emotions?

And I, also, was gripped in that steel vice, which daily became tighter and tighter. How could I have found the time to dream about sentimental complications, when I was tortured hour after hour by the most stern realities? Those weeks of the month of August come back to me, and again I experience their terrors. First of all, in addition to the material tasks of the hospital there were long *tête-à-têtes* with Ortègue, with the purpose of initiating me into the future management of the *Clinique*. I had, of course, definitely accepted his proposal. So it was necessary to apply my mind to an order of ideas and a number of documents which were new to me.

Each of these meetings renewed my sense of the pathological tragedy in which Fate had entangled me. I came to understand in more

exact detail the tremendous labour in which Ortègue had exhausted himself, and also from what wealth his approaching death was going to snatch him. Above all, each time I saw him—he was no longer under the restraint of hiding his sufferings from me—I noted the ravages accomplished, almost minute by minute, by the disease which was consuming him, and by the drug which he was employing to relieve the intolerable pain. He himself compared the itching from which he suffered to a living hair-cloth which, at certain times, almost drove him mad. I saw the jaundice return to the palms of his hands and his conjunctiva, spread to his face, grow darker in places. The Spanish character of his face became more marked through its becoming this blackish green, which imparted to him a sort of beauty, though terrifying and sinister, and this change of aspect was taking place under the more and more perspicacious eyes of the young wife.

Running parallel to this was the ever-growing anxiety about the war, that succeeded the

fond hopes based on the early successes in Alsace; the French troops driven back to Nancy—the Belgian army brought to a stand at Antwerp, the bombardment of Namur, the battle of Charleroi, the taking of Liège, Donon and the Col de Saales abandoned, the enemy at Péronne, Longwy, and Maubeuge captured, then the retreat, the Germans at Compiègne and Senlis, the departure of the Government for Bordeaux, Paris threatened, followed by Joffre's order of the day, the terms of which showed the seriousness of the danger: "Cost what it may, hold your ground and die there rather than relinquish it,"—and then the waiting and the great hope in which we hardly dared to believe, and following on that the battles of the Ourcq, Grand Morin, and Montmirail, the repulse of the enemy, Lunéville, Saint Dié, Raon, Pont-à-Mousson relieved, and finally the victory of the Marne. How full of joy my soul would have been, even in the presence of the dying Ortègue, if those days of deliverance had not coincided with the arrival of our first patients!

It was on September 8th, a Tuesday, that the military authorities sent them to us. They were all wounded in the head or the vertebral column. Considering Ortègue's specialty, a better choice could not have been made by the Val-de-Grâce Hospital. We were informed of their arrival by the bell reserved for that purpose. Long shall I remember that first summons, those three long and penetrating rings which made Ortègue and myself start to our feet, although the telephone had already given us notice. In an instant, the whole staff of the hospital, the nurses, male and female, and Mme. Ortègue with them were down below.

Three motor ambulances were standing opposite the door—three long, grey vehicles, each marked with a red cross and covered with a tilt. We have since seen many similar vehicles stop in this narrow Rue Saint Guillaume, filled with their sorrowful loads; but I always experience an inward tremor when I recollect that first arrival of wounded.

We were still so near the beginning of

August: those enthusiastic days when the whole youth and strength of France set off with laughter and anger on its lips. We had all seen the great Eastern and Northern Railway stations send forth towards the frontier—volcano-like—a human lava, the most ardent and the best of our blood. We had seen the flower-bedecked trains set off, heard the songs which, from the south to the north, floated over the countrysides with the smoke from the locomotives. My own perception of these things had been all the more keen because, in the intervals of our occupations at the *Clinique*, I was able to turn over and over in my mind, hastily, the smarting regret at being left behind. I had also seen women's eyes wide open with terror, eyes which, more penetrating than those of the men, saw into the unknown future.

There had been no change in the season. The summer sun still shone from a clear sky, and the vision of hallucinated eyes had become a reality—bloody, immediate, and implacable. In front of me two hospital attendants slowly

drew from one of the ambulances a stretcher, on which lay a rigid form in a blue capote and red trousers, the head swathed in bandages, which left visible only the lower part of an earth-coloured face, with bluish, parched lips stretched over the teeth. Another stretcher followed, and then another—nine in all—which our men deposited in the vestibule downstairs. Ortègue and I, assisted by our student, made a preliminary examination, to ascertain whether an operation was urgent.

The wounded astonished us by their silence. It seemed as though they had suffered so much whilst travelling from Charleroi in cattle-trucks, with stoppages at small ambulances where no one had dared to touch such wounds, that they wished never to speak a word again! An odour of sweat and blood rose from their ragged and straw-covered clothing. They still wore their heavy boots covered with the mud of battlefields. We noted with horror that two of them were blind; a third was absolutely incapable of uttering a word, having been struck by aphasia as the result of his

wound. The others could see and speak, although one was paralysed in the arm, another in the leg. There was one of them who, plunged into a semi-comatose state, uttered every now and then that meningeal cry, the harshness of which, once heard, is never forgotten.

“A complete set of samples of the goodness of God in which my little cousin Le Gallic believes,” said Ortègue, and, pointing to the most serious case, the one with meningitis: “If there is anything to be done at once, it’s for that man there. Carry him upstairs.”

XI

AGENTS OF DESTRUCTION

I HAD often seen Ortègue operate. I had participated, as his pupil, in those surgical feats which he willingly performed in the presence of his astonished rivals. "They are not operations," said Poncet, the great surgeon of Lyons, one day, "they are bets." And Poncet added, with his frank and indulgent smile: "But since he wins them all! . . ."

The secret of this almost thaumaturgic superiority resided in his extraordinary knowledge of anatomy, added to a no less extraordinary clearness of observation and manual dexterity. Never had our surgical intimacy revealed to me a more brilliant Ortègue, a more audacious and more successful virtuoso of the knife, than he now showed himself operating upon these first patients and those that fol-

lowed them very quickly, and in too great numbers.

A week after the arrival of this first batch, our forty beds were filled. The more numerous the cases of lesions calling for the application of his technical knowledge, the busier became the surgeon in the "Director." The scientific fervour of youth was born again in this man who himself was condemned to death.

To me, who knew the truth, there was no need of explaining this renewal of professional ardour, in his state of incipient cachexy. The morphia was beginning its work, as destructive as the cancer itself. His condition pointed to the first stage of intoxication.

The most distressing fact was to see a lessening of Mme. Ortègue's anxiety. She was unaware of the terrible habit which her unfortunate husband was contracting. She beheld him growing more and more enthusiastic, as in former days, regarding interesting cases, which he talked about and discussed. She must have concluded that a cure was possible,

if his breakdown was due only to neurasthenia, and all the more since all Ortègue's faculties—his altruism, for instance—were over-excited at one and the same time.

He had ever been prodigal in his devotion to the unfortunate. When he asked a Moreau-Janville £2000 for an operation, he used to say: "Let the rich pay for the poor!" And in his case this phrase was strictly true. His free consultations and operations were innumerable. He was, therefore, logical when, during those closing days of August and those first days of September, he said to us:

"I do not know what would have become of me, if I had not been able to make myself useful during this war. We civilians shall never be able to repay our debt to the soldiers. These men are dying for us, that is what we should ceaselessly repeat,—for you, Catherine, for you, Marsal, and for myself, Ortègue. Yesterday, this man, from behind whose ear I extracted a bullet, and who will live, thanked me with tears in his eyes. 'But it is I who owe you thanks, my fine fellow,' I replied to

him. I did not add that he'd been lucky to be sent here. The stupidities I read in the medical journals regarding surgery of the nervous system are frightful. When this war is over, you will see, Marsal, what a book we shall write!"

He was speaking in good faith, after his own diagnosis! What a mystery these illusions to which our mind does not really adhere are, and for the space of a minute we speak as though we believed in them! Moreover, these affirmations, so strange in the mouth of a scientific man of this calibre, and of a sick man in this condition of decline, were doubtless but another result of morphinism. A fortnight had not elapsed before the period of exaltation was succeeded by one of degeneration. Either because Ortègue increased the dose, or because the intoxication produced by the disease was added to that of the drug, I observed with terror the signs of a painful change in his moral personality.

I surprised him—he who had always shown such strictness in the case of the slightest de-

viations from truth—in lying, and evidently pathological lying. He said, for instance, that he had walked in the garden, whereas he had remained in his office, and *vice versa*. He pretended that he had read a newspaper which he had not read. To this insignificant mythomania was already added a veritable paralysis of the will, a more disquieting sign of morphia-poisoning. He would now, in the morning, put on his blouse and apron, and, stretching himself on the sofa, say to me:

“Marsal, go the rounds. You can report to me. . . .”

And he did not even make an excuse for his fatigue! Ceaselessly, he, who had been so active the first ten or twelve days, would utter, when confronted with cases requiring immediate attention, the dilatory phrase of the lazy surgeon: “We will operate to-morrow. I was not alone in noting these symptoms of degeneration.

After the short period of relief which I have mentioned, there again appeared in Mme. Ortègue’s eyes her former anxiety, augmented

by a look of astonishment. She no longer recognized the man of superior intellect whom, while admiring, she had loved. Nor did I, either, recognize him. Knowing the double influence which was hourly exhausting the formerly inexhaustible source of his abundant energy, I foresaw some catastrophe or other, without being able to divine exactly the unexpected form it was to assume, and the incident of a wholly professional order which was to mark, as it were, the second act of this tragedy.

XII

THE SURGEON'S COLLAPSE

THIS incident occurred, to be exact, on Monday, September 28th. There is a special reason for my recollecting the date. On the previous day a German aëroplane had dropped four bombs on Paris and injured a little girl of thirteen.

“How stupid chance is all the same!” said Ortègue that Monday morning, when pointing out to me in the newspaper the account of the outrage. “Why was I not in the Avenue du Trocadéro, in the place of this child?”

“And who would have operated upon Dufour?” I replied.

This Dufour was an artillery captain who had been brought to us the preceding week with a terrible bullet wound in the region of

his spinal cord. He could no longer walk. After a careful examination, Ortègue had concluded that the paralysis was due to pressure, and that on the projectile being extracted the officer would be cured.

“You are right, Marsal. Who would have operated upon him?” he repeated. “No. I’ve not forgotten the unfortunate fellow, nor that we fixed upon this morning for our attempt to save him. The sooner the better. We’ve put it off too long. Now, with his sore, it is perhaps a question of hours. Will you give orders to have him carried into the operating-room?”

On my return he continued: “On his account, I’ve stopped taking morphia for the past three days. I’m suffering again,—ah! cruelly! But there is something worse than this suffering. There’s the trouble here,”—pointing to his head,—“that thought which abandons you, that barrier between action and yourself, that interior immobilization . . . I was frightened, when confronted with the necessity of operating on Dufour, at being no

longer myself, and not to have acted in such a case would have been equivalent, for an Ortègue, to desertion . . . So I vowed to myself that I would take no more injections, and broke them off at once. As you know, I'm not the man for half-measures . . . I realized that I should never succeed by diminishing the dose . . . Only, I've the classic symptoms due to sudden abstinence,—insomnia, tingling, cold, and extraordinary hyperæsthesia. But anything, anything rather than that oppressive weight, that leaden cloak on the will . . . Marsal, I want Dufour to walk, and walk he shall . . . Come, he must have been made ready by now. . . .”

A few minutes later we entered the operating-room; he, exceedingly nervous and at high tension: I, filled with a great desire to see ended and successful the daring operation he was about to perform on the heroic and unfortunate Dufour. I noted with anxiety that Ortègue's excitement increased the nearer the moment for action approached. Formerly, it had been the contrary. The mere act of

putting on his apron and india-rubber gloves had calmed him. But that morning he talked and talked, all along the corridors, with such a morbid volubility! I distinctly remember two of his remarks, one of which he made to me almost on the threshold of the operating-room, as he pointed out the figure of the chaplain descending the steps into the garden:

“The Abbé Courmont has just distributed his morphia, and perhaps to poor Dufour. It is even more stupefying than the other.”

The second remark was made in the operating-room itself, before an audience composed of the group of nurses, male and female, who, surrounding the wounded man, had just finished sending him to sleep on the table—

“You are going to behold a miracle,” said Ortègue to them, “but a true one,—a scientific miracle. This paralytic will walk. I shall open his vertebral canal and extract the bullet. Ah! it is a magnificent operation. Young men and women, you’re in luck’s way. In the course of two months you will have witnessed three laminectomies. Ask Marsal.

He did not see more during the whole of his hospital studies.”

The sort of intense glee with which he announced one of the most bloody surgical interventions that exists justified the insulting epigram of the humorist who made out that we become surgeons to satisfy with impunity the instincts of the executioner. How little this ill-placed delight resembled the sudden fixity with which he watched me paint with iodine the back of the wounded man, who lay on his stomach! I also noticed that his fingers, usually so steady, trembled a little, whilst, armed with a three-legged compass and guided by a radiographic plate on which the bullet could be distinguished, he marked three reference points on the now quite yellow skin, —but not more yellow than his own face. These preparations completed, he began to proceed to denude the vertebræ by means of a deep rectangular incision, as far as the bone.

Was my own nervousness at fault? It seemed to me that the stroke of his knife lacked its customary decision. But no time

was given me to reflect on that point. The denudation was accompanied, as usual, by a considerable flow of blood, which threatened to obscure the field of the operation. I had seized the two instruments used for holding the lips of the wound apart. I used one myself and held out the other to Ortègue. But to my stupefaction I saw him pay no heed to my gesture. He continued to work amidst the flow of blood, but with a hesitating, uncertain hand. Suddenly, he let go of the handle of his knife, and an instant later I saw him break down, with wild eyes and distorted features. We had only just time to move up a stool, on which he sank, stammering hoarsely:

“I cannot see it! . . . I can do no more!”

Professional honour alone surviving amongst his momentarily overclouded faculties, he had still the strength, in the midst of this dreadful *collapsus*, to push me away and say, pointing to the table on which the bleeding patient lay:

“Marsal! Attend to him. Extract the bullet. . . .”

XIII

THE PROOF OF MADAME ORTÈGUE'S DEVOTION

THERE was not the slightest doubt about my duty: the patient first. While two infirmiry attendants, supporting the overcome surgeon, led him away, I tried to stop the hemorrhage. But what was to be done after that? Ought I to close the wound, when I had that redoubtable phrase ringing in my ears: "It is perhaps a question of hours"? Must I continue the operation, groping in the dark, and guiding myself solely by Ortègue's diagnosis? I decided on the latter alternative as though hypnotized by that genius whose eclipse I had just witnessed. Above all I responded to the necessity of procuring for him the only relief he could receive, in the distress into which his breakdown had plunged him. His first words, when we saw each other

again, would be the question: "What about Dufour?" What a comfort if I were able too reply: "I've got the bullet. It was indeed a simple pressure on the spinal cord. He is saved!"

Amid the tumult of these thoughts, I ordered the assistant who was giving the anæsthetic, who had also risen, to replace the mask on the mouth of the patient, whose moans presaged an early awakening, and, completing the application of the instruments for holding the lips of the wound apart, resumed the exploration in a field where an error of but a few millimetres might have proved fatal.

During the whole of my medical career, I cannot recollect having carried out a piece of work which seemed so long. Not one either, made me experience more keenly, amid the painful detail of the breaking and opening of bones, that sensation which one of our masters, Jean Louis Faure, has described so eloquently on one of the splendid pages of his essay entitled: *L'Ame du Chirurgien*. He shows the

operator experiencing a thrill which exalts him and adds a new power to his being.

While feeling my way from fibre to fibre, amid that bleeding and living flesh, I once more admired the sureness of Ortègue's inductions and his superhuman insight. The projectile was located exactly where he had said. I held it; I withdrew it. The pressure on the spinal marrow would disappear, and with it the paralysis. The miracle would be accomplished—the patient saved. Let me add, parenthetically, that the patient was so indubitably saved that he departed from the hospital the other week, on convalescent leave, without ever having suspected amid what events the work of his deliverance had been accomplished.

Jean Louis Faure has noted also in commenting on one under an anæsthetic—that such a one is the only person who is indifferent to the spectacle which is being enacted around the operating-table. Never have those words appeared to me truer than on the occasion of that episode, in the happy issue of which

I could not believe, whilst the assistants carried the man back to his bed, still asleep, but restored to life.

I hardly took the time to wash away the blood which covered my hands and face. With stained apron still around me, I rushed in the direction of Ortègue's study, clasping between my fingers, as though it were a treasure, the projectile I wished to hand him, before even a word passed my lips.

"The Professor has recovered," said a nurse whom I met on the way. "He has been given, at his request, an injection of morphia. He wished us to leave him alone, and is now resting on the sofa, with Mme. Ortègue by his side."

"So he has relapsed," thought I. "That was inevitable. Better so. His breakdown during the operation, with that troubled vision and the giving way of the legs, is the result of the sudden suppression of the morphia. A fatal syncope might have occurred. I must look into his condition. . . . But if he is sleeping? . . . Anyway, I'll go to the room

adjoining his study. If he is asleep, then I will retire. If not, the news that the operation has succeeded will be the best of medicine. . . .”

So I opened that first door as quietly as possible, walking on the tips of my toes. I had no sooner crossed the threshold than the sound of voices came to me from the study to which the room mentioned formed the antechamber. I was about to knock at the second door and announce my presence. But a phrase, heard distinctly, stopped me dead, so much did it impress me, and the following is the terrible dialogue I heard, immovable as I was and veritably prostrated. Ortègue, in the bitterness of his distress, had not had the strength to keep his secret. He had just told his wife the name of his disease, and the rest. And she was crying:

“But if you die, I shall not survive the day. You must not die! . . .”

“My poor child,” replied Ortègue, “you will survive me, and it is only right. You are not yet thirty. You have the right to live. . . .”

“Not without you.”

"Don't speak that way to me. Tempt me not . . . Tempt me not!" he repeated. I guessed from the noise of a chair being moved that he was now walking about the room. "Yes. I have had the terrible idea of dragging you with me into that darkness, that coldness, that void. Since I became aware that I am condemned, it is not once but twenty times that I have risen at night to listen to you sleeping. I heard your calm, fresh, and regular breathing. I lit a candle, the light of which I screened with my hand, so as not to awaken you. I saw you so young and beautiful! Ah! that word youth! I imagined you in a year, in two years, in ten, fifteen, still so beautiful, and I so far away! . . . I said to myself: 'I shall be but a phantom. She will forget me.' "

"Never," she moaned, savagely.

"Yes," he replied, no less savagely. . . . "Everything is forgotten. . . . And then came despair, jealousy, fury. I thought: 'Suppose I kill her in her sleep, without her feeling it? . . . I have plenty of choice as to means.

There are so many poisons which kill instantly. I have some there.' And then I held myself in abhorrence. I went down on my knees before your bed and begged your pardon. You do not know how much I love you. It is not death which frightens me. Death is a mystery only to those who do not know, who have not seen. Only, Catherine, to enter into it and part from you! To leave you to others! . . . But why lay bare before you all this shame and cowardice? . . . I fill you with horror. . . ."

"It is you who do not realize how much I love you," she replied.

"No, no," he said, "it is impossible for you to love me any longer. No one could love the dead body I have become. When I look at myself in the glass and see this sinister mask, these emaciated cheeks, this greenish complexion, I fully realize that further love for me is impossible. Impossible! The end has come. . . . Until this morning I had a right to think: 'Intelligent as she is, and the daughter of a scientist, she may still find something

pleasing in me—my talent and science; seeing me at work in this hospital, admired by all, she may be proud of me—proud to bear my name. . . .’ That idea supported and exalted me. Because of her, I have outdone myself here during the last few weeks. Let me bear witness to that as I should do to a dead person. That also is ended, ended! . . . After my breakdown this morning, I shall never dare to touch an instrument again. I should be too frightened of being an assassin. . . . Perhaps I am one, unless Marsal has succeeded. . . . So you and Science and my art—everything has gone, everything. . . . Think how horrible a thing it is when everything you love dwindles, crumbles away, and is lost—when you see and feel it slipping away, and when, stricken by such a disease, you are going with it! . . .”

“But I am not going to crumble away, Michel,” she cried, in most touching accents. “You are going to keep me. You will not lose me. I love you; listen, I love you.”

“Do not say those words.” With what

feeling, too, Ortègue protested! "They hurt too much. . . . But since that is impossible! . . . You do not love me. You pity me. And truly I am much to be pitied. . . ."

"I love you," she said, in a supplicating voice. "I have placed all my life in you. I love you. . . . As to its being impossible or foolish, I cannot say. I know that it is so. I love you with the same passionate tenderness as on the day when you asked me to be your wife and I replied 'Yes.' On that day I gave you my whole soul. You possess it. Do you not feel that you possess it? I have never taken anything back—no, nothing. But tell me that you realize I love you, that you feel it. Tell me. . . ."

"I cannot feel it," he exclaimed. "That is no longer possible. . . ."

"Because you are suffering—because you are wretched? . . . You have not, then, understood why I love you, why—I repeat—I have placed my whole life in you? Yes, the whole of it. For I cannot admit either that one can love twice or cease to love. Above

all, I cannot admit that one can start one's life again. That is a thing for which I have never forgiven my mother. You were older than I was. I have always realized that you would grow old before me, and that also has been a reason for loving you the more.

"My father brought me up in the adoration of Science. He told me what he thought of you and of your value as a scientist. It is the poetry of your life which attracted me—that life devoted to Truth, amidst things so hard—the noble and benevolent side of that work which appears so brutal. I said to myself: 'When he begins to grow old, I will look after him. If need be, I will be his nurse. My being will have fulfilled the whole of its work.'

"Other women dream of becoming mothers. Would that I had been a mother through you. I should have been very happy because of it. But that was not to be. I do not regret it. But if you do not feel that, just at the time when you most need to feel it, what would you have me become? Where would you have

me seek strength? If I cannot help you in this last trial—well, then, everything is at an end. But I shall support and aid you. . . .” And again, savagely, she said: “You thought of killing me. Didn’t you?”

“I told you so.”

“Tell me another thing. You thought also of killing yourself?”

“I did.”

“Well, shall we die together? Would you then believe that I love you? . . .”

There was silence.

“Is that indeed true?” he asked.

“Is it true? Look at me.”

“Ah!” he exclaimed, and I shuddered, noticing that his voice had changed, that his despairing accent had given place to a tone of ecstasy, exaltation, intoxication. “Yes, I believe that you love me. . . . Ah, thank you, thank you, thank you! It is the first time for weeks that I have rid myself of my nightmare, that I breathe and feel a little gentleness. Yes, I feel now that you love me. And how sweet it is. What a feeling

of calm has come over me! What a relief! . . . To have spoken to me thus, how you must love me!"

"At last!" she moaned. "Yes, I love you—passionately, absolutely. Agreed. I shall need no effort to leave a world in which you no longer are. Death does not frighten me either. I also know it is the eternal sleep. When shall we enter into it? To-day, so that your poor flesh need suffer no longer? Now, at this very minute, when we are so united, so transparent, the one as for the other? Is that your desire? I am ready."

"Not yet," he replied.

With what anguish, during those terrible minutes, I awaited from him, from that man whom I was accustomed to respect so much, a cry of revolt, a gesture of refusal, in the presence of this proof of a mad devotion! But that cry did not pass his lips. I guessed that he raised not his hands to make that gesture. A sign, alas! that his soul was as sick as his body. He accepted this monstrous plan of a double suicide, without even discus-

ing it, in a state of delirium which proved that he also had placed all his life on this love, and he continued:

“I am too full of happiness now. I do not want to lose it. As long as I have eyes to see you, hands to take yours, and the power of knowing you exist, I wish to live, to lose not an hour or a second of you. Morphia will save me from too much suffering. I was frightened of it, because I noticed that it was preventing me from working. It will not prevent me from looking at you, from hearing you breathe and feeling that you are living. I have still weeks—perhaps months—before me. I do not want to lose them.”

“Nor I,” she said. “But promise me one thing. Swear to me on our love that the resolve is only postponed, that you will not go without me, that it is a compact between us, as on the day when you asked for my hand. Do you remember? . . . You are a doctor, and will clearly recognize the symptoms which announce the end. When they come, you will tell me, and also the means for myself.

I shall have courage. We will pass together into that darkness, that coldness, that void of which you speak. There might be something darker, colder, and emptier than that: our house without you. Michel," she insisted, solemnly, "I know that you have never broken your word. Do you promise me?"

"I promise you," he replied.

"Thank you," she exclaimed. Then, in a more cajoling tone, as if to a patient: "Try, *mon ami*, to sleep a little. You need it. You owe it to me, now, to husband the remainder of our time. Lie down. You are going to sleep."

"Not before I know the result of the operation," he said, with a return of anxiety in his voice. "I have been so upset that I forgot poor Dufour. If only Marsal has saved him! . . ."

"I will go and see," she replied, "and then come back."

XIV

THE FAILURE OF AN ENDEAVOUR

THERE was time for me to slip out and pass into the corridor. There, I should have met Mme. Ortègue as though by chance. She would have thought that I was coming from the operating-room. My first impulse was, indeed, to withdraw. But I remained where I was. Those words "To-day. . . . At this very minute . . ." rang in my ears. Supposing Ortègue, at the end of his strength and in the paroxysm of a fresh attack, were to return to them? Supposing the horrible project was carried out that evening, or tomorrow? Should I ever forgive myself for not having immediately uttered the cry which was on my lips in the presence of this crime? For it was a crime—that example of cowardice in the midst of pain, set before all the

wounded in that hospital, at such a time as that.

Whilst I was hesitating—barely a few seconds—Mme. Ortègue had opened the door and seen me. She started back in surprise; then, placing a finger on her lips, as a sign for me to be silent, she pointed with the other hand to the closed door, and, taking me by the arm, led me away.

“Were you there long?” she asked, when she had led me into her private room, which was near to that occupied by the sick man—a fact that still further increased the tragedy of that conversation, because of the possibility that he might appear at any moment, impelled by the desire to know the fate of poor Captain Dufour.

“Yes, Madam,” I replied, feeling that it would be useless to try to lie to her. “I came to inform the Professor that I have completed the operation, that it has succeeded, and to bring him this bullet.”

“Why then did you not come in?” she asked, imperiously. “Why did you listen to us, spy upon us?”

"Madam," I interrupted, "I cannot offer any excuse. I ought either to have come in or withdrawn. That is true. I was, as it were, nailed to the spot."

"And now you are going to speak to him, to tell him that he has no right to drag me to the grave; to add still more to his agony and snatch from him the last joy I am able to give him? Well, it is contrary to my wishes, Marsal. It is contrary to my wishes. . . . But be quiet!" She again placed a finger on her lips and listened. Someone was passing along the corridor and moving away. "Give me the bullet," she said, "and I will take it to my husband. When he knows that his patient is out of danger, he will rest. Not before. . . . And wait for me."

Five minutes later she was back again. I had had time to reflect, and it was I who resumed the conversation by accosting her with these words:

"Madam, I shall not speak to M. Ortège. He is so ill. I shall not inflict an additional emotion upon him. He has suffered too much

for months past, as you now know. To crown everything, there is this operation which was interrupted so painfully. . . . If we were not in a war hospital, I should leave this house. I cannot; he would not let me go. My presence is all the more necessary here for, in the capacity of the Professor's pupil, I am the one designated to carry out his instructions if he cease to operate, as he says he will. I shall not therefore go away, nor, I repeat, shall I speak to him. But the very silence which I promise to preserve towards my teacher, my admiration for him, and my respect for his wife, entitle me to say this to you. Madam, this double suicide is a crime. Do not commit it, and do not allow it to be committed."

"What crime? Does my life belong to me?—answer me, yes or no."

"Not to you alone, Madam. No one's life is his alone. But go up to the wards—into the room of the wounded man on whom I have just operated. Look at him and question your conscience. So long as there exists

in the world any one who suffers and to whom we can do a little good, to go away is to desert; and in war-time, in this hour of universal unhappiness, there are suffering people everywhere. . . .”

“But if my husband needs me more than all the others?” she interrupted. “If I have no other means of aiding him than by dying? You speak of the man on whom you have operated. Suppose that he were suffering at this moment from a contagious and fatal illness, and I came to you, and said: ‘He needs a nurse to look after him; I will go.’ That would also be a suicide. Would you call it a crime? Marsal, I am not doing anything more than that, and my conscience is quite clear.

“Moreover, it is not your conscience which speaks to me; it is your prejudice. I have noticed it for a long time. You do not dare to think truly. I learnt first of all from my father and then from my husband how to think correctly. Listen. Would you like me to tell you my husband’s views regarding suicide? Two years ago—he was not ill then

—one of our friends killed herself. I shall not tell you her name. The fact was kept secret—again through prejudice. Someone was indignant with her. I can still hear my husband reply: ‘The reasons against suicide were invented by guzzlers who are fond of life, and would have everybody love it as they do. Out of the most animal of instincts they have fashioned a virtue.’

“But that very instinct,” I replied, “proves that suicide is contrary to nature, contrary to order, contrary to law.”

“Continue right to the end,” she replied, with singular irony. “Say that it is forbidden by God, while you are about it. I am going to astonish you. At any rate, that would have a meaning. But God! If there were a God, should I be living through this atrocious hour? Have I deserved it? . . . As to Good and Evil, what do these words mean? I am the daughter of a savant and the wife of a savant. I am accustomed to think for myself. I know that there is no God. I know that there is no other world.

I know that Good and Evil are the result of a long atavism of adaptations. For other women, these formulæ have no meaning. They have one for me. My father and my husband have sufficiently commented upon them. When that adaptation is no longer possible, when a human creature suffers too much, in whose name would you forbid him or her delivering himself or herself from that suffering? That is my case, Marsal. My suffering is too great."

"And suppose a soldier in the trenches, to-day—someone you esteem or love, your cousin Le Gallic, for instance, were also to say, 'My suffering is too great,' and kill himself—what would you think of him?"

"That he was a coward, if able to fight. But supposing he were unable? . . . Marsal, give me the means of fighting against this horrible ill which is going to carry off my husband—drag him from me. And you shall see! . . . No. You know too well that there is nothing to be done; that the cancer is there, implacable and incurable, with its issue as

certain as the return of morning and evening. You know that my husband is doomed.

“I did not lie to him just now. You heard me. I have placed all my life on him. If he fails me, I cannot continue. I will not start my life again. You spoke to me of nature. To a nature like mine the whole value of life, its whole beauty, rests in fidelity. As for those women, who, having loved, love again—who repeat to one man the words they whispered to another, who disown both themselves and their past—they disgust and horrify me. I do not want to change; and the most terrible thing, in the case of survival, is that, while living, and in spite of myself, I shall change. Even during this year, since my husband has been ill, I have feared at times that my feeling for him, complete and unique though it be, might elude me.

“You recollect Vincent’s *fiancée*—poor Vincent whose face was crushed,—and her terrified flight from the blind man with his bleeding and pus-covered face, after she had slipped in to be present at the dressing, and

her shrieks in the corridors. 'It is he no longer! It is he no longer! . . .' That despair is mine. At certain hours, it seems to me that I can no longer recognize my husband. I shudder to think that there are things which he stirred in me and which he stirs no longer. But that tremor is still prompted by love. It is the passionate desire to have existed only for him and through him. To pass away with him is to consummate that desire. It is to have truly lived my life."

What reply was to be made to her? On what authority, indeed, could one prove that she was wrong? I saw that she was entirely sincere, and from absolute sincerity comes a strength which is imposing. To surprise a human nature in its most intimate logic, is to admit it. It is to legitimate, momentarily, ways of thinking which we should condemn as abominable, if isolated from that moaning and suffering personality. We can no longer judge it so long as we feel that it is living.

Formerly I had indeed suspected, in the

case of Mme. Ortègue, the influence of the two highly educated men in whose atmosphere the young girl first of all and then the woman had grown up. But her beauty and elegance, the apparent frivolity of her luxurious life, her self-control, and her habitual discretion had not allowed me to penetrate her character, which was strongly coherent in its complexity. I now noted to what a degree her father's mind and that of her husband mastered her own. She was not of Breton origin for nothing. She had adhered to their teaching as to a faith. That insane resolution to commit suicide had sprung from the depths of this nature, which was so concentrated, and capable of the most violent and fixed purposes. This woman's determination, endowed with supreme devotion, mingled with exaltation and reasoning, conceived in a delirium of pity and justified by nihilistic axioms, was the conclusion, the sum total of a whole existence, at once ardently romantic and severely systematic.

To oppose frenzies of this intensity with

academic arguments was like barring a torrent with a dam of pebbles. The rushing water merely sweeps them aside and roars the louder. Purely abstract ideas cannot arrest souls which are in that state of absolute tension where intelligence and passion form a whole. They bend only under a power analogous to that of the apostleship, under the influx of other souls in a similar state of tension. Life alone struggles against life. My inner weakness, my own intellectual indecision would, in any case, have resulted in my disarming when confronted by the force of such a wild outburst.

Meanwhile, another circumstance paralysed me. Conjugal intimacy possesses its arcana. To penetrate too far into it is a profanation. I felt that to be so, at that moment, and also that I had listened—against my will—but listened all the same, to what I ought never to have heard.

It was necessary, however, to speak to her, so, finding but words of the simplest humanity, I said:

“How unhappy you are, Madam, and how I pity you!”

“I am not to be pitied,” she replied, with a pride which reminded me of Ortègue, and the shake of her head when I had clasped her hand after hearing her disclosure.

She was truly, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, the wife of this man. That was also proved by her promptitude in deciding to cut short a scene which was about to degenerate into one of useless emotion. She had spoken to me merely with the object of obviating fresh intrusions in the tragic *tête-à-tête* which she was determined to maintain until the end, between herself and her husband. She already regretted that this outburst had exceeded her purpose. I saw her stiffen, and it was in a dry and cutting tone that she added:

“All this is waste time, both for myself, who have accounts to finish before my husband wakes up, and for you, who have to watch over your patient. Go.”

I obeyed her, but I had hardly passed the

doorway and broken the magnetism of her presence when I recovered myself, and, walking along the corridors, kept on repeating:

“I will prevent this horrible thing. I will prevent it. But how?”

XV

TIME, THE ALLY

CERTAIN silences after certain words make a very strange impression. When I met Mme. Ortègue two hours later, I felt that any allusion to our conversation was impossible. She had recovered herself, and would never have permitted it. We found ourselves in Ortègue's presence, and he also had regained self-control. Rested by his short sleep, he asked to see me in order to secure exact details about that morning's operation.

"I am pleased with you, my dear Marsal," he said. "It is a great comfort. It is improbable that I shall ever operate again." He stopped my protesting gesture. "But though the hand fails, diagnosis remains. I can still render service—with your aid. Con-

fess that I was right, at Beaujon, in telling you over and over again: 'Be a surgeon.' Based on Science, it is so fine an Art! What intellectual emotions arise when, knife in hand, and the most minute anatomical details returning to us, we literally graft our action on to that of life! This war offers us an extraordinary, a unique opportunity for performing experiments. Take careful note of to-day's business and particularly the signs of localization. You recollect them?"

As, in a few luminous phrases, he summed up for me his reasons for having substituted in the present case the diagnosis of a pressure on the spinal cord for that of a section, which had first been adopted, I was surprised by the serenity which was now stamped on his face. His whole being was expressive of expansion, quietude, placidity. That this master of the knife could lay aside everything with such tranquillity, that this prince of surgery could abdicate with such resignation—what an indication! It was this plan of a double suicide, offered in the bewilderment of pity

and accepted in the aberration of despair—this delirious compact, that calmed the violent and convulsive storm of his rebellion as though miraculously. The dying man, enraged to find everything falling into decay and ruin in himself and around him, suddenly found the strength to say farewell to a life in which he would not leave the one he loved—ah! loved with how great an ardour and insanity!

Such peace of mind was more terrifying to me than all the recent outbursts. That monstrous death-contract, between this man and this woman, was not, then, a game, the caprice of a moment of folly? These two had accepted it, immediately it had been conceived, with absolute, total, and irrepressible sincerity.

Seeing them thus—he so ill, yet almost ecstatic through the double intoxication due to morphine and passion, she with a bewitched look in her eyes—I had the proof that I was face to face with a phenomenon of reciprocal fascination, against which any intervention would be vain. I had been present at the simultaneous inception of their determination

to commit suicide. It had not been imposed upon them, but communicated from one to the other by a sentimental contagion which appeared to me at that moment a stroke of destiny, a *fatum* at the thought of which I shuddered with terror to the innermost depths of my soul.

This idea of fatality is incessantly encountered by the doctor. There is nothing which our profession teaches us to face more often; to accept it when the issue is immediate and overwhelming, and to combat it when the day of reckoning, uncertain or retarded, leaves us the time. Time; that is our battlefield. Better still, it is our ally. How many times have we seen its slow and silent action amend the irreparable, introduce into the logical course of facts an unexpected element which refutes our surest calculations! Time was on my side. Let it be my excuse for not having at once tried everything that could possibly militate against the sinister project into the secret of which chance had just admitted me.

I knew that it would not be accomplished either on the morrow, or the day afterwards, or before many days. Ortègue's love fever guaranteed that; he would postpone to the last moment the act of eternal separation. In the meanwhile, perhaps, the voice of conscience would of its own accord revive in him. Another conversation which we had, almost immediately proved that to me; in the midst of the wreckage of his old morality, he retained the sense of probity. For he made a point of excusing himself for his relapse into morphinism.

“Marsal, confess that you have lost your esteem for me owing to my having recommenced these injections? You are wrong. I have not forfeited my word. I entered into a compact with myself to suffer in order to remain capable of operating and to be of service. But, since I can do no more, I have taken back my word. Operate? Even if the recollection of my breakdown did not forbid it, my strength would no longer permit. . . . Look, I can hardly lift this book. . . .”

It was his big *Traité clinique de Chirurgie Nerveuse*, published the preceding year. He opened it, and, showing me some notes pencilled on the margins, said:

“I am rectifying a few small details. If it is ever reprinted, insert these corrections. Marsal, a scientist can never be too careful.”

What an invitation to speak to him was this scrupulousness of his! But how could I confess that I had listened to his terrible conversation with his wife without running the risk of one of those excessively violent outbursts of anger, such as he had had of recent weeks, and of a complete rupture between us? If he were to send me away from the Rue Saint Guillaume—he was the master there—it would be impossible to recover contact with the two accomplices on the crime which I wished, at all cost, to prevent. Yes, it was necessary to exercise patience, since, once more, time was on my side. Had I not before me an example of that sovereign power which waiting carries with it, the example of the battle of the Marne, the development of

which was in my case mingled with all the emotions of that hard month of September? Ortègue himself talked to me about it incessantly.

“Do you know why Joffre is a great man?” he said to me. “Because he is waging a scientific war.”

He evoked the picture of the general at Charleroi, measuring the extent of the German avalanche, mathematically, calculating that his own reserves would not reach the front in time to be useful, and moving back his front towards them.

“It’s simple common sense and observation. *To submit one’s idea to facts and be ready to abandon, modify, or change it, according to what the observation of phenomena teaches,* this phrase from the writings of Claude Bernard remains as true of war as of the laboratory. Two different methods do not exist for the human mind. One alone is of value: to observe reality as it is, and conform to it. One can only act on facts with facts.”

I listened to him reasoning, so justly and

uprightly, and marvelled to find in the one man so much wisdom united with such mental alienation. Throughout the day, in the midst of my hospital duties, I repeated to myself, in paying tribute to him, his admirably precise formula: "One can only act on facts with facts." Between two dressings, I endeavoured, in imagination, to apply it to the problem which was beginning to obsess me, and which I felt would obsess me all my life if I did not succeed in solving it before the date fixed by Ortègue. The fact that I had discovered that abominable intention of double suicide, by means of what other facts could I prevent it? I came to the conclusion by psychological facts alone. But the materials vanished. There was no coercion which enabled one to prevent offences of this nature, and as to modifying Ortègue's state of health, the primary and fundamental element in the drama, one might as well have thought of trying to give him back the healthy organism of his twenty-fifth year. I hesitated in the presence of that other fact,

—an explanation with him. I have stated why.

One field only remained open to me,—Mme. Ortègue's mental disposition. She also—she above all—might change. The instinct to live is still very powerful at her age! Yes, but personal honour is also very powerful, the need of keeping an engagement all the stronger the more redoubtable and painful it is! That had been made only too clear to me on the occasion of our explanation; she was one of those women who cannot bear even the suspicion of being considered afraid or anxious to draw back. How could I speak to her, confronted by the apprehension of seeing her stiffen still more in the pride of her tragic sacrifice?

Days, however, followed days and stretched out into weeks. After that Monday of September 28th, came Monday, October 5th, and then Monday, October 12th. If I had kept a daily bulletin of my relations with the Ortègue household, I should have had to write down, every evening, those words "situation

unchanged," which made me extremely low spirited through reading them too often in the *Communiqué*. For the war—so near, eighty kilometres from Paris, and still so uncertain—continued.

I followed its events with every bit as much anxiety as if I had not been involved in this private drama, a very insignificant and sorry drama, however, compared to the other! I realized that only too well, and that the tremendous struggle, prolonged at that time on the Aisne, was, in comparison with the possible suicide of a deluded couple, what an earthquake, like that of Lisbon or Messina, is to the crushing of two poor ants. Yet the national disquietude did not succeed in paralysing that other disquietude which was within me. The two mingled while growing keener. With feverish haste, I opened the newspaper in the morning to learn what progress we had made round Arras, in the Woevre, on the Haut-de-Meuse, and closed it without finishing what I was reading, whenever Ortègue or his wife drew near, so that I might devote my whole

attention to a scrutiny of their faces. What stage of their criminal plan had they reached? Had they again spoken of it?

Naturally I deciphered on the face of my poor director nothing save the progress of the implacable disease, and, on that of his companion, the determination to avoid my inquiry. She now overwhelmed herself with work. Everybody was astonished by her indefatigable activity. From morning until night I saw her passing between her husband's study and the various wards of the hospital, reporting the slightest incidents to him, and transmitting the orders which he insisted on giving from his sofa. He remained stretched upon it for hours together, smoking cigarette after cigarette.

There was a perplexing contrast between the fatal resolution which the young woman concealed beneath her beautiful, serious face and the assiduous work of charity in which I saw her engaged. I endeavoured to discern in it the clue to secret remorse. Her almost feverish desire to be useful to the unfortunate

seemed to me, at times, to be an anticipated expiation. "It is impossible," I said to myself, again and again, "that she does not feel the truth of my words: that suicide at such a time as this is desertion. I have made an appeal to this sentiment once. I will try again." I waited and waited, with the idea of allowing this evidence to be still further strengthened in her.

From time to time she uttered very simple remarks which proved to me to what a depth the terrible sights of the hospital penetrated her imagination, and how keenly also she appreciated the value of humble alleviation. I recollect, for instance, that one of her friends—a woman of her own age, extremely pretty, and dressed in the latest style—having come to invite her to dinner, I said to her:

"It is astounding to see how unaware some people are of the war."

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "She is a very good soul, but does not see the wounded. If I were to go and dine in town as she does, I veritably believe that those who are here would

rise up at table before me and put me to shame. So long as they are suffering, we ought not to live as we did before."

On another occasion, to be precise—one morning—as she found me finishing a newspaper, I handed it to her with the words:

"Read that. It is a most eloquent article."

"No," she exclaimed, with a gesture of refusal. "What is said or written does not interest me in the slightest." And then, pointing to some amputated soldiers who were crossing the peristyle, "Nothing real exists save the sufferings of these poor fellows, and the assistance we can render them. I cannot understand how any one in France, to-day, can think of anything else but fighting or nursing."

The very evening of the day on which she had touched me by this generous profession of faith, another vision of her inspired in me the hope that the fatal design would not be carried out. We were getting near the middle of October. The battle was raging from Lille to Verdun, and, owing to incredible adminis-

trative incoherence, the arrival of wounded was almost suspended at our place. Five o'clock had just struck. The afternoon dressings had been finished sooner than usual. There reigned in the corridors that silence which follows visits to the wounded. It was the moment when the convalescents were coming in from the garden in order to avoid being surprised by the first chilly evenings of autumn. I had gone to the window to see if our soldiers were obeying orders, and if any of them were lingering.

I saw Mme. Ortègue walking alone in the deserted alleys. At first I could hardly recognize her, so strangely did she (whose walk was usually so firm and quick) drag herself along, as though tired and broken. She strolled along, contemplating, amidst the thin and golden foliage of the trees, the beautiful sunset—an orange-coloured sky, with pale-green reflections. Not a breath of wind stirred the air. The immobility of this verdant spot made that small garden, enclosed as it was within other gardens, seem like a little park,

all peace and harmony. The façades of adjacent mansions were presented in profile beyond. I could see, amidst the openings in the foliage, their discoloured and neutral tints showing from space to space, with the rays of the sun striking the panes of a few high windows.

The extraordinary tranquillity of the place and the hour harmonized with the white silhouette which I watched as it moved along with a step that seemed more and more fatigued. Was that restful atmosphere reaching the young woman's tortured heart, or was she suffering from the contrast between the peace of things around her and her thoughts? The lawn was jewelled with the clumps of flowers which Ortègue renewed weekly. That was one of the luxuries of his *Clinique*, a luxury which, in spite of the war, he continued, through one of those little persistencies of pride and self-love that were customary to him.

Mme. Ortègue stopped before a rose-tree full of deep scarlet blooms. She plucked one and raised it to her face. At that distance,

and in the gathering twilight, I could not distinguish her features, but what a symbol that movement was, that attitude, that flower, the fragrance of which was long and voluptuously inhaled, amid the blazing sunset, by a woman who, in my hearing, had dedicated herself to death, and who now suddenly appeared to me as the young captive of the legend, saying farewell to life, regretting it all, regretting herself! Did she, who had already come into contact several times in our hospital with the cold and sinister reality of death, mentally start back in terror at the thought of an engagement, made in a burst of pity, so tender yet so insane? Was nature revolting in her over-impulsive soul against that promise which had gushed forth in a moment of superhuman tension?

The silent drama which I conjured up was suddenly completed by the arrival of Ortègue. I saw him descending the steps, doubtless in search of his wife. He walked a few paces along the alley, without interrupting the reverie into which, still motionless and with the

fragrant red flower held to her face, she was plunged. He stopped and in turn looked at her, as she just before had gazed at the roses. The horizon had become obliterated. The sun's reflections no longer shone on the window-panes. It was as though the enchantment of that peaceful hour had vanished because of Ortègue's very presence.

What was he himself thinking of, as he contemplated that woman's melancholy? Did he indeed still think of dragging her with him to the grave? Suddenly he approached her and placed his hand on her shoulder. She turned round, as though frightened, and then I saw them slowly returning towards the house, without a word, each fearing perhaps the voice of the other. Seized with pity on account of their silence, I descended to meet them. We met on the steps, and I began to talk to them about a household question, which served Mme. Ortègue as a pretext for leaving us.

"I will set that right," she said, "and return."

On leaving she had placed the beautiful rose on a table of the peristyle. Ortègue, who had sat down, picked up the flower, and with his hands, which he now always kept gloved in order to hide their darkening colour, began to pull it to pieces, petal by petal, with a cruel expression on his thin, bronzed face, and a look of hatred in his fiery eyes, whose brown sclerotic was terrifying to behold. When all the petals had fallen on the floor, he threw the sad and mutilated débris of that lovely rose on the table, and, with a spasmodic laugh, exclaimed:

“This is what I’ve come to, Marsal—revengeing myself on flowers—I, Michel Ortègue!”
“. . . Michel Ortègue!” he repeated, and with that he disappeared by the same door through which had passed his wife, without my finding a word to answer him.

XVI

LE GALLIC'S RETURN TO THE CLINIQUE

HALF an hour later, he called me into his office. He was holding a telegram, which he handed to me. A doctor at the front—an old pupil of his—announced the sending to the hospital in the Rue Saint Guillaume of Lieutenant Ernest Le Gallic, seriously wounded in the head during one of the fights around Albert.

“I should like you to break the news to Catherine,” Ortègue said. “I’ve no more strength for anything. I’m going to have a sleep.”

There floated in his eyes a torpid look, which proved to me, as did the half-open drawer in which he kept his morphia, that he had just given himself a hypodermic injection. But this time it was no longer physical pain which

he wished to deaden. The recent scene revealed that only too clearly. What a descent into the abyss! What degradation since the day—recent as it was—when he received that same Le Gallic in that very study with such aggressive words, but with such firmness still pervading his whole being! I recollected that, on passing into the corridor, and his pleasantry concerning the names of flowers substituted for those of saints. I also remembered my first suspicions—very quickly combated—regarding Mme. Ortègue and the interest inspired by her cousin. I was about to see how well justified I had been in not giving way to them, and that this woman's soul was too loyal ever to have harboured, since her marriage, a feeling of which she might have been ashamed.

“Poor Ernest!” she said, simply, when she had read the telegram, and big tears ran down her cheeks. She strove to hide them no more than the honest emotion which brought them forth. “I expected it,” she continued. “It was inevitable. The best are struck down.

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They are the bravest and, to set an example, expose themselves. And my cousin was so brave! Even when quite a child he gave a proof of his courage. I can see him again, at the age of ten, during the holidays which we spent together at Tréguier. They had been repairing the cloister, and there was a scaffolding which reached to the roof. A little boy of the town had climbed—goodness only knows how—one of the topmost poles, in order to recover his kite. Having got there, he remained astride the pole, seized with terror, and daring neither to advance nor to come back. He saw us and cried for help.

“Before the maid who was in charge of us could stop him, Ernest rushed forward and, climbing from plank to plank, walked along the pole, calling to the little fellow: ‘You see, it’s not at all dangerous.’ He then seized him by the hand, brought him back, and returned for the kite, without ever once crouching. I can still hear him say to me: ‘You’ve no idea, Catherine, how amusing it is to be frightened and to go all the same.’ He loved

danger. What I fear, Marsal, is that, with this wound on his head, he may be no longer in his right mind. What a sad thing it is when a man is no longer himself!"

"But why do you fear that?" I asked.

"Because they are sending him here," she replied; and then, shuddering, "You get used to everything in a hospital except that. I thought of it last night, when sitting up in the ward. To me, during those vigils, there is always a touching moment: that when the grey light of dawn enters the rooms. Throughout the night, one has heard heavy breathing, suppressed sighs, moans, the sound of those in pain. At that moment pain is visible, but it is also the moment when, almost always, it diminishes, and, in the presence of those suffering bodies, which, despite everything, are at rest, one begins to hope. We tell ourselves that that sleep is in itself a slight relief. We look at them, bed after bed. We are acquainted with their wounds. We say to ourselves: 'In two, three, five months they will be cured.' And then our eyes rest on one

of those for whom this healing of the animal part of man will be but the perpetuation of a diminished and shattered existence, without either memory or speech. In the case of those, we hope that they may never wake again. Ah! if I were to see my poor Ernest like that!"

"Don't look on the blackest side of things, Madam," I begged, "that will never do."

"You are right," she said. "Besides, we cannot." On uttering these enigmatic words, which nevertheless were so plain to me, her look once more became gloomy. She mastered herself, however, and said: "We must prepare the room in which we are to put him. The one which has been empty since this morning—the first to the right, you know, in the second corridor. I ought to say the Lily-of-the-Valley Room. But these floral names applied to such places are too sinister nowadays."

There was, indeed, an extraordinary contrast between the ideas of spring, freshness and light gaiety, evoked by the recollection of the May lily, *Lilium convallium*, and the ap-

pearance of the poor fellow whom the army medical corps sent us the next day. Although Le Gallic was able to walk, he was carried on a stretcher, in accordance with the instructions of the surgeon who had first attended him, and who evidently feared the consequences of the slightest movement. His head was enveloped in several layers of gauze, which continued round his chin. Thus enframed, his energetic face was thrown into relief—pale, hollow-cheeked, eyes dilated, filled with a look of animal melancholy, if I may so express myself.

Two months of warfare had passed over the enthusiastic lieutenant, who, in the plentitude of his strength, had set off at the beginning of August. He returned to us, worn out by his wound and over-fatigue, and also as the result of too many emotions. However, the fear expressed by Mme. Ortègue was not justified. In his deeply injured body, the mind remained intact; courage and hope were the same as before. He proved it by his first words, when hardly installed in his room, and on seeing the tears in his cousin's eyes.

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"You must not cry, Catherine. I'm not worth it. There could only be one sad thing to-day—the victory of the Germans; and they are beaten. As for myself, I've never asked God for anything so much as to fall facing the enemy in a just war." And with a smile: "He has spoiled me, since he has granted me, in addition, the favour of knowing it."

"Come, now, my little Ernest," said Or-tègue, who had insisted on superintending the conveyance of the wounded man, "don't talk too much. What I want to know is the truth regarding that slight hurt of yours. Undo his dressing, Marsal, and you, Ernest, answer my questions, by monosyllables, so that you may not tire yourself. First of all, how many days exactly is it since you were wounded?"

"Six."

"And where does it hurt? Here? . . . Here? . . . Here ? . . ."

He traced with his hand the surface of his own neck. Le Gallic stopped him as he was following the course of the occipital nerves.

"Yes, there."

"Do you suffer much?"

"Yes."

"Those are the inner nerves which are torn or bruised. . . . Any dizziness?"

"Not just now."

"Any fever? . . ." He had placed a thermometer under his arm. "None. Have you had convulsions?"

"No."

"Good! The mind is intact. . . . Can you see my fingers?"

He had placed his two hands at a short distance on each side of the temples of the wounded man, who replied:

"Not very well."

I had finished unwinding the gauze bands. At the back of the head we saw a small hole, which was rendered all the more discernible owing to the fact that care had been taken to shave away the hair surrounding it. Ortègue made a long examination of the wound.

"I think I can establish your diagnosis," he said at last. "Lesion of the occipital bone.

A deep and penetrating wound. The bullet is still there. It must be lodged in the right occipital lobe. There is no need to intervene, so long as you have neither dizziness, nor fever, nor convulsions. Judging by the appearance of the wound, there are no splinters. But that is to be verified by a discreet trepanation. You can be cured. The bullet will become a foreign body that will be quite tolerated. Rest in bed, injections of morphia to calm that wretched neuralgia, and as few movements as possible, so as not to displace the projectile. You are very young. You will get over this. You have ahead of you happy days to live, my dear friend."

"Not happier than those I have lived in the trenches these last few weeks," replied the officer. "It is a magnificent thing to be there, under fire, and to say to oneself: 'At any moment I may see God face to face.' "

"That will be reserved for another time," continued Ortègue, in a tone of forced gaiety. "Our duty, as doctors, is to prevent those appointments, from being kept. Marsal will

rearrange your dressing. As for myself, I'm going to rest a little. Do you know, my poor Ernest, I've been very ill since I've seen you; I am so still. But I was determined not to leave to any one, not even to him"—he pointed to me—"the task of examining you. To-morrow we will have you radiographed by Laugel, the most skilful man in Paris at that work. I shall be very astonished if he does not confirm my diagnosis."

He retired from the room, leaving us alone—Mme. Ortègue and I—by the side of the wounded man. Le Gallic had half-closed his eyes and his semi-bandaged head was immobile on the pillow.

"Well," she began, "you see that it isn't so serious. The Professor is not often wrong, and so long as he does not operate . . ." In view of the wounded man's silence, she insisted: "You believe what he has told you, don't you?"

"I know what I know," he replied at last. "I've seen, in an ambulance at the front, one of my comrades who was hit in exactly the

same place. Like me, he was without fever, without convulsions, without mental troubles. But he died suddenly. That will be my story, but I am 'cleared,' as the sailors say with us, do you remember? Let us talk no more about myself, if you don't mind?"

"Yes, let us continue. Assure him, Marshal, that no two wounds are alike. Come now, tell us how you received yours, instead of talking 'stuff and nonsense.' That is another homely expression. Do you, also, recollect it?"

"Oh, there was nothing heroic," replied the officer, "nor even interesting in the way I was wounded. Such is war. You take part in twenty fights; the bullets will have nothing to do with you. And then you enter, as I did, a communication trench, to carry an order. It is rest time; a day of dead calm. Just at the moment you are unprotected a shell arrives, and you are caught, as I was, I should say stupidly, if it had not happened while I was on duty and, above all, if I had not seen many ordinary soldiers struck down

under the same conditions without complaint. And I, too, do not complain. Since the beginning of the war my comrades and I have had but one idea: to be not too unworthy of our men. They have been splendid."

"You also, I am sure of it?" questioned Mme. Ortègue.

"I hope that I have done my duty," he continued. "But let us speak about your husband. He said just now that he had been ill."

I seized the opportunity of replying first.

"He is better than he was," I said, "and we hope——"

"We hope for nothing," exclaimed Mme. Ortègue. "What good is there in lying to my cousin, Marsal? Ernest will see my husband's condition only too clearly. He would ask him if he were suffering, and where. He would irritate him—you know how he is—and uselessly. Yes, Ernest, poor Michel is very ill. His days are counted. A word will tell you everything—he has a cancer."

For the first time since Ortègue had left

the room, the wounded man looked at his cousin. An expression of infinite pity replaced on his face that of suffering serenity. He muttered as though to himself:

"*You will always find the Cross.*" Then, questioning, "A cancer? There is no doubt about it?"

"There is no doubt about it."

"And he knows it?"

"He knows it."

Le Gallic appeared to hesitate. Then seriously, he said:

"Allow me to put a question to you. What stage has he reached, I mean from the point of view of his religious ideas?"

"What stage would you have him reach? You know quite well that he has never troubled himself about those problems."

"Even when face to face with death?"

"Even when face to face with death," she replied.

There was further hesitation on the part of Le Gallic, and anxiety now in his voice:

"But you, Catherine? When we were

children, you had faith. Not more than ten years ago, at the Easter holidays, you were almost a girl, and I can see you communicating by my side, in the old Cathedral of Tréguier, where for centuries those from whom we are descended—you and I—received Holy Communion. Does not the promise in which they believed, and in which you believed, return to you on the eve of your being separated from your husband?"

"What promise?"

"That of eternal life."

"There is no eternal life."

"I will reply to you in the words of St. Paul, which a soldier-priest, who was later killed at Ypres, repeated to us in the trenches: 'If we have hope for this life only, we are the most wretched of men.' "

"The point in question is not whether we are wretched, but whether we are keeping to the truth."

"The truth cannot reside in ideas that fail to sustain us when we suffer or die."

"Look at me, Ernest, and look at my

husband," she said, with a strange, defiant accent. "You will see whether we are not sustained when it comes to suffering and dying." And in her turn she left the room, adding: "The Professor wishes you to speak as little as possible, and I've been making you chatter and chatter. I'm going to fetch you a nurse to whom Marsal will give his instructions." Then, with a smile, as though to correct the brusqueness of her flight: "Good-bye, Ernest; but not for long."

XVII

LE GALLIC, THE INSTRUMENT

I HAD trembled on hearing those words with which she invited the Christian to watch her suffer—and die, she had added. To Le Gallic, this word applied only to Ortègue. But *I* had understood that she applied it to herself. She had just affirmed anew that determination to commit suicide, against which I remained inactive, through a sense of prudence, which became more and more mingled with remorse. Suddenly I recognized in the wounded man the instrument for carrying out that action of which I felt myself incapable. He was Mme. Ortègue's nearest relative, excepting her mother, who had left Paris at the beginning of the month of August. For a minute I had thought of writing to the former Mme. Malfan-Trévis; then I had given

up the idea of introducing this egoistic and unintelligent woman into a conjugal drama of so exceptional a character.

I recalled the evidence I had had when listening to Mme. Ortègue's confession: the futility of reasoning against passion. I had come to the conclusion that, to dominate an exasperated soul, the influx of another soul with the force of an apostleship, was necessary. That force was before me. I had only to look at the officer's firm face and at his eyes, whence streamed, in the midst of his suffering, the inner light, to recall the words he had spoken at his departure as well as his recent remarks. Believing the things he believed and with such sincerity, this man would be horror-struck at the thought of this double suicide. What would he not do to prevent it? Alas! I had no right to inform him, no right to betray a secret which I had learnt through an indiscretion—half involuntary, it is true, but nevertheless in a manner entailing a certain loss of esteem. But after all he might guess the truth of his own accord? The few words

with which he commented on his cousin's departure revealed to me indeed a deep and almost divinatory knowledge of her character. I was less astonished at that later, when I knew how much he had loved her.

“And what do *you* think, Dr. Marsal?” he asked me first of all. “Do you also believe in complete negation?”

“No,” I replied; “but neither do I believe in affirmation. As regards everything connected with the psychic world, my motto has long been the epitaph of a doctor of Padua of the Middle Ages. It is as follows: ‘I have lived eighty years, I have studied unwearyingly, and I have at least learnt one thing: not to ignore my ignorance . . . *ignorantiam meam non ignorare.*’ ”

“Humility is the half of faith,” said Le Gallic. “But you heard what my poor cousin said? She asks me to watch her suffer—and you saw how she hurried away? What? She suffer—she who has so little strength with which to support suffering? Only pride knows how to suffer wearing a mask as calm as the

face of faith. But that is only a mask, hiding despair. Catherine is filled with doctrines inspired by pride; but she is without pride herself. As a girl, she adored her father, and thought as he did. Now she loves her husband, and thinks as he does. Her personality has ever felt the need of support from another. She is a woman. What will become of her when Ortègue is taken from her?"

The entrance of the nurse interrupted this conversation. Mme. Ortègue had brought her. This time she and I went out together. Her recent words had brought back to me the agitation I had felt when stationed behind Ortègue's study door on the day of the terrible scene. It was as though I had heard a solemn renewal of the suicidal compact, and, as then, it was impossible for me to be silent.

"Let us go to the radiography room," she had said to me, "and arrange the negatives."

I followed her, and, when hardly inside the room, said abruptly:

"You told your cousin to watch you suffer and die. . . . *Die,*" I repeated. "Are you

still, then, intending to carry out that terrible resolution?"

She did not even look at me, but, walking towards a table loaded with negatives, which she began to handle, merely replied:

"I am."

But I noticed that, despite her apparent tranquillity, her hands trembled slightly. This sign of emotion, and, above all, the fact that she had not flatly stopped me, emboldened me to continue.

"You will do me the justice, Madam, to admit that I have kept my promise. I have not spoken a word to the Professor. And with you I have at no time tried to resume our conversation of three weeks ago."

"That is true," she exclaimed; "you have acted as a friend. I have felt that and must thank you."

"Well, Madam, I repeat what I said to you then, that at the present time your life does not wholly belong to you. You heard what your cousin Le Gallic said. You have seen him. By talking with him you have been able,

even more than through the instrumentality of the other wounded men, to judge of the feeling which animates all these soldiers who are fighting for us. Do you not also feel that your individual drama is very small compared with this great drama?"

"Possibly," she interrupted, "but it is my drama."

"Ah," I continued, "do you not feel above all that you have no right to think in that way, no right to detach yourself from this great collective drama in which we ought all to take part to the end? Examine your resolution carefully. You wished to give your husband a little joy, because he was unhappy?"

"Have I not given it him?" she asked.

"Be it so. All the same, imagine the firing line stretching from Dunkerque to Belfort. Imagine the hundreds of thousands of men who are there. These men have wives, as you have a husband. They have children, mothers, fathers. They have a future. They are giving all that. They are suffering in their flesh. They sleep in the mud, under shell-

fire. They suffer in their souls, think of the absent ones, weep in secret. And so they must continue to do. Remember those words uttered by one of our wounded men: 'To climb up the ladder out of the trenches is to mount the scaffold.' Nevertheless, they climb it. For whom? For France. But France is the sum total of French lives. It includes ourselves, I repeat. It embraces all our countryside, all our towns; Paris and all the houses composing Paris; this *Clinique* in the Rue St. Guillaume and your house on the Place des États-Unis. These men, at the price of their blood, defend all that. Ask yourself conscientiously, are they accomplishing this immense, heroic effort for the sake of a love adventure, such as a double suicide between these four walls? We are destroying that effort, each his own share, if we are not better because of it."

"Were you a hundred times right," she replied, "I have given my word."

She had been unable to reply. How could I help thinking,—suppose some one were to

give her back her word, would she not be saved? Who was that "some one"? The very person who exercised his influence over her and whose footsteps I heard at that moment in the corridor. Was not this an opportunity for provoking between them one of those explanations in which the presence of a third party serves to moderate, if one may say so, and even to prevent the intemperateness of two excited minds that would become incensed with each other were the interview a private one? But the "Director" had no sooner opened the door than I judged from his look that he was in one of his bad moods, and I heard him say to me:

"Marsal, I have reflected. I do not think it necessary to wait until to-morrow, neither for the radiography—you must telephone to Laugel—nor for that little exploration for the splinters. As to the operation, I am still uncertain. He's such a wreck! . . . Although with a fellow of his tranquil disposition . . . He's really without nerves. Cerebral life has not been awakened in him. A

quiet and monotonous family existence, an ecclesiastical college, St. Cyr, and the barracks. Everything by rule. No initiative. No variety of impressions. Men of that type are exactly the sort to preserve survivals. This one offers us a curious example: the atavistic preservation of a mode of thought, stereotyped in him, and which he adapts to all circumstances. It is serving him to-day."

"But if it serves him, *mon cher maître* ? . . ."

I dared to object.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ortègue, "I should take good care not to touch his mental apparatus. Besides, I should have my work cut out. Impossible to bring such brains as those to the scientific point of view, which is essentially impersonal. In the case of a Le Gallic, on the other hand, the sole question is the destiny of the human person. That is the pivot of Religion. The pivot of Science is the conception of law without finality. To science we are but epiphenomena. To a Le Gallic, the thing he calls his soul is the essential

reality. No means of coming to an agreement."

"Yet the human creature who suffers and dies is indeed a reality," said Mme. Ortègue.

"Those are moments in the condition of its organs," replied Ortègue, "and these very organs are only a series of physico-chemical facts, carried along by a movement which has had no beginning and which will have no end. . . . But what a power is heredity, Marsal! Look at my wife. She knows from her father and from me that there are two pictures of the physical and moral Universe—that of Religion and that of Science. She is aware that one of these pictures is painted from dreams, the other from nature, and that they are irreconcilable. If one is true, the other is false. She knows that, and behold! she comes once more across a relative with whom she was brought up. He is wounded. She is filled with emotion. The impressions of her childhood are revived. Momentarily, her personality of fifteen years ago superposes itself on her present personality, and she no

longer sees the absurdity of the ideas of this poor fellow, who imagines that the good God—he calls him good—led him by the hand into that communication trench to receive a shell specially manufactured for him at Essen! Confess, *mon amie*,” he was now addressing his wife, “confess that it is madness, sheer madness!”

As he laughed sarcastically, when uttering the last words, I was stupefied to see Mme. Ortègue burst into sobs.

“Come now, Catherine,” he cried, “why are you crying? . . . Pardon me, Marsal, for this little domestic scene. . . . But what is the matter?”

“That view of the world is too harsh,” she said, “that is all. It hurts me too much.”

“*Ma pauvre enfant*, it is precisely with the object of making it a little less hard that we are in this hospital. . . . Marsal, telephone then, immediately, to Laugel for that radiography. That’s the safest thing to do.”

XVIII

FAITH AND SNEERS

WHAT a conversation! And how significant! It seemed to me that there was a tremor of pity in Ortègue's voice when he said, "My poor child." And I asked myself, what stage had the husband and wife really reached in their terrible project? Had they spoken of it again? When? In what terms? How was one to know? Two facts were certain. In reply to my objections, she had been able, just now, to make but one reply—the cry "my promise." He, in the presence of her tears, and when she moaned over his too harsh view of the world, had been moved to pity. He had pitied her for faltering, for giving way to nature. That was his way. How many times, during our visits through the hospital, have I heard him repeat, at the bedside of the

sleeping wounded: "How touching is a suffering human being when he simply gives way to nature!" Would not the sight of his wife's fear of suicide suffice—would he not be the first, in that case, to protect her against the temptation which he himself had created in her, perhaps unconsciously, the temptation to commit this crime in a horrible delirium of egoism and distress?

Yes, all that would have been true of the old Ortègue, the magnificent worker for Science, the triumphant investigator from whom there flowed—as I have already noted—a never-failing, inexhaustible stream of altruism. It sprang from his temperament. One of my hospital friends said of him: "The Director is as generous as wine." That phrase conjured up the Ortègue of yesterday. The man of to-day, this emaciated, dying man with fixed look, exhausted by the drug he was taking, at times somnolent, at others angry and suspicious, had nothing in common with that other save his intellectual lucidity, which was astonishingly persistent. The affective

parts of his person were attacked to the point of being depraved.

He refused to leave the hospital, owing to the intense obstinacy of his pride, which recoiled before that supreme step. As his autocar fatigued him too much, he now slept in the Rue St. Guillaume. Living thus with him constantly, enabled me to ascertain only too well the moral decomposition of his being—more painful to me, his pupil, even than his physical decomposition. I could follow its curve, day by day, and I immediately noted that Ernest Le Gallic's arrival at the *Clinique* had coincided with a sudden fall in that ever descending line.

I had a first proof of this in his irony—he who formerly never displayed it towards a patient—when, the next day, I brought him the result of the radiography and my exploration.

“No splinters, the wound put in order—that's good. The bullet, as I thought, in the right occipital lobe. We must wait. Le Gallic, with a brain which has never done any

work is in the best possible condition. Hey! Suppose we made him think, do you believe that that would astonish him?"

He began to sneer, just as he had done in the month of August, at the time of the officer's first passing visit. It was then but the nervous irritability of a sick man. Now, his grimace betrayed a maliciousness bordering on hatred. I also detected a look of hate in his eyes, and it was more intense the second day. We were proceeding together to the Lily-of-the-Valley Room. Mme. Ortègue was standing near the door. She came towards us, exclaiming:

"Not just now. Ernest asked to see the Abbé Courmont. I have brought him. . . ."

"So," said her husband, "when I was looking for you just now, you were there? . . ."

"Certainly. . . ."

Ortègue added nothing. Standing against the high corridor window he began with visible impatience to drum on the panes with his fingers.

"Marsal," he questioned, "when you an-

æsthetized Le Gallic the day before yesterday for that small affair, had he already seen the priest?"

"Yes," I replied.

"The Abbé must be amused!" he resumed, shrugging his shoulders. Then, jokingly: "The confession of a soldier who has been on campaign, what a confession it must be!"

"Not in this case," interrupted Mme. Ortègue.

"And as for the others," I risked saying, "be indulgent to them, *mon cher maître*. As you said so well one day, they are dying for us."

"I am not the one to reproach them for repopulating France," sneered Ortègue again. "All the same, our Bayard is a long time relating his frolics. Good, it's over."

The door of the Lily-of-the-Valley Room had just opened, making way for the Chaplain. The Abbé Courmont was a man of sixty, small statured and very slender, with a wholly fresh and wholly pink face, lit up by blue eyes which looked, with childish can-

dour, from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. His light hair, barely turning grey, crowned, flame-like, a face which was animated with an ever-exalted enthusiasm. A kind of ecclesiastical *finesse* modified the candid character of this physiognomy, through the blinking in the corner of the eyebrows and the smiles which gave proof of a very perspicacious mind, combined with an immense kindness.

He was known amongst the Parisian clergy for his liberalism, which had cost him his curacy at Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Ortègue had accepted him at his *Clinique* for that reason. He had been somewhat surprised to find that this priest, who was so extremely tolerant, possessed also the faith of a missionary. We had learnt this concerning him—an incident truly apostolic in its charity: that at the time of the mobilization he had stood in front of one of our large railway stations, talking to the soldiers, and had thus found the means of confessing hundreds. Ordinarily, Ortègue looked upon him with amused curiosity as a man of another century. On that

day, however, there was a flicker of malicious mockery in his eyes and around his mouth, while the excellent priest was saying, with zealous effusion:

“Ah! Madam, your cousin Le Gallic is a saint. He is truly the soldier according to the Gospel.”

“Oh, oh! Monsieur l'Abbé!” exclaimed Ortègue, “say that our cousin is a hero. That is correct. But the Gospel—applied to someone who returns from the battlefield! I don't often read that book, to whose most astonishing success in the publishing world I bow. I recollect, however, a certain Sermon on the Mount: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.* Is not that the text?”

“Yes,” said the priest, “but there is also the Centurion, a lieutenant like M. Le Gallic, whose servant Our Lord healed and whom he admired. For he did admire him, Monsieur le Professeur. He declared: ‘I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.’ Note that well. He said to the rich, Abandon your

riches. He did not say to the Centurion, Abandon your regiment. And it is the Centurion who has marked the mass with his: *Domine non sum dignus*. . . . The soldier's words are repeated daily at the altar by the priest, before the Communion. The Army has the last word at the Holy Sacrifice."

"Behold the Gospel militarized, like my *Clinique*," replied Ortègue. "However, if the Centurion's servant had got in his head the projectile which our poor cousin is moving about in his, the Quack of Nazareth would have wasted his time Without offence, Monsieur l'Abbé. You have done your duty; we are going to do ours. Let us go in to our Centurion. Are you coming, Catherine?"

"I am going to accompany Monsieur l'Abbé a few steps," said Mme. Ortègue. And I distinctly read on the Professor's lips a phrase which he did not permit himself to pronounce: "You are not going to apologize for me, are you?"

He contented himself, however, by knitting his eyebrows, with a nervousness that his

wife doubtless interpreted as an order. She hardly took the time to exchange two or three words with the Chaplain, and was with us when we entered the room.

XIX

AN INCIDENT AT THE FRONT

THE wounded man, lying on his back, was engaged in writing with a stylograph. As on the preceding day, his emaciated yet handsome face wore an expression of extraordinary dignity, and a pure ardour shone in his light and dreamy eyes.

“I’ve caught you, Monsieur l’Officier,” said Ortègue. “So, man of discipline, the doctor’s orders count for nothing? Answer me, yes or no, did I order you to take absolute rest? And there you are at work! . . .”

“It is not a piece of work,” Le Gallic exclaimed. “I am copying a few thoughts for an *Image Mortuaire*, for one of the friends of my childhood. You will, perhaps, remember him, Catherine, the man

who managed a sailing-boat so well—François Delanoë?”

“Remember him, I should think I did! Is he dead?”

“Killed by my side, eighteen days ago; he died heroically. I wrote a little account of his end for a Rennes newspaper. He had established himself in that city as a lawyer. And then I found these pages too shapeless, too crude. So I did not send them.”

“You have them there?” Mme. Ortègue asked.

“Yes,” he exclaimed. “Oh! they don’t amount to much!”

He withdrew a few sheets from a portfolio lying on his bed between a New Testament and a prayer-book.

“You can even read it aloud,” he added, handing over the papers. “This narrative will show you, Cousin—and you also, Dr. Marsal, what our men are like. We must love them, you see. Theirs is a hard task, as you will hear, and how heartily they shoulder it! I heard one of them, in the trenches,

say to another: 'If I go under fire again, I shall win the cross of honour.' 'Or a cross of wood,' said the other. And the first speaker responded: 'That's the same thing.' But read, Catherine."

Mme. Ortègue unfolded the sheets and began to read. I do not believe that I have experienced, during the whole of this war, a more thrilling sensation than that of the savage attack which was evoked in the presence of one of the combatants, on the eve, alas! of death, by that sweet trembling woman's voice. Brilliantly and distinctly her voice enunciated the technical terms, employed quite naturally by the officer, because the picture of the fight—brutal and complete—was revived in him. She grew tender, choking down her emotion, on reaching passages that were too painful. But here is the story, with the title which Le Gallic had written at the top, in his big manly hand—that of one who goes straight ahead.

FRANÇOIS DELANOË

MY TESTIMONY

He died heroically. He was the comrade of my childhood, my brother, and until only a week ago, my sergeant. Poor fellow!

Ah! that magnificent attack! Everything had been minutely prepared.

The watches of the chiefs of the section had been set by each other. We were to leave the trenches at five in the morning without the discharge of a signal rocket. No knapsacks for the men. Two hundred cartridges for each. In our nose-bags, in addition to a tin of bully beef and a bit of bread, five grenades. Flasks full of water and coffee. Tied on our backs, five empty sand-bags, for blocking the communication trenches when conquered.

Before the departure, everyone was to cut a step with the tool fixed to his belt in order to jump all the quicker over the parapet, Afterwards, not a gun shot. Everything at the point of the bayonet. On reaching the

enemy, we were to be at them with hand-grenades and daggers.

At ten minutes to five, I said: "Look to your things. Is everything ready? Attention!"

Then, once more, I felt that sinking feeling, that moist warmth in all my limbs which is not a sign of fear, but which no human force can master. No human force, but divine strength! Delanoë—he and I had made our communion the night before—was by my side, and he said to me in a low voice:

"I shall be killed to-day; of that I am sure."

"Are you frightened?" I exclaimed laughingly.

"No. I have never known the value of life better. It is so beautiful when one can give it in a holy cause! And never has it been easier for me to die, because I have never felt God so near."

While he was speaking the pale and slowly coming light of day gave him a phantasmal appearance, the beauty of an apparition. That light drove before it, around us, a heavy and

wet fog, which seemed to proceed, like a shroud, from the cubes and pickets of our barbed-wire entanglement. During the night the sappers had made passages in it which I could see distinctly.

Delanoë suddenly said to me:

“Listen, that is one of our home birds.”

I heard a lark saluting the awakening of that cold morning of early autumn.

Everything appeared grey and distant to me. I could perceive nothing of our goal. At three hundred yards, I guessed the location of *their* trenches from the black and gaping eyes on a level with the ground. Loop-holes, close together and well-guarded, were cut in the marly embankment. The day before, I had made a thorough inspection of the ground, through my glasses. I knew the exact position of the four machine-guns which flanked the defences of the enemy and made approach to the curtains and lines of retreat almost impossible.

If, unfortunately, our big gun had failed, at the hour of the attack, to contribute its

maximum of work, if their barbed-wire entanglements were still intact, the result was a mathematical certainty: we should all be mowed down.

Delanoë knew that, as well as I did. He also said:

“Three hundred metres at the point of the bayonet is an absurdity. But look!”

He pointed out to me, about two hundred yards away, a barely visible depression in the ground, which provided the necessary angle for sheltering the men when lying down. It was a possible salvation, allowing time to let the second line of reinforcements come up to us before we should be required to set off again! He added, “We stand a fair chance.”

Five minutes to five: “Fix bayonets!”

There was a long rustling of steel, accompanied by rapid flashes. The men gripped their rifles. Delanoë and I looked in their faces.

Ah! brothers of two months of suffering

and hope,—humble brothers whom we are about to precipitate, by a gesture, into the furnace, how we should like to kiss your poor sunburnt, hollow faces!

Which of those, full of ardour and youth, are about to fall?

Just at that minute, and as though a current had united our thoughts, I felt his hand take mine. "Farewell, Ernest." "*Au revoir, François,*" I replied. But again, and very seriously, he said: "Farewell."

Five o'clock! five o'clock! "Now, boys, forward for the sake of France!"

At a single bound every *képi*, every bayonet, every man was out of the dark trench. The serried line was in movement, trampling down the tall grass.

They have seen us!

Pop! pop! pop! . . . The machine-guns spluttered forth incessantly. The bullets met us full in the face.

"Quicker!" Oh! the dull sound of pierced flesh and shattered bones, the stifled cry and

the last oath of your neighbour who rolls to the ground cursing the Boche!

“Quicker!” Their curtain fire is now jerky and unsteady. Shrapnel lash us in the face, burst within three yards of our heads. “Quicker, boys, we shall have them.”

“Take cover!” It was the shelter, for two minutes,—the blessed ridge. Flat on our stomachs, silent and breathless, we recover our wind.

“Delanoë? . . .”

Ah! Delanoë is bleeding. He is pale. Blood pours from his cheek on to his light-coloured capote.

“Hit?”

“Jaw pierced. It’s nothing.”

“Return to the rear and have it dressed.”

“To the rear? You’re joking. Never.”

“You *must* go. As your lieutenant, I order you.”

“And I, as your friend, remain by your side.”

Already! Here comes the line of reinforcements, which reach us and spread out. For the second time I rise and shout to my men:

“Up, lads! Cheerily! forward!”

Then comes the rush, the advance amidst wild yells. A hundred yards at full speed. A few seconds. “Forward! Forward!” With lowered heads, thumping hearts, clenched teeth, and stumbling, we are carried towards the white line, which I can now see and which belches forth death incessantly. “Forward! . . . Forward! . . . Forward!” And then comes the shock of bodies which jump, cast themselves into an abyss, fall to with the points of their weapons in the flesh of others, who, crushed, beseech or flee along the trench. Then comes the horrible hand-to-hand struggle, knife in hand, and wounded men locked in deadly embrace.

“Barrier to the left, quick, quick! . . .”

“*Kamerad! Kamerad! . . .*”

“Assassins! Cowards! Ruffians! Louvain! Termonde! . . . The sand-bags! The loop-holes! . . . The loop-holes! . . . *Vive la France! . . .*”

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The resplendent sun—God’s sun—the sun

of the great days of peace and labour and Christianity, rose in the heavens. It was as though it shone for our victory. Everywhere there was silence, that terrible silence which comes afterwards, and which nevermore will be broken by that ringing "Present!" of so many of our men who have fallen on the plain. Anguish-stricken and with a lump rising in my throat, I called out: "Delanoë! Delanoë! Delanoë! . . . "

I found him with his face to the earth. Death had wreaked itself on his poor proud soldier's face. There, again—this time by a grenade—he had been struck, mutilated and killed, but without touching the string of his scapulary, and upon his heart there lay the Sacred Heart of Jesus. *Cor Jesu, spes in te morientium, miserere nobis.*

"I had still another reason for not publishing that," said Le Gallic, when his cousin had handed back to him the sheets. "I did not want the mother to know of the disfigurement of this son whom she loved so dearly. She it

is who has entrusted me with the little task for which you reproach me, Cousin. But I have finished it. Mme. Delanoë wishes to send this Memento to all the men of her son's section. Now that you know how he died, Catherine, you must tell me if the words I have chosen appear to you suitable. . . ."

He handed Mme. Ortègue another—a single sheet. She read it, this time in silence. When about to hand it back to the wounded man, Ortègue intervened:

"May the unbeliever see it?"

"Naturally," said the officer, "and Dr. Marsal also."

I have them before me at this very moment, those texts which I copied out the same evening. I transcribe them such as they are. I too, like Le Gallic, am writing my testimony. I am supplying a document regarding two ways of interpreting the problem of death. These texts chosen by the Breton officer for the *Image Mortuaire* of his companion-in-arms represent, better than any commentary, one of these two ways. Placed side by side with

this battle story, they illumine it and are illumined by it. We have here, it seems to me, gathered into a revelatory epitome, the whole psychology of the Delanoës and Le Gallics. For these "centurions of the Gospel," as the priest called them, are legion in our army, and Le Gallic was so sincere that he realized in person the perfect type of a certain class of men, who are all will-power in action, all faith in prayer; and action leads them to prayer, just as prayer leads them to action. The symbol of this state of mind is the sword, the instrument of battle, when you take it by the hilt. At rest and planted in the earth, it is the cross.

Are such individuals, as Ortègue contended, mere examples of atavism? How is it, then, that the country, in the hour of supreme danger, finds them to be exactly the workers it requires? How is it that their energies accord with the most vital needs of the Society of which they are members? How is it that their way of feeling and thinking is that which leads to the greatest output from the national organism?

At the top of his project for the *Image Mortuaire*, Le Gallic had traced a cross with the legendary device: *In hoc signo . . .* ; then the following quotations, each with its source:

Moriamur in simplicitate nostrâ.

The Maccabees.

For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

St. Matthew viii., 9.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah liii., 5.

Grant, O God of armies, that what appears mean to other men I may find beautiful. Ah! if truly You are there, in that consecrated

wafer, deign to see that I am not wicked, and that I also am worthy of giving my life for an idea.

From "The Call to Arms," the book of my friend, Lieutenant Ernest Psichari, Renan's grandson, killed in action, with his rosary on his arm.

Blessed be he who inscribed Hope on the tomb.

Written in a prayer-book in the handwriting of Taine's daughter.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

II. Corinthians i., 5.

Jesus Christ completes His passion in us.

Pascal.

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"I've read somewhere a report of the autopsy on Pascal's brain," said Ortègue, on

handing me the Memento; "I must find it for you, Ernest. I confess, however, my inability to see the connection between the scenes of carnage,—necessary, I admit, courageous, I also admit, which you have described, but ferocious, you will agree,—and these sentences of a transcendental idealism."

"There is a connection, however," said Le Gallic.

"And what may it be?"

"Sacrifice."

"And then," exclaimed Ortègue without replying, "if Mme. Ortègue finds a little consolation in this reading, I've no objection. On the other hand, I've a good deal of objection to your reading old books in search of these or other quotations. What I want is absolute rest and immobility for your head. For you must suffer cruelly, when writing, with a lesion in a whole bunch of nerves in your occipital region. Have they given you your injection of morphia this morning, and what was the dose?"

"He refused it," said Mme. Ortègue.

“What! refused it?” exclaimed the Professor.

“Yes,” replied Le Gallic. “The suffering is great, but supportable. Even if it were not, I should support it, rather than suppress it. Do you recollect, Cousin, what I said to you on the occasion of my passing visit here—that one must pay for oneself and, if one can, for others? That is why I try to have the strength to suffer, though it were only for those who do not possess that fortitude.”

Ortègue’s dark face suddenly contracted.

“To whom are you referring?” he exclaimed in a sharp tone.

“To no one in particular.”

“Yes, you are referring to me—to me,” resumed Ortègue violently. “And owing to someone having related to you . . . But who has been speaking to you here?” He was seized with a veritable fit of anger. Walking towards me. . . . “Was it you, Marsal?” But before I could even raise my hand to make a gesture of denial, he said: “No. You are a devoted friend, you are.” Then, turning

towards his wife: "It was you, Catherine. It was you. I do not wish you to remain a moment longer in this room. I do not wish you to return. Do you hear, I forbid you? Go out! I tell you to go out!"

XX

LE GALLIC'S REQUEST

MME. ORTÈGUE obeyed, without a word or a gesture. All three of us remained as it were stupefied by his inexcusable outburst, the shame of which was already felt by the one who was responsible for it. He had sat down, still trembling all over, and kept his eyes off us. I feared that Le Gallic might also give way to some act of violence. He had become very red, then very pale, like a man agitated by a fit of indignation, immediately suppressed. Ortègue was the first to break this painful silence by saying to the wounded man, simply, as though he had come into the room merely for a medical purpose:

“Will you let me feel your pulse, my dear Ernest?”

He had taken off his glove. His fingers, blackened by jaundice, rested on the young man's white wrist.

"No weakening," he continued, "no irregularity. That is a good sign. . . . Still without dizziness, lying in bed? Good again. . . . You can hear me well? Yes. . . . No feeling of oppression? No sickness? . . ."

All these questions indicated a secret fear that a bulbar syndrome might suddenly seriously compromise a situation which, though apparently calm, was charged with redoubtable possibilities.

"Condition stationary," he concluded, turning towards me and drawing on his glove, "therefore favourable. My prognostic remains the same: he has every chance of recovering. Rest. More rest. And still more rest."

He had arisen and appeared to hesitate for a moment. Then, biting his moustache, he said, in a low voice, which was no longer supported by the affirmative and authoritative tone of the Director laying down his opinion:

"Certain silences are lessons, Ernest. I have understood yours. I am very ill, as you know, and I have not always control over my nerves. . . . It is true, I take morphia, and I do not wish to suffer. With my ideas, I am right, as you, with yours, are right in wishing to suffer. To a monist like myself, suffering is a useless horror. I am not frightened of it. I fear nothing. I find it absurd, that is all. That being stated, did my wife tell you that I took morphia, answer me, yes or no!"

"Never," replied Le Gallic. "I give you my word."

"Knowing her, I ought to have been certain of it," continued Ortègue. "I have done her an injustice, her of all people," he repeated desperately. "There are times when I'm a poor sort of man, Ernest, a very poor sort of man. I had no need of this proof to know that our mind is merely the expression of our organic condition. I have just had a veritable psychological *raptus*. It is over. Friend, be kind to me. Permit your cousin to be one of your nurses. I beg you."

"Cousin," exclaimed Le Gallic, "will you allow me to be absolutely frank with you?"

"Certainly," said Ortègue. I saw from the trembling of his mouth that his recent irritation was returning.

"Well," replied the officer, in the same reflective and scrupulous tone, "I beg you not to insist. Do not read into my prayer anything more than this—an earnest desire that my last days may be as it were a retreat, that they may be undisturbed by needless anxieties. For these, I feel, are my last days, and you yourself . . ."—here he interrupted Ortègue's denial—"have just proved to me, by your questions, how much you are still hesitating in your diagnosis. In any case"—this in answer to a fresh denial—"it is not impossible that these *may* be my last days. That is sufficient to make me desire to employ every minute in preparing myself. The *Fiat* is still only on my lips. It has not been completely uttered in my heart. I require peace.

"At the present moment, you present to me the noble spectacle of a man who, having

given way to a fit of impatience quite explainable, punishes himself by an act of generosity. I have always observed, during my life, that these heavenward movements, after a weakness, are, from the small to the great, characteristic of fine natures. But why were you impatient and irritated? Because, my cousin and I, being more than relatives, lifelong friends, you supposed she might have informed me of the trials through which you are passing together. That susceptibility of the heart will return. It is so natural! In any case, again, it may return. That is a sufficient reason for not desiring to have my cousin as a nurse. At any rate let us wait"—Ortègue was visibly getting more and more nervous—"let us wait until to-morrow. We will speak about it more calmly then. There is no hurry."

"Ernest, you make me painfully aware of the fact that I have not been myself," said Ortègue. "For a Christian, you are somewhat lacking in charity."

With these words he went away. I was

about to follow him, when the wounded man restrained me, saying:

“Do me a service, Dr. Marsal. I know that M. l'Abbé Courmont is going out this afternoon. If he has not yet left the hospital, I should like to see him again before he departs. By sending him to me, you will greatly oblige me.

XXI

A FAR-OFF IDYLL

A NURSE with whom I came face to face on the staircase told me that she had just met the Chaplain in the courtyard. I hastened on. He had already passed the entrance. I only overtook him at the corner of the Rue Saint Guillaume and the Rue de Grenelle. On seeing me coming towards him with bare head and in my hospital blouse, the poor Abbé made a gesture of dismay.

"Is the lieutenant worse?" he asked, thus proving how great an interest he took in his "Centurion."

"No," I replied, "but he wishes to see you." And I laid stress on the wounded man's almost anxious insistence, without relating, of course, the painful episode which had preceded and, as I comprehended, provoked it.

"I'll go," said the priest, simply. He now opposed to my curiosity that atonic face which I knew so well—that which we doctors assume at consultations. Whilst accompanying him, he asked me unexpectedly:

"Do you think, Doctor, that the lieutenant might be taken, without danger, to another hospital? I mean to say, for instance, to the country?"

"Certainly not, Monsieur l'Abbé. The Professor would never permit it. But why?"

"Because, holding such different convictions, and nervous as M. Ortègue is, I fear a conflict between them. M. Le Gallic is a great soldier. Notwithstanding that, or because of that, perhaps, he possesses a very sensitive heart!"

With these words, the meaning of which was certainly vague, he left me. I saw in them an indication, as well as in the suggestion of a transfer, that the stay at the *Clinique* was regarded by the confessor—and also, doubtless, by the young man himself—not without anxiety. Did the prospect of a clash

of ideas with the husband of his cousin justify this fear on the officer's part, and especially its communication to the priest? Why had he summoned him now, immediately after Ortègue's offer? His ardent piety must have made him accessible to all scruples. There suddenly rose before my mind's eye the serious expression on his face when listening to that offer. I heard the almost imploring tone with which he spoke of the calm necessary during his last days. No, the believer did not fear a clash of ideas with the atheist. He was in fear of his own heart. I also recalled a "certain Sermon on the Mount," as Ortègue put it. I had myself read over and over again those fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the classic piece of that "most astonishing success in the publishing world," to quote once more the ironical Ortègue. A verse, the profound psychology of which I have always admired—the flash of light thrown on the relations between thought and action—came back to me: "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh

on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

“Behold the true motive. He loves her.”

These words had no sooner been expressed in my mind than they brought conviction, and while going from room to room—it was in the afternoon—to ascertain whether the orders given in the morning had been carried out, my imagination wandered far away indeed from the sad sights of the hospital. It carried me to Tréguier, that ancient and pious town, ennobled by its cathedral, and to that Breton country-side where Ernest Le Gallic and Catherine Malfan-Trévis had wandered together at the age of fifteen.

My old hypotheses regarding the past of the two cousins again took shape. They became clearer. I caught a glimpse of an innocent and far-off idyll, transformed in her case into a dim recollection, but which in his had become a passion.

At fifteen, a youth and a maiden are truly of the same age. They love each other or they think they love each other. At twenty,

this parity of age exists only as regards dates. The young woman who can marry, found a home, become a mother, has reached a more advanced stage of life than the belated one of the young man who has just finished his studies and whose career is not yet begun. The outlined idyll appears to the young woman as child's play. She is now attracted towards the man who can be her support, towards the prestige of strength in the fulness of its maturity. She forgets the naïve romance wholly made up of dreams—the romance in which no word of love was uttered and the only episodes of which were quickened heart-throbs, over-protracted walks, proffered and accepted nosegays, a dress put on more often than another because it was becoming. When she thinks of those mild emotions, the young woman smiles and fails to recognize them as her own.

But the young man does not forget so quickly, and if he is a Le Gallic, one of those steadfast and dreamy Bretons, timid and meditative, in whom time engraves impres-

sions, instead of effacing them, he continues to love the little betrothed of his fifteenth year, with a painful and increasing passion. It is a wound which bleeds within him and which he conceals above all from her who has caused it. He would be angry with himself if he were to utter a word of reproach or complaint, and he takes a dolorous pleasure in remaining all the more faithful the more he has been misunderstood.

If she and he were not of the same family, absence would cure him, but he sees her constantly. If he gave way, like his companions, to the temptations of sensual pleasure, this romantic flower would shrivel up in his case as in theirs, but he is a Le Gallic and devout. His purity nourishes his amorous fervour. She whom he loves is married. He excuses himself for continuing to cherish her only on condition that he denies himself the most insignificant liberties. How clear everything thus became in Le Gallic's conduct, and everything, at the same time, in Ortègue's attitude! When one loves a wife as ardently

as Ortègue loved his, one has a sort of divination of the feelings she inspires. Ortègue knew by intuition Le Gallic's secret, which up to now was unknown to Mme. Ortègue. I comprehended that also—that this woman had always looked upon her cousin rather as a child and with a child's simple mind. The wife of a distinguished scientist, and the daughter of another, she had never perceived what I had glimpsed at the time of the officer's first visit to the *Clinique*, what I had just established at the wounded man's bedside: the extraordinary amplitude of the inner life given him by his religious faith. Was she beginning to make this discovery in the presence of such heroism, such resignation, such charity, such certainty? Evidently Ortègue feared it. His fit of jealousy was explained then, and also the wounded man's desire, that he should be spared that supreme trial. What a temptation, and how strong, to feel oneself, at last, known, understood, perhaps loved!

XXII

THE SOURCE OF STRENGTH

THIS was one of those psychological constructions which I have so often built up in my existence. Without doubt, this wretched infirmity of mine, my lameness, by placing me somewhat apart from others, has made me rather a spectator than an actor in the tragicomedy of life. I have observed a good deal. I have used my imagination to a great extent. I have been greatly deceived and often. Not this time. My fear of seeing the accomplishment of the crime—as I continued to call the project of a double suicide—strained all my faculties of observation; and that I saw clearly into the sudden intellectual interest aroused in Mme. Ortègue by her cousin's moral attitude was proved to me almost immediately.

How did the Abbé Courmont manage to dissipate Le Gallic's scruples? Did he treat them as mere imagination? Or else did he look upon Mme. Ortègue's presence at the wounded man's bedside as a possible means of converting her, and, who knows, the Professor also? The fact remains that a tacit agreement was arrived at, and that the young woman began to render her cousin a few services proper to nurses. She assisted in the dressing of his wound. She saw to his meals. Although he obviously avoided long talks with her, the few words which escaped from him from time to time regarding his interpretation of life, the judgments which he delivered on men and on things, the books which she saw him read, all the revelations also of the wealth of his soul engrossed her. Sufficiently, indeed, to make her ask me, after only forty-eight hours of those cares:

"Marsal, have you known many devout persons in your life?"

"None other than my mother. I mean to say, really known. But the characteristic

of the sincerely religious person is that he hides himself. Again a rule of the Gospel and once more in the 'certain sermon': '*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.*' "

"But have you observed, among those whom you have known to be sincerely devout persons, even without knowing them intimately, that their belief gives them strength?"

"I don't quite understand you. To believe is itself strength."

"I have framed my question badly. I should like to know this: Do you think that the strength displayed by my cousin, to-day when his suffering is so great, yesterday when face to face with death, which he braved so coolly, comes from his ideas or his character?"

"From both," I replied, "for they are connected."

"It is, however, very astonishing," she insisted, "that one can find strength in complete error."

She was only at the stage of astonishment. A few days later, I heard her—to my own great surprise—hold with her husband a discussion which very clearly indicated the evolution taking place in her mind.

“What do you think Le Gallic said to me just now?” Ortègue began. “I’ll give you a thousand guesses. He, an officer and present on the occasion, says that the Battle of the Marne was a miracle. . . . Why? Because, it appears, it can never be explained strategically. ‘Well,’ I replied to him, ‘granted that it cannot be explained, that we do not know the necessary conditions well enough to give an explanation, nevertheless there is one.’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘a supernatural explanation.’ Confess, Marsal, that it is astonishing to find any one, in the year 1914, thinking like that. But you can’t account for these secular, stereotyped minds. . . .”

“The unknown, however, exists in the world,” exclaimed Mme. Ortègue.

“There’s nothing but the unknown,” he replied.

“Well then . . .”

She hesitated. He insisted:

“Well then, what?”

“Then Le Gallic’s hypothesis may be as true as any other?”

“Reason a little,” he continued. “You do not know what the next room contains at this moment? Does it follow that you have the right to think that it contains a centaur or a unicorn,—fabulous animals? We do not know what the unknown is. We know quite well what it cannot be.”

“All the same,” she said, “the Hertzian waves, radium, before they were discovered . . .”

“What are you driving at?” interrupted Ortègue.

“This: that forces, of the very existence of which we are unaware, may be at work in the universe. When Le Gallic speaks of the supernatural, he does not affirm anything else.”

“I beg your pardon, he does not say that these forces are possible, but gives them out as real.”

“But,” she replied, “if there was not a part of reality, whatever it may be, in his beliefs, how could he obtain strength from it? That which acts on the real is necessarily real.”

“That which is acting on him is his ideas, and a false idea determines volition as much and sometimes more than a true idea.”

At this point I could not help intervening. The objections raised by Mme. Ortègue presented too great an analogy to those which had haunted my mind during recent weeks to prevent my doing so. The discussion now interested me on my own account.

“Is that quite correct, *mon cher maître*?” I asked. “Certainly a false idea may make us act, but our action very quickly collides with the reality, which confronts us with a contradiction.”

“And don’t you find that reality confronts us with a contradiction to Le Gallic’s mystic phantasmagoria? Why this terrible war itself should. . . .”

“I do not, *mon cher maître*, He interprets the war and adapts himself to it.”

“Was I not right?” he cried. “*Primo purgare*. The virus is reappearing in you also. I appeal to the intelligence of both of you, not to your sensibility or your imagination. Neither our desires nor our dreams count for anything in the search for truth. It is a question of forming a conception of the world in accordance with the data of scientific experimentation—data which we ought to have the courage to regard as intangible.

“Now, among all our conceptions, one alone does not contradict these data: an eternal and infinite energy, ever identical in its elements and laws, which creates, destroys, renews inexhaustibly, without beginning and without end, and consequently without object. Everything which exists—individual, species, planet—arose from this indistinct abyss and falls back into it. We do not know the limit of the power of this energy. Its laws are constant, but we do not know them all. Hence those obscurities which we call mysteries, and which are merely interferences. We place desires and dreams in them. Behold

the Supernatural! It is true that if we were to speak to Le Gallic on the subject of interferences. . . But, perhaps, after all, he knows there are luminous waves, and that when they strike against each other, there is a diminution of light. He must have covered a certain amount of physics to get into Saint Cyr. Little good it has done him! . . .”

XXIII

A HEART INVADED

HE uttered the last little phrase with such bitterness that the conversation was brought to an abrupt conclusion. Jealousy was again gnawing at his heart. His wife certainly noticed it as I did. I observed that, during the days which followed this talk, her visits to the wounded man's room began to be less frequent. Every now and then she sent a nurse in her stead. On the other hand, her assiduity towards her husband increased still more. She constantly returned to his office when he was resting there. "Where is he?" She let her eyes leave him hardly for a moment, was alarmed by his slightest display of impatience, was eager to disarm him by forestalling his slightest fancies. I also noticed that this redoubling of her attentions, instead of calm-

ing Ortègue, seemed to increase Ortègue's irritability. He became the ungrateful patient who reproaches those who nurse him for his disease. "Who is the person whom Œdipus detests the most?" said one of my patients, a tabetic, to me one day, when I reproached him for his harshness towards a relative who lavished her devotion on him. "Antigone, because every minute she proves to him that he is blind." In spite of myself, in the presence of Ortègue's increasing injustice towards his wife, I recalled that cynical declaration, and felt that beneath the witticism was hidden, alas! a sad human truth.

But was there only injustice in Ortègue? Yes, in case one confined oneself to looking merely at acts. But when you know a household, as I now knew this one, in all its most intimate details, acts are nothing. Feelings are everything. Had Mme. Ortègue fled from the *Clinique*, unable to bear the sight of her husband's decadence, the sick man might have shown less rancour. He might have said to himself: "To see me thus pains

her too much. She loves me still." But to him, as to me, this multiplication of little material cares betrayed a constant voluntary effort. Above all, that systematic flight from, that shunning of her cousin, proved that she was struggling. Against what? Against the invasion of her heart, not perhaps by a new affection, but by a fresh interest. Another male personality had become living to her.

Language is so clumsy an algebra, when it is a question of translating shades of sentiment, the formulæ float about in such a condition of approximation, that I cannot find words precise enough to interpret a moral situation the cruel stages of which I have recognized so well, the drama of a soul which has reached, as regards another, a sort of saturation point, and discovers with terrible remorse this termination of the tenderness of the past. That term—saturation point—is very technical, very brutal. It expresses so exactly Mme. Ortègue's incapability of experiencing a fresh emotion for her husband!

On the other hand, everything was new in

the sensations given her by the poetry suddenly revealed in the comrade of her childhood. She had known him as an obedient child, a good young man, a Saint Cyrian noted for his studious diligence, and an industrious officer. She met him again in the character of a Crusader, and this at a time when her affection for her husband, always more imaginary than real, existed merely in her will power. When she told me, in our tragic conversation, of her horror of women who love a second time, who abjure their own past, this confession slipped from her: "The most terrible thing is that, while living, and in spite of oneself, one changes!" She was already defending herself against the exhaustion of her sensibility.

The folly of her offer to die with her husband had had as its motive not merely the irresistible need of consoling his terrible distress. She had wished to furnish herself with a proof that she remained absolutely, blindly faithful to her love. How could she keep up this illusion, now that a feeling was springing

up by her side—a feeling all the stronger through its being accompanied by a spiritual revival? The piety of her girlhood before the hypnotism of the paternal mind had turned her into an unbeliever, was obscurely awakened in her heart.

At the same time, she discovered in it traces of agitations which had been less felt than dreamt about, the recollection, formerly obliterated, now suddenly revived, of the silent romance of her fifteenth year. In the course of the remarks which the nurse and the wounded man exchanged in my presence, and in that of Ortègue, according to circumstances, the words “Do you remember?” passed and repassed incessantly. The old playmates went back to scenes insignificant to everybody save themselves. Ortègue was absent from these recollections, but was not this, to his wife, one of their attractions? They served her as a relaxation from the present nightmare.

Perhaps also—I set down this idea only as a hypothesis—this was an effect of that psychic environment of the subject to which

I am ever returning. By what signs do we recognize the presence of a form of energy,—for instance, electricity? By the fact that it impresses us directly, or else is transformed into another form of energy, which impresses us in its turn. Light and heat belong to the first group, electricity to the second. We cannot perceive it directly, hence the explanation for its being so long unknown. The existence of a psychic medium, independent of nerve centres, and whence these would draw their force, is therefore possible. Does not Blainville's formula, that the brain is the *substratum* and not the *organ* of thought, contain a hypothesis analogous to my own? But I am wandering from the point. I would merely connect to a more general law a *telepathic*, or more correctly *telesthetic* phenomenon, which I myself observed. Myers defined it as "the transmission of impressions of any kind whatsoever between one brain and another, independently of any known sensorial path." Goethe, who possessed a great scientific mind, also said: "One

soul can, by its very presence, act strongly on another."

Was not the mental purchase which Le Gallic began to obtain over Mme. Ortègue an action of that order? He loved her passionately, and, as I have since learnt, against his will. There can be no doubt that he associated her with the continual dialogue with God which his prayers and meditations prolonged indefinitely. Everything happened as though radiations emanating from this secret fount of love enveloped and influenced the young woman. Such are two poles connected by a magnetic current. But whoever says current, implies a conducting medium. Perhaps indeed—I pass to the point of view Le Gallic himself would have taken—I was merely witnessing one of those miracles which are invisible to the unbeliever, and which, to those with faith, are of daily occurrence? Yes, perhaps the wounded man's ardent prayers exorcized the spell which had been burdening the unhappy woman for weeks past? Who knows?

These hypotheses occupied my mind from that time onward. They interest me still. But of what consequence were the causes of this evolution in his wife and the principle of that influence to the dying husband, to that imperious and passionate Ortègue who was made irritable by his disease and whose jealousy made him cruel? The agitations of this feminine heart, so long in his possession, and their origin could not escape his perspicuity, which was all the keener because the sentimental emulation between Le Gallic and himself was increased by another. Ortègue was as passionate in his irreligion as in his love. To have a believer of such fervour as this as a rival, redoubled his torture. When I now think of it, and from a distance, I shudder at the idea of his last days, spent thus in holding his peace.

I have since learnt that his wife did not succeed in dragging a word from him for hours and hours at a stretch. As the donjon of a ruined castle remains standing, so pride was the only thing that remained of the triumphant

Ortègue whom I had known and so much admired. I gathered from these disclosures of Mme. Ortègue, that there was no repetition of the violent scene of which she was the victim in my presence, at Le Gallic's bedside. Nor, during that period, which lasted nearly a fortnight, did Ortègue ever speak to her of their suicidal compact, although his ever progressive emaciation and the more and more marked intensity of the jaundice proclaimed the implacable progress of the disease. He rose for only a few hours, but on all occasions refused to leave the hospital, despite the objurgations of those of his *confrères* who came to see him and dared to give advice. Visibly, he was suffering more and more, and the injections of morphia were becoming more frequent.

Such a state of affairs could be prolonged neither physically nor morally. I saw that clearly. My observations tended towards the conclusion that a crisis was imminent. The patient was at the end of his strength, but the man was not at the end of his jealousy. He was about to prove that.

XXIV

PAUSING AT THE BRINK

ONE morning, as I was going, as usual, to his bedroom, to communicate to him the reports of the night nurses, I was told that he had risen and was in his study. I found him seated at his desk, in the act of disposing of a heap of letters,—tearing up some, classifying others, or throwing them into a blazing fire. Warned as I was, I saw immediately that these arrangements were only preparations. I recognized a long massive mahogany chest, which was usually on his work-table at the Place des États-Unis, and in which I knew he kept his correspondence. He hardly cast a glance at the sheets I handed him. Usually he examined them minutely.

“By-the-bye,” he asked, “where have you got to with your notes?”

He had asked me, in fact, to draw up a record of the most interesting cases observed in our hospital.

"I depend upon it a good deal, as I have already told you," he insisted. "My work here has not been what I should have liked it to have been, materially, you understand. All the same, I've . . ." he corrected himself, "we've done some good work. It must be made serviceable to Science. How many observations does the whole represent?"

"Fifty."

"And you have how many more to make a fair copy of?"

"Eleven or twelve."

"Good!" he said. "You will have been of very great help to me, under very trying circumstances, my dear Marsal. Will you be very nice to your poor old master? Finish transcribing those last eleven or twelve observations between now and to-morrow morning . . ."

"If only my duties will . . ."

"Quénaut and Renard will see to everything. I shall give them orders."

Quénaut was the surgeon whom he had called in following his break-down—a very good operator and who, moreover, incessantly bothered me to speak to Ortègue on the subject of a surgical intervention. In the Director's presence he was as much a little boy as I was myself. Renard was the incompetent student who assisted us and assists us still as a hospital pupil.

“Very well, between now and to-morrow everything shall be set down,” I replied.

“Thank you. I desire these notes to be communicated to the earliest meeting of the Academy of Medicine, and I need to read them over. In the midst of life we are in death, and in my condition . . .”

A smile passed over his face as he uttered these words and completed my conviction, so expressive was it of bitterness and impatience. On leaving him, I went cold all over and my legs trembled. I had just been furnished with a proof that it was *settled*. Still clearer was this made to me when I met Mme. Ortègue. She was deadly pale, with a fixed

expression, and an almost convulsive trembling of the lids of her eyes, which seemed to be concentrated upon a horrible vision interposed between herself and the objects around her.

If things had reached such a pitch as this and the fateful day had arrived, hesitation on my part was no longer permissible; and that the fateful day *had* arrived was proved to me, for the third time and irrefutably, by a very simple incident. Its coincidence with Ortègue's demand for the completion of my notes ended in dissipating my doubts. About half-past ten the Professor again summoned me. He was with a solemn-faced individual, whom I had already met at his house, and who was no other than his notary.

"I forgot to tell you, my dear Marsal," he began, "that Maître Métivier was coming to-day for the signing of the document which settles your position here, after my departure."

"There you are again with your ideas!" protested the stout notary, whose comfortable, over-fed appearance—that of a well-set

sexagenarian—formed an extraordinary contrast with that of the dying man whom he made a pretence of comforting. “You look much better,” he insisted. “Moreover, we have always noticed at the office, my clerks and I, that it resuscitates people to make their wills, but you had no need . . .”

“Will you acquaint Dr. Marsal with the contents of the document?” said Ortègue, ignoring these consoling remarks, which, in their banality, were, involuntarily, cruelly ironical. Maître Métivier handed me the sheet of stamped paper, at which I glanced for form’s sake. “He has summoned his notary to look at his will,” thought I, “and the other has just said so. What more is there for me to wait for?” And my signature had no sooner been placed at the foot of the last clause than I hastily took my leave.

I went straight to Mme. Ortègue’s room. She was not there. I sought for her throughout the hospital, without finding her anywhere. Tired out, I went to see the secretary who kept the register at the door. He in-

informed me that she had gone out. My instinctive and immediate reasoning was: "If the suicide has been decided upon, she must have gone to the Place des États-Unis to put her private papers in order, as Ortègue has been doing just now. How can I make sure of that? Telephone? So that she will refuse to see me if she is there! Go there? Surprise her? Suppose I try . . ."

It required only a moment to take off my hospital blouse, to put on my coat, to hail a taxi-cab, and I was speeding along the Boulevard St. Germain, the quays, the Avenue Marceau, and the Rue Bizet towards that mansion where I had so often visited the fashionable surgeon in happier days. What a tumult my thoughts were in during that journey! and then what emotion I felt when the door-keeper, replying to my question, said:

"Madam has been at home for the past hour. I will announce Monsieur."

"There is no need to trouble," I said, anxious to get rid of the man. "She expects me."

I rushed up the staircase, feeling certain, if she were engaged in arranging her private affairs, that I should find her in her little second-floor drawing-room. The rooms on the first floor were reserved for patients and receptions. The appearance of things around me recalled to my mind, as I mounted the steps, the Ortègue of the period preceding his illness. At a celebrated sale, he had secured, after keen bidding, the Italian Renaissance statue which stood in the vestibule. The Spanish tapestries, hanging on the walls, had figured under his name as a collector at a great retrospective exhibition. The gratitude of an American millionaire, whom he had saved, was embodied in a china vase, a huge example of *art nouveau*, supported by a no less huge carved wooden pedestal in the corner of the landing. Ancient stained-glass bathed with a warm soft light the silence of this residence, abandoned now for ever by the one whose pride it trumpeted forth.

This deserted and silent staircase still further increased my sadness. I had, as it were,

the physical sensation of visiting a tomb—the feeling that Ortègue was already dead! . . . But someone was living and must continue to live—the unhappy woman who had also ascended these two floors amid the phantoms of former hours of triumph. I had reached the door of the little drawing-room. I knocked, a prey to the most unspeakable emotion. A voice replied, “Come in!” It was hers!

Just like her husband a short time before—a clear proof that I was right—she was sitting at her desk, surrounded by letters which she had begun to classify. She had stopped this work in order to write. Thinking that she was speaking to the door-keeper, she said simply, “Is that you, Joseph? . . .” and her pen continued to move over the paper. Then, turning round, she saw me and started to her feet with a cry.

“You, Marsal? What has happened? Does my husband want me? Is he worse?”

It was the first time for many days that I

had seen her dressed otherwise than as a nurse. She was still the beautiful Mme. Ortègue of former times, but how changed! These weeks of anguish had imparted to her noble features an outline that was finer, more compact, more hollow, as though cruelly chiselled.

“No, madam,” I replied, “and he does not know that you have gone out. I have left him with Maître Métivier, his notary.”

“And so you have understood?” she said. With her hands behind her back, she leant against the table, her head hanging down loosely. The start of surprise over, my presence no longer astonished her. How and why I had come to the Place des États-Unis—drawn there by what presentiment, she did not ask herself. I was there. I formed part of the day-dream in the midst of which she was struggling, and with fixed eyes and half-open mouth, she said:

“Yes, it is for to-morrow. I have promised and courage fails me . . .”

She had uttered these words in a low voice

for herself alone. Looking at me, she continued:

“Marsal, I cannot speak to my husband. I cannot face his contempt! Look . . .” She turned round, and with a trembling hand pointed to the page interrupted by my entry. “I was writing there what I have not the strength to tell him. Take his sheet, Marsal, take it——”

She sank on to her chair, and, overcome, let her arms fall slowly on to the table, with her head on her arms; and without uttering another word she began to cry. I took the sheet of paper and read as follows:

“I sincerely believed that my love of him constituted my whole life, my whole being. I told him so, and it is not true. I believed that if he died, the natural, the inevitable thing for me to do was to die with him. It seemed to me that if he were taken from me, I should no longer exist. It was my soul dragged from my body. I could not picture the sorrow of losing him. It was too terrible.

That was beyond my power. I imagined the void, the inanity of my being, separated from his, eyes deprived of light, heart emptied of blood. To such an extent had he set his impress upon me! His voice, look, and mind, infused into me, had formed me into a new creature. That look, so warm, so full of gleams and disturbing, that somewhat bitter voice, which seemed to me to be the very voice of intelligence and passion, that indefatigable mind the audacity of which carried me away, intoxicated me with confidence. But there was nothing else in me than that! I was merely the impression and reflection of you. Never did I think, like so many other women, of the face and figure, which you loved so much. When I closed my eyes, your eyes still shone under my eyelids and possessed me.

“Michel, Michel, is our love at an end? I am frightened of you now. I suffer from unspeakable shame and anguish. From day to day, from hour to hour, it seems as though you are slipping away from me, withdrawing from me, and that my separated existence

is reforming itself. I desire things which are not you. I desire air and light and space, in which it is so good to walk! I desire to share the ardour of this nation in arms. I desire the thanks of the wounded to whom I am doing good. Oh! Michel! All that, even without you, I desire.

“Michel! . . . But I shall never dare to speak to him. How he will despise me! Would *he* have ever abandoned me in danger, in suffering?

“But if I live, I abandon him. . . . Towards the horrible path before which I am faltering he is every hour advancing. He must advance. He cannot stop, poor man! There is only me in the world who can help him, by walking by his side, and by lying near to him in the tomb.

“Ah! Michel, I cannot do it! I have promised too much. Free me from my word; If you require it, our bodies shall be laid in the same shell, but our souls must be liberated before death. The trial is too terrible. It shatters me. It shatters our love. Let me

live. Even bruised and torn I would live. I am well aware that I shall be ever wretched after the splendid years I have known through you. Ah! if only I could hope to cross with you the threshold of another world, if only we could continue to love each other in a heaven or in a hell! But death is the end of all things. I beg you, Michel, to spare the flower which you love. . . .”

This suddenly interrupted phrase, the ink of which was not yet dry, was completed by a spasmodic stroke of the pen. Not again while I live shall I experience this sensation of having gazed upon a bleeding heart, of having touched its most sensitive spot.

XXV

HASTENING TO ORTÈGUE

I HAD no time to waste over emotion. I had in my possession that unique means of acting on Ortègue for which I had sought for weeks. He should hear this agonized appeal—and immediately. However changed his personality might be, however weakened by disease, poison, and despair, its chords remained too sensitive to prevent them from responding to this supplication of a soul in agony. I looked at Mme. Ortègue. She was still weeping, with her arms, head, and bosom crushed, as it were, against the table on which she had written this lamentable confession. She no longer saw me. She no longer knew either that I was there or where she was herself. What was the good of trying to console her? The thing to be done was to save her.

Stepping as softly as I could, I left the little drawing-room. Then, as quickly as my wretched leg would allow me, I hurried down the staircase and out of the house into the taxi. I shouted to the chauffeur the address in Rue Saint Guillaume. I trembled at the thought that Mme. Ortègue, on recovering herself, might follow me to take back that sheet of paper—her salvation! Once more I read its harrowing phrases, interrupting the reading repeatedly to peep through the little window in the hood for the purpose of ascertaining whether any carriage were following mine. No. On reaching the hospital and while paying the chauffeur, I noticed that the Rue Saint Guillaume was deserted. Mme. Ortègue had not followed me, at any rate not immediately. I had full liberty of action.

In the courtyard I ran up against Maître Métivier. The ceremonious notary, who, a short time before, in the office, had greeted me with distant affability, was the first to approach me. He had been so astonished by the conversation he had had with his cele-

brated client that, at the risk of being guilty of professional indiscretion, he referred to it.

"I am glad to meet you, Dr. Marsal. I know how fond of you is M. Ortègue. I have just received proof of it." I have since understood this allusion to the will of my poor master, who, in his generous affection, had bequeathed his *Clinique* to me, in the event of his wife's death. "And you also," continued Métivier, "are very fond of him, aren't you?"

"Certainly."

"Then, watch him. I should not be astonished to hear that he was contemplating a fatal resolution. I have even thought fit to warn the Chaplain. For, as you know, I'm not a free-thinker. I have implicit faith, and I should very much like to meet my faithful clients in heaven, especially those, like M. Ortègue, who are the glory of a practice."

Consumed as I was by anxiety, I could not help wondering how the same ideas, refracted in different minds, assume contradictory aspects. In the eyes of the worthy Parisian notary the other world was for *gens de bien*,

well-to-do folk, whom he confused with *gens bien*, good people—big fortunes continued. This paradisaical dream of a comfortable after-life no more resembled the religion of sorrow professed by the Breton Le Gallic than this most eminent member of the middle-classes himself resembled that officer. However, by his somewhat insipid optimism, Métivier recognized the existence of a spiritual world. Ortègue also, in spite of himself, by his rebellious pessimism. His frenzy, his spasms of passion, the feverishness of his nihilism, his despair in the presence of death, which he regarded as a drop into nothingness, his outbursts of anger, all constituted the blood which dropped from the severed limbs on the bed of Procrustes. His soul was mutilated by his doctrine.

All these thoughts came to me afterwards. At the time I had but one idea: "Maître Métivier has spoken to the Abbé Courmont. I hope that the Abbé has not already spoken to Ortègue, and that I shall not find the Director too irritable! If it is possible, let me be

beforehand." And I hurried towards the office. But almost at the door, at a turning of the corridor, the very person I met was the priest.

"Are you looking for the Professor?" he said immediately. "He is with M. Le Gallic. I am looking for Mme. Ortègue."

"I have just left her. Is the Professor anxious about her?"

"Is he anxious!" replied the Abbé Courmont. "He has just gone into M. Le Gallic's in a terrible state! He is no longer able to contain himself. He made a veritable scene before us. A little more and we should have incurred responsibility for Mme. Ortègue's absence. So I said I would go and look for her. I have left him in the arm-chair into which he collapsed. Ah! he is indeed ill! God has sometimes a heavy hand, after having had an indulgent and open one. But the body matters nothing. There is his soul! . . ."

"One question, Monsieur l'Abbé. I know that the notary has spoken to you of his fears regarding the Professor. He trembles at the

thought that my poor master may have an idea of committing suicide. You have not mentioned the subject to M. Ortègue?"

"No," said the priest. "But that conversation impressed me so much that I went upstairs to speak about it with M. Le Gallic, seeing that he is a very near relative."

"Did you communicate Métivier's idea to M. Le Gallic?"

"He held the same already."

"They are perhaps talking on the subject at this very moment," I cried. "What are they saying? Let me go to them, Monsieur l'Abbé . . . but alone. That will be the wiser course. I will reassure the Professor regarding his wife's absence. She has left the hospital on a mission, and if there is a discussion between her cousin and him, I shall be able to intervene with more authority. The mere sight of your dress might have the effect of exasperating M. Ortègue."

"I leave you, Dr. Marsal," replied M. Courmont. "So long as M. Le Gallic is there, I am quite useless, speaking from the

religious point of view. I preach the Gospel. But he does more than that: he lives and suffers it. If M. Ortège does not see religious truth through that great soul, it is because he cannot see it, because, as we theologians say, his ignorance is invincible. The parable of the talents tells us that God demands only from those to whom He has given. . . . And then, the poor people whom the Professor attended through charity will pray for him. I told Maître Métivier so. Guess what he replied. 'That is the surest honorarium.' Oh! it's not equal to François de Sales. All the same, it's not bad for a *bourgeois*. But I am keeping you . . . Go . . . Go . . ."

XXVI

A RECIPROCAL CHALLENGE

I FOUND Ortègue at the officer's bedside. Le Gallic's eyelids were drawn down over his eyes, as though he were asleep; from the Professor's anxious eyes, on the other hand, there darted anger. Both were silent. Le Gallic would not permit himself to express, and doubtless he reproached himself for feeling, the revolt aroused in him by the evident and unjustifiable jealousy of his cousin's husband. Ortègue was bursting to speak. But he was unable to reveal to the young man, whom he regarded as his rival in his wife's affections, his intimate martyrdom. Pride commanded him to hide the terrible crisis through which he was passing and which had suddenly made him decide to fix the next day for the fatal expiration.

Tortured by seeing the one whom he loved to distraction escape from him morally, tormented by that fever of suspicion which it was all the more impossible to calm because it was founded not on facts but on feelings, he wished to lay a desperate wager: either his wife still loved him and the compact to commit suicide together held good, or else, loving him no longer, she would draw back, and he would know! She had not drawn back, and he did not know. Another doubt had sprung from that acceptance, from the "yes" uttered by Mme. Ortègue unhesitatingly and which she would also carry out, but impelled by what? Was she going to die with him through love or as a point of honour? That painful question confronted Ortègue. It was insupportable to him.

His wife's inexplicable absence, by increasing the enigma, completed his exasperation, and perhaps his remorse. What ferocity there was in that charge he was thus bringing against a creature whose devotion he had so many times tested! The old Ortègue, so

noble and so generous, reproached the erring Ortègue of the present with this cruelty.

Moreover, what a contrast between this almost bestial outburst of passion and the self-mastery of which Le Gallic, at this very moment, set the madman a severe and humiliating example! This superiority of character was an insult, and one that Ortègue, with the feelings which he now fostered for the officer, could not support. He would have learnt with dismay and horror that his wife loved Le Gallic. He still doubted it. He did not doubt that Le Gallic loved his wife. At bottom, as I have already indicated, he had always known it. The indulgently bantering sympathy which he had so long shown Mme. Ortègue's cousin was a form of the complacency which a man advanced in life shows for a younger man to whom he is preferred—an irresistible caress to the most sensitive spot of our self-esteem. A reaction in the contrary direction had occurred as soon as Ortègue had no longer been able to believe absolutely in this preference. Le Gallic's

contained passion for his cousin had flattered the triumphant husband. The dying man was irritated by it, took offence at it. I have also indicated this: he hated him.

To-day, these reflections spread themselves out before my mind. At the time, I perceived them all, in a flash, through a phenomena of mental simultaneity, analogous to that primary intoxication of anæsthesia which so many of my patients have described to me. All the details of one's life rise up before one; at a glance one sees whole series of years; and yet the inhalation of the ether or chloroform has lasted but a second.

"Lieutenant," I said to Le Gallic from the threshold of the door, "pray excuse me. I should like to speak to the Professor privately."

I myself noticed that my voice trembled slightly. Doubtless the features of my face were distorted. These signs of emotion did not escape Ortègue, who questioned me sharply.

"It has to do with my wife? What is it? What has happened?"

He also spoke in a suffocated voice. I

distinctly read in his eyes the horrible vision which rose up before him—his infatuated victim anticipating the hour and killing herself the first.

“Calm yourself, *mon cher maître*,” I replied. “Nothing has happened. I have just left Mme. Ortègue.”

“She has come in, then? She must know that I am looking for her. Why is she not with you?”

“Because she has not come in.”

“You say that you have just left her. Where?”

“At her home, Place des États-Unis.”

“She is at the Place des États-Unis? She asked you to go there?”

“She did not ask me to go there, *mon cher maître*. I went myself.”

“How did you know she was there?”

“I conjectured it.”

“On what grounds? Why did you seek her?” It was Le Gallic who now intervened.

“Because Dr. Marsal was anxious about

her, Cousin. He does not dare to tell you, but I guess it."

For the first time since his arrival at the hospital there was a tone of authority in his voice, ordinarily so resigned and detached.

"Yes," he added, "and I also was anxious about her, after her visit this morning."

"She has spoken to you, then?" exclaimed Ortègue, leaning forward. Looking alternately at Le Gallic and at me, he then said to both of us: "What is the meaning of this conspiracy around me?" And to Le Gallic alone, violently: "What did she say to you?"

"Nothing. But I noticed she was so troubled and anxious, like a person in the grip of overwhelming anguish. As to the reason for that anguish, I fear to know it."

"Come, speak out . . . Out with it!" insisted Ortègue, still more violently.

"It is very serious," replied Le Gallic, with visible effort, "and yet . . . Cousin, if Catherine's mother were here, or, in her absence, our aunt, who is, after her mother, her nearest relative, I would adjure her to put

a question to you. In their absence and being the only representative of the family, you must not be offended if I put that question to you. That which is at stake indeed, if my fears are correct—and I am not the only one to feel them—is the cruelest grief which Catherine can experience through you. Cousin, give me your word of honour that you are not thinking of killing yourself.”

On hearing such a demand addressed to such a man and at such a moment, I trembled, and still more on looking at Ortègue as he listened to it with tight-set jaws, flashing eyes, and hands clenching the sides of his arm-chair. I have often thought that the wretched man, under the double influence of jealousy and morphia, must have been suffering on that occasion from the beginning of a veritable fit of delirium. Otherwise, would he ever have replied to that evidently unacceptable question by a still more unacceptable one, which risked provoking a fatal emotion in a wounded man entrusted to his care? Above all, would he have continued with a confession which

ended by putting him, with respect to the young man, in such a position of moral inferiority?

“Since we have got to the point of asking each other for words of honour,” he began, “I will reply to your question, my dear Ernest, after you yourself have answered a question of mine. Ah! so it is as a representative of Mme. Ortègue’s family that you claim to have the right of controlling my household? Well, give me your word of honour, in your turn, that you are not in love with my wife.”

“Cousin!” cried Le Gallic, raising himself up in his surprise and indignation. He repeated: “Cousin!”

“Ha! ha!” continued Ortègue, with a burst of savage laughter, and in a tone of cruel triumph. You don’t give me your word! You cannot! . . . So you love her! . . .”

“Cousin!” said Le Gallic for the third time, and in what a tone!

“You love her!” resumed the other, completely beside himself. “And it is not merely

to-day that I've learnt it. I've known it for a long time. There was a difference. Formerly, you had no hope of anything. You felt yourself to be a little boy by the side of the man that I was . . . that I was!" he repeated. "It was two months ago, on the occasion of your visit here, that you began to say to yourself—I read the shameful thing in your mind—'If she were to become free.' And then you were wounded; you got yourself sent here, in order to see her again. I've told you what I believe, that you may live, whereas I . . . You had no need to be a doctor to know that I am going to die, and then . . . Then, understand, that shall not be. For my wife, does not love you. It is I whom she loves, and she is going to leave with me for ever. She has offered to do so. I have accepted. You shall not take her from me. I am keeping her . . . Really! you claim to defend her against me?

"When she comes in, ask her to come here. Tell her that I am going to kill myself, that I've told you so, that I have also told you

that she wishes to die with me, and that we have made the agreement together. Make her change her mind. Try. I authorize you to do it. I don't know where my head could have been just now when I was astonished at her not being here. She has gone to the Place des États-Unis to do what I did here this morning—put everything in order as for a journey . . . It is a journey, but without a return . . . Only, since you love her and I have always been good to you, Ernest, you might have refrained from coming here to spoil our last hours."

"I did not come here, Cousin," replied Le Gallic; "they sent me without my asking. I regretted it, I may tell you, until now."

And, turning towards me, he continued: "Dr. Marsal, will you give me that crucifix."

He pointed to an ivory Christ, a piece of modern work and very simple, which he had had hung on the wall, opposite his bed, in order to have it constantly before his eyes. I handed it to him. He clasped his hands

around the black wood of the little cross, raised it slowly to his lips, kissed the nail which pierced the feet, and said:

“Thank you, Doctor. I am glad that you are here, to be present at the oath I am about to take. . . . Michel,” he now addressed Ortègue, with a fraternal appellation the unexpected gentleness of which astonished the enraged man, who raised his head. “Michel, on this image of the Lord, I swear to you that I have never in my life uttered a word—a single word—to Catherine which you might not have heard. If the thought has ever crossed my mind that she might some day be free and become my wife, I swear that that thought was involuntary, and that I dismissed it—you being alive—as a criminal temptation. This Christ of my first communion is a witness that I asked Him for the strength to resist, and that He has given it me. Formerly, I asked Him for the strength to be happy for Catherine’s happiness, when that happiness came from you, and I loved her passionately. For it is true, I loved her passionately, solely.

Yes, I have prayed that she might be happy in this world through you, and, in dying, I shall offer my sacrifice that she may be happy in the other world, in which I believe. Behold how I loved and love her.

“And you, Michel, look now how *you* love her, and at the act which you are going to make her commit. You say that she has offered to kill herself with you. You ought not to accept that offer. We need no longer choose our words carefully. You are sacrificing her to an abominable egoism. You believe only in this life, and you take away the joys she may still have in it, because she will not share them with you! . . . And then, this life! . . . If there were but one chance out of a thousand, out of ten thousand, out of a million in favour of another, you have the right, as far as you are concerned, to set that unique chance at defiance, but for yourself alone. You may say to yourself: ‘I kill myself and run the risk. I believe that death is nothingness. If there is a God and He punishes me, that is my affair.’ So be it.

All the same, you are not sure that death is nothingness. That is only an idea of your brain. It is not based on experiment—you who believe only in experimentation. I tell you that you are advancing towards a terrible punishment. Go; but do not lead any other person to it. If you are determined to kill yourself, Michel, do not carry with you and upon you the burden of the suicide of the one whom you claim to love. Do not drag that beautiful soul to perdition.”

He again lay back in his bed, exhausted by the effort of this long and passionate speech, and said in an undertone:

“Everything is swimming round—everything. Ah! How painful it is!”

This animal cry from the sick man, following so suddenly on the elevated mysticism of his declaration and oath, rendered me conscious of the material situation, and, as he added, “It’s nothing; the dizziness is over,” I said to Ortègue:

“*Mon 'cher maître*, let us go and leave M. Le Gallic to rest.”

Ortègue rose, took a step towards the door, and then, turning, said:

“I am going, but not before I have declared on my honour, before him and before you, Marsal, that I have left, leave and will leave my wife perfectly free to follow me or not, the day I decide to finish with it. You are an honest man, Ernest, but I am conscious of being one also.”

XXVII

RELINQUISHMENT

“**R**UN and fetch Renard,” said Ortègue to me, when we were barely out of the room and the door had closed. “He must remain by Le Gallic’s side. I hope that dizziness is nothing; but in the case of these head wounds we have sometimes nasty surprises—latent infections which affect the base. And when the bulb is attacked! . . . In short, it is more prudent to place him under observation. Act quickly and rejoin me in my office.”

After taking a minimum of time to find the student and put him in charge of the wounded man, with the necessary instructions, I once more knocked at the study door. The fit of jealousy was not entirely over. Ortègue was about to continue his inquiry. While waiting

for me he had set to work again to arrange his papers. I have often noticed that automatism operates that way in crises; that it is all the more mechanical the more violent they are. May this not be an act of defence on the part of nature, which, in order to compensate the disordered state of our higher psychism, maintains an equilibrium in our lower psychism? A complete overthrow would immediately result in death or insanity. His gloved hands continued the classification while he questioned me:

“Marsal, why did you go to the Place des États-Unis?”

“Because I knew everything, *mon cher maître* . . .”

I then made a complete confession: the conversation with his wife, overheard behind the door—Mme. Ortègue’s demand for silence—my feelings since then—how I had hoped that he himself would renounce the horrible plan—my awakening when he had pressed me to draw up in a few hours his last clinical notes—my increasing suspicions through the

notary's visit and Mme. Ortègue's absence . . . And I concluded—

“I said to myself, if the thing is true, she will be at home. So I simply went there. I arranged with no one; consulted no one. There is no conspiracy around you. There has never been one.”

“No conspiracy?” he exclaimed. “But what about her request for silence? You mentioned it.” Then, with infinite bitterness, “How alone one is!”

He stopped my protest and again assumed an inquisitorial tone.

“So when you reached the Place des États-Unis, she was there?” he demanded.

“Yes, in the little drawing-room upstairs. She was writing.”

“She handed you a letter for me? Give it to me . . . give it me at once . . .”

“*Mon cher maître*, it was not a letter she was writing. She has handed me nothing for you.”

“But, after all, you talked. You questioned her. She replied. You left her. You

returned here and sought for me. Answer me, yes or no, has she given you a message for me? What is it? I want to know."

"She has not entrusted me with anything. She hardly said two or three words to me. She was in a state of despair. She had, as happens in these moments of great distress, scribbled a few phrases upon paper. She showed them to me, because she could not speak. I read the document. I fled with it. I have brought it to you. But, let me repeat it once more, she did not send it to you. She would have asked its return if she had had the strength. She had not. But there is here, in this document, a soul's cry—her cry, and you must hear it."

I had drawn the sheet of paper from my pocket. Ortègue snatched it from me and began to read, muttering savagely:

"At last I shall know!"

I had once the terrible curiosity to witness an execution. I went to it. But I did not see it. I saw neither the knife descend, nor the head fall. My eyes closed at that very

second. A similar feeling of horror seized me in the presence of Ortègue's reading those pages of despair written by his wife, and I turned away my eyes. I was obliged to strike him that blow. To look at him whilst he received it was beyond my power.

I was wrong. Nothing was to be lost of that last lesson—after so many others which this extraordinary man gave me: the lesson of a magnanimous heart judging and condemning itself, and thus affirming, by its noble reaction, a whole order of realities denied by his intelligence. It was truly a pathetic commentary on the celebrated saying: "The heart has reasons which reason cannot accept." This absolute determinist, in blaming himself for certain acts, recognized—yet did not realize that he did so—the facts of moral obligation and free will. This phenomenist, to whom thought and feeling were accidents, proclaimed—and yet did not understand—the respect which one person owes another. This man who denied the existence of a spiritual universe moved wholly in it at

that moment, despite the weight of his dolorous flesh, despite the slavery of his long intoxication.

I expected him to burst forth into revolt and anger, to give way to acts of violence like that of which he had just given the deplorable spectacle at Le Gallic's bedside. Filled with astonishment, I listened to him speak to me with extraordinary calm and a voice to which the recollection of his wife brought nothing but tenderness—a disinterested, I was going to say disincarnated, tenderness. For it was indeed a voice from beyond the tomb, and one which stirs me even now when I recall it! On the point of setting down these *novissima verba*—his true last will and testament—and which he desired me to collect, I have to stop. The pen trembles in my hand.

“Marsal,” he began, in the same tone of stoical intellectualism which he adopted when setting forth, in that same study, the diagnosis of his cancer, “have I not been fairly correct, all my life, in believing only in facts? How facts bring you down to reality. For weeks

past I have been floundering about in a state of uncertainty, in the world of imagination. I did not know. Now I do know and am delivered. Since you heard my conversation with my poor wife, you understand everything: I doubted her love, she wished to give me a proof of it, and I wished to see it as a fact. It was one, but not the one I thought it was. On the part of her generous heart, it was an outburst of admirable pity. It was not love. And then I doubted again, and, because of that, committed a crime—yes, a crime. Not in accepting the offer of the double suicide. I don't reproach myself for that. I had the right to accept a love offering. In our case—ephemeral, and one might almost say illusory beings that we are—the evil is suffering; the good is happiness and above all love—love by means of which every one of us can overstep his limit, mingle with another being, and, through it, with the universal.

“You see, Marsal, knowledge is formed from age to age, it is hardly outlined; whereas love

is an instantaneous possession, but full and superabundant of everything which surpasses us. It is our minute of eternity. We cannot separate ourselves from the being who gives us that. He is the apple of our eye, the marrow of our bones, our inexhaustible and all-sufficient treasure. And if he love us also, it is so natural, so legitimate that he should wish to die when we die! No. I do not reproach myself for having said 'Thank you' to my wife and for having accepted her offer.

"My crime consists, when I had a presentiment that she no longer loved me, in having demanded the carrying out of that promise. Why? To test her. And that, you see, was hideous—abominable. To accept her death, even to aid her, in order that we might pass away together, loving each other, was the supreme ecstasy of our happiness. To risk what I have risked, Marsal—the killing of herself through pity for me in a lie imposed upon her by my mistrust—was murder."

"Well, then, *mon cher maître*," I hinted,

"be logical. You no longer accept the idea of her dying with you? . . ."

"Haven't you understood me, then?" he interrupted.

"Yes, *mon cher maître*; and it is precisely because I have understood you that I have this to say to you: Do better than liberate her from an insane promise. Assist her—it is within your power—to recover her moral health by returning to it yourself."

"You are referring to that scene of jealousy I made before Le Gallic,—he a wounded man and I his doctor? Believe me, I regret it bitterly. I was mad. . . ."

"It is not Le Gallic who is in question. It is yourself. Confess that a sick man like you—physically diseased but mentally in good health—would long since have sought a remedy for his ailment."

"There isn't one. You know that."

"There is a palliative. You would have advised, ordered it immediately to a patient whose case you had diagnosed as you have diagnosed your own."

“An intervention?” he asked, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yes, an intervention. You spoke to me about it once, to reject it, and in such terms that I didn’t dare to broach the subject again. To-day I don’t mind what I say. This intervention is efficacious, whatever you may maintain. Recollect Dieulafoy’s two splendid lessons on cancer of the pancreas and the history of his Portuguese, who, thanks to the operation, secured months and months of perfect health. Promise me that you will have a consultation, and if our *confrères*—you can choose them yourself—are of the opinion it is necessary to operate, that you will allow yourself to be operated on?”

“I no longer say no,” he replied. “Why not indeed? . . . But there is a more urgent operation, Marsal,—that of reassuring my poor wife. I am thinking of the agony through which she is passing at this moment. She has not come back. You must go and fetch her. Moreover, it is preferable that you should see her before I do and speak to her.

I could not do so, immediately and under the influence of so many emotions. . . . Marsal, where are our heads? Let us find first of all if she is still there."

He had already taken the movable telephone standing on his desk and was asking the door-keeper of the Place des États-Unis if Mme. Ortègue was still there.

"She has not left," he said. "Come to the apparatus, Marsal," and he handed me one of the receivers. "Call her up. She has a telephone in her little drawing-room. You must reassure her immediately. You must spare her an excess of anguish. Tell her that you have handed me her letter, for it was indeed a letter which she had not the courage to send me. Tell her that I am quite calm, that I await her, and that, at my request, you are going to fetch her and tell her everything."

"May I even tell her that you are willing to undergo an operation, if it is recognized as possible?"

"Yes, if you like. But reassure her."

While we were exchanging these few words, the door-keeper had transmitted the communication to the interior of the house. A voice, which I recognized as Mme. Ortègue's, replied. "Here she is," I was about to say to Ortègue, when I saw that he had seized the other receiver. "I trust that she will not say anything to hurt him," thought I; "I cannot stop her!" Then, aloud:

"Is that you, Madam? I have spoken to the Professor. I have given him what you wrote. He has read it and he asks you to be calm. . . . He is sending me to fetch you. I am coming at once. I will tell you about our conversation. It will do you good. . . . Meanwhile, once more, be easy in your mind. . . ."

"But tell me, how is he?" asked the voice, stifled with emotion.

"Better. Reading what you wrote to me delivered him. That was the expression he used. He will be so happy to see you!"

"Get her to speak again," whispered Ortègue to me, "so that I can hear her voice

once more. Explain to her why I do not speak myself. Find a reason."

"Are you still there, Madam? The Professor asks if you are easier in your mind?"

"Yes, yes. But what about himself?"

"He would like to speak to you through the telephone. He directs me to tell you that he has not sufficient strength. He is too overcome. He begs you not to torment yourself either over that or anything else."

"Ah! Thank him, and come quickly."

"How many times, Marsal," said Ortègue, as he hung up the receiver, "have I come here, to this telephone, between two operations, to ring her up and listen to her voice as I did just now, to feel that she was in our home, happy, and that she trusted me! How refreshing to get a few words from her mouth! But be off, Marsal. When one is waiting, seconds are years, and when one recollects, years are seconds. Go quickly, as she asks."

XXVIII

THE TRAGEDY IN RUE SAINT GUILLAUME

TWENTY minutes later I was at the Place des Etats-Unis. Mme. Ortègue was awaiting my arrival before the door of the house. When my taxi turned the corner of the square, she recognized me through the window and came towards me. She was another woman. Merely from her look I could not fail recognizing that the whole of her vital energy had been concentrated during those few hours in a deep and humble feeling, an animal-like fear of death. From her eyes, wild with anxiety a short time before, there now streamed a warm and mysterious radiance. She was going to live. Her half-open mouth seemed to breathe the air of deliverance greedily. Hardly had I shouted to the chauffeur to stop than she had already climbed

into the automobile, herself giving the address in Rue Saint Guillaume. For a short time she remained without speaking; then, in a timorous tone, in which there was a last trace of anxiety, said:

“So he wishes to see me?”

“Yes, to set your mind at rest, to sustain you, to explain that he understands you. Ah! if you had been there while he read your words!”

“I should not have been able to bear it. I should have been too full of shame.”

“Not at all. In writing them you were truthful and you have brought him back to the truth.”

“Because he agrees in the breaking of my word? You call my cowardice the truth! How much he must despise me, Marsal.”

“He has never loved you so much, and the proof of this is, that he wishes to try to live. You know that he would not accept even the idea of an operation.”

“He has made up his mind to it?”

“Yes. You see indeed that you have changed him.”

“An operation! That is true. Why didn't I think of it sooner? . . . ” she said, clasping her hands. “Why didn't I speak to him about it? How much time has been lost! We were living in a nightmare, in a state of distraction. Who knows now if it is not too late? You don't think so, do you? Ah! Why is it not already done! When he told me everything, the day of the Dufour affair, he was still so strong. He would still be strong without morphia—the poison which is destroying him. They will cure that also. They will give him back to me for some time, for a long time perhaps, and I will indeed show him that I have not ceased to love him. Only, I am merely a woman. I have not his grandeur of soul. He expected too much of me. It is my fault. I expected too much myself. It is the same in the case of ideas. You remember when I wept. I no longer know what I think or believe. There are times when you feel you are being rolled along by something more powerful than yourself. You are, as it were, under a huge wave. You

can only close your eyes and let yourself drift.”

She spoke in that manner, giving me the impression that it was but a little child who was by my side. And I felt glad because of this weakness, this disarray of a will which I had known so intent, this surrender to instinct. I was so certain that the presence of a poor, uncertain, and disabled being would have a sovereign effect on Ortègue. He would have pity on her, and this pity would complete the dispersion of his pride and despair. Alas! his victim's second sight was correct. It was too late.

We reached the Rue Saint Guillaume. As I was pushing open the small door at the main carriage entrance to allow Mme. Ortègue to pass through, three nurses, who were conversing vivaciously in the courtyard, suddenly stopped talking on seeing us. They turned aside and followed my companion with a look which frightened me. I could not question them, not wishing to leave, for a second, the poor woman, who was almost running, without

having noticed this little incident. The spectacle presented by the entrance corridor was too extraordinary for her not to ask immediately: "What has happened?" Wounded soldiers, nurses and visitors were there, talking together, with that sort of dismayed animation which springs up around sudden catastrophes. They also stepped aside without replying. She continued to run forward, and reached the little anteroom to Ortègue's study. There she ran up against Dr. Quénaut, who was leaving the latter room, and who stopped her, saying:

"Do not go in, Madam. The Professor has just fainted. Renard is attending to him. He will come to. But do not go in. Marsal, prevent Madam from entering."

She uttered a piercing cry: "He is dead!" And pushing us to one side—Quénaut as well as myself—with irresistible strength, she rushed into the study.

Ortègue was stretched on the divan on which I recollected having auscultated him two months before, his mouth half open, and

not a breath coming from it, his eyelids half closed, with no expression lighting up his glassy eyes. Mme. Ortègue uttered a second cry, still more piercing, and, throwing herself on her husband, began to press him to her arms, covering with kisses and tears that motionless and ravaged face the infinite sadness of which would never more be dissipated by her caresses.

“Better leave her alone,” said I to Quénaut and Renard, who were remaining there, in a state of hesitation. The other people had withdrawn. I pushed them both into the antechamber and asked in a low voice:

“How did it happen?”

“We don’t know much more than you do,” said Quénaut. “We were upstairs, Renard and I, with Lieutenant Le Gallic, who, by the way, is going fast. Indeed, Renard, you had better go up to him at once. I will join you. An excited attendant came rushing up to us to say that, when passing under Ortègue’s windows, he had heard groans, that he had gone in and found the Professor unconscious.

We descended. The unfortunate man was already in a comatose state. He died almost immediately. You know he abused the use of morphia. He must have given himself too strong a dose. Such things happen. . . . Poor woman!"

The sound of a sob came to us from the adjoining room—so violent that it made me anxious.

"You, also, return to the lieutenant, my dear *confrère*," said I to Quénaut. "I will try to calm her."

I had a reason of my own for getting rid of this witness. I trembled at the thought that Mme. Ortègue, in her frenzied grief, might let drop some revealing word. The painful conjugal drama was solved by this death. For the honour of Ortègue's memory, these cruel events must be enveloped in eternal secrecy. Fortunately Quénaut's sense of professional duty was stronger than his curiosity.

"I will leave you, then," he said. "Especially as the patient up there is in a serious condition: weakening of the pulse, anxiety,

dizziness, pallor, Cheyne-Stokes's breathing; in short, bulbary syndrome as clear as daylight. Moreover, Ortègue feared it. I should have operated on him, you know, and as soon as he arrived here. The toleration of projectiles in the brain is theoretical. I should also have operated upon Ortègue. I have often told you so, and I was right. I should have united his biliary vesicle with an intestinal loop. His jaundice would have been swept away. His sufferings would have disappeared at least for months. It is astounding that a master-surgeon such as he should have preferred the brutalizing influence of morphia and all its dangers. . . . But hear how she is groaning. Ah! how she did love him!"

He had barely left the room when I entered the office. Mme. Ortègue was still pressing the body to her bosom. I took her by the arms and tried to drag her from it. She let me do so, as though the nervous attack of the first moments of her grief was changing to passiveness, which, through her distress and

wildness, was still more terrifying. As I was leading her away from the divan on which Ortègue lay, holding her hands in mine, she turned her head towards him, and, with convulsed face and haggard eyes, repeated incessantly:

“He killed himself. He killed himself through me. He died in despair through me. It is my fault. He died because of my horrible cowardice. Ah! Marsal, why did you show him that paper? I did not ask you to do anything.”

“Not at all, Madam. He has not killed himself,” I replied—lying to her. I understood so well now why Ortègue had got me out of the way, and his tragic determination to commit suicide, alone and in silence—a suicide which might pass for a natural death, even to my eyes, even, and above all, to those of his wife. She no longer loved him as he wished to be loved. He had held the proof of it in his hand. Suddenly, he had decided to put an end to everything immediately, without seeing her again. The movement he

made when he took the telephone receiver to hear that adored voice once more returned to my memory and rended my heart, while I continued my useless imposture.

“Reason a little, Madam. If he had killed himself, he would have left you a few words,—here, for you to find. . . .” I pointed to the table, and, displacing the papers, added: “You see there is nothing.”

“Why should he have written to me? What had he to say?”

“But he would have liked to have seen you again,” I insisted.

“He could not bear it. I had wounded him too deeply. Ah! why did you show him those words?”

“Wounded him too deeply? If only you had heard him speak of you after reading what you wrote—with what tenderness and impatience he looked forward to having you here and reassuring you!” In recalling the attitude of indulgent gentleness which Ortègue had indeed displayed, how clearly I recognized its heroism and martyrdom! I also felt that

I was not deceiving this woman, who listened to me with her eyes ever fixed on the dead man. However, I insisted:

“No. He did not commit suicide. Neither Quénaut nor I know how he met his death. But it is evident that it is an episode of his disease. Embolism, congestion of the brain, stoppage of the heart—there are twenty possible explanations. . . .”

“I shall soon know,” she said, escaping from me and going towards the drawer of the desk I knew so well, and in which Ortègue kept his morphia. A key, attached to a bunch, remained in it. “You see,” she cried, “he opened this drawer. Our poison was there.”

She pulled at the key violently. In one of the compartments her eye caught sight of a little bottle, which she seized. It contained a white powder, and as she raised it to the light coming from the window, I was able to read on the label the redoubtable formula $K C N$ —that of cyanide of potassium. The bottle was full to the top, and the cork sealed. Mme. Ortègue murmured:

“Our poison! He has not touched it!”

Fortunately, in the excitement of verifying this first suspicion, she had overlooked what I had noticed, with terror—a large hypodermic syringe, placed in a compartment. A small quantity of liquid was still to be seen in it. This liquid, I have since found out, was morphia. Quénaut had judged the fact accurately, without understanding its significance. Ortègue had employed the simplest method of committing suicide, but at the same time the one most difficult to discover; he had injected a deadly dose of his habitual poison. He had had the strength to replace the instrument of death, to dress again, and to go and stretch himself on his divan. The whole picture was formed in my mind with such clearness that I also could have cried out. I succeeded in mastering myself, and, pushing the drawer in, as it were mechanically, I said to Mme. Ortègue:

“You see, Madam, that the bottle is intact—a proof of what I say.”

“He killed himself in some other way. He

hoped that I would not understand, that I should believe it was an accident. He acted generously, as he always did. But he did not want to see me again.”

She had sunk into an arm-chair. Her two hands clasped the little bottle, and I heard her moaning:

“Or else he rejected the poison he had prepared for both of us.”

Drawing near to her, I said very gently, “Madam, you must give me that bottle.”

She made no reply, save by shaking her head, and at the same time she pressed her two hands, which were still holding the bottle, to her bosom. I insisted:

“Madam, you must give it to me. I ask you in the name of your husband, whose last wish, expressed to me in this very room, an hour ago, was that you should live.”

She sprang to her feet, placed the arm-chair between herself and me, and, holding the bottle still more tightly, said:

“I hope you don’t intend to take it from me by force.”

XXIX

COMBATING A DIRE RESOLUTION

THIS short and terrible scene was interrupted by the arrival of the only person before whom it could continue, considering his priestly character—the Abbé Courmont, who had been sent (his first words informed me of that) by the dying Le Gallic, whom he had just attended. He entered and immediately saw this picture, only too significant after the revelations which his penitent had certainly made to him—the dead man on the divan, I, distracted, in an imploring attitude; Mme. Ortègue, taking refuge behind the arm-chair and pressing the bottle of poison to her bosom, in a savage attitude of defence.

“Since you are here, Monsieur l’Abbé,” I cried, “assist me . . .”

My outstretched hands clearly indicated

the nature of the help I demanded. I wanted to get possession of the bottle, and without delay, terrified as I was lest the unhappy woman should break the seal and kill herself before us. A pinch of that powder, taken even from the hand, and all would have been over! I was employing—at this distance of time I still shudder at the thought—the surest means of precipitating the catastrophe which I wished at all cost to avoid. Violence, in the case of a soul filled with frenzy, has never aroused anything save violence. But the priest had not lost his calmness. He understood everything and saw the danger. As I was repeating, “Assist me . . .” he said, addressing Mme. Ortègue, and without replying to me:

“Madam, I have learnt the terrible misfortune. I have come to pray by the side of your dear, dead husband. You will allow me, won’t you?” She made a sign of assent. Whereupon he asked: “Would you like to join with me in my prayer?”

She refused, shaking her head fiercely.

The Abbé Courmont did not insist. He went and knelt down at the foot of the divan, made the sign of the cross, and began to pray. I continued to watch Mme. Ortègue. The words of the Lord's Prayer, murmured by the priest, came to her, as to me, in fragments. . . . "*Thy will be done. . . . Forgive us our trespasses. . . . Lead us not into temptation . . .*" I saw that her hands slightly loosened their hold, and that two large tears were flowing down her cheeks.

What force was acting upon her? I cannot say. An energy emanating from a spiritual source, outside herself? Perhaps. I admit that that influence is possible. A suggestion from the priest? I admit it also. A new and powerful recollection, in the presence of this kneeling priest and this murmured prayer at the side of the dead, of the far-off impressions of childhood? Again I admit it. Once more, I record the fact without attempting to explain it. That fact, moreover, proves to me that a mind formed by religious discipline is able to show itself singularly fit in

the knowledge and direct handling of reality. For the Abbé Courmont had found the only means of arresting the unhappy woman's progress towards suicide. But for how long?

He rose from his prayer, and, in his gently serious voice, said:

"I asked that peace might be granted him, Madam. He worked so much, suffered so much, loved so much. God is good. He sees what we do not see. He will give him peace. Provided that . . ." He stopped, and, in a still gentler, almost supplicating voice, continued: "Madam, I came for another purpose. Make an appeal to your courage. Your cousin Ernest is very ill, very ill. . . . His hours, perhaps his minutes, are counted. He would like to see you. . . ."

She shook her head, as shortly before, with the same movement of savage refusal.

"Don't say no, Madam," interjected the priest. And, pointing to the dead man, "When it is on his account. For I know that M. Le Gallic wishes to speak to you about him."

She repeated the words: "About him?" then, turning towards me:

"Marsal, they saw each other to-day?"

It was the priest who replied: "Yes, Madam."

"For a long time?"

"For a long time. Go upstairs, Madam. I shall remain here, to watch."

"I will go," she said, after a silence.

She had taken her handkerchief to dry her tears. Continuing to watch all her movements, I noticed that she rolled the bottle of cyanide in it. This action prompted me to follow her up the staircase. She entered the bedroom, and I made ready to remain behind in the corridor, to respect the secrecy of this last interview. "She will not kill herself before Le Gallic," thought I. It was he who, having caught sight of me behind Mme. Ortègue, motioned to me to come in. Already his irregular breathing no longer permitted continuous speech. It quickened, then slackened, to the point of almost stopping at certain moments. In the intervals he was able to articulate.

“Gentlemen,” he said to Quénaut and Renard, who were standing near him, “I have something to say to my cousin. I should also like Dr. Marsal to remain. . . .”

I understood the secret reason for this wish immediately. I knew enough for him to be able to say certain words to Mme. Ortègue without teaching me anything, and my presence was sufficient to prevent his being tempted to utter others.

Renard and Quénaut went out, but not before the latter had said aloud:

“We shall remain here, in the corridor, lieutenant. Don’t fatigue yourself too much.”

And to myself, in a whisper, near the door.

“Nothing can be done. The bulb is attacked. It’s all over.”

“Catherine,” began the dying man, and the intervals in his breathing gave his broken elocution a character still more heart-rending than the actual phrases he uttered. It was truly a man in the pangs of death who was speaking. “Catherine, I came to an ex-

planation with Michel in the presence of Dr. Marsal. He told me what you wished to do. . . . I know that as regards his case it is all over. I fear that you are still of a mind not to survive him. . . . Catherine, you must live. You must for his sake. I, who am on the point of death, affirm that there is another world. I feel it coming nearer and nearer. I see it. I touch it . . . I know that one can suffer in this other world. One suffers for one's faults; for those one has committed. One can also be relieved by the good will, by the good actions of the living. . . . You do not know that this is true. You cannot be sure that it is false. That is what I told your husband to-day. . . . Reflect that, if it is true, your suicide burdens your poor Michel with a terrible load in the other world. If it is true, reflect also that your life may be useful, bountiful to him. . . . You see quite well that you ought to live. . . . If it is true, not one of the minutes you live in patience, humility, and charity will be lost to your husband. Nothing is lost when one offers it. What I am

suffering at this moment and what I am going to suffer is not lost, because I offer it. I offer my death for you, so that you may be enlightened and purified, so that you may live. . . .”

He also said:

“Poor Catherine! I who am about to pass away understand that your duty is harder and more difficult than mine. It is so simple to give everything at a single stroke. . . . But, you see, I have suffered much before reaching this hour. I know that there is a great consolation hidden in suffering that we accept. . . . Farewell, Catherine. I do not ask you to promise. You would not like my sacrifice to be useless to you. Farewell! Leave me with Him, with the Man of Sorrow. . . .”

He pressed the crucifix to his breast, with the same gesture of supreme recourse she herself had made, but a short time before, when clasping the poison to her bosom.

“Farewell,” she said, and bending over the wounded man’s forehead, she placed a

kiss upon it. He looked at her with a look of gratitude and supplication. His lips murmured a "thank you" which was no more than a breath. In view of his loss of consciousness, I ran to the door and called to Quénaut and Renard.

"Attend to him," I said to them. "We must attempt a lumbar puncture. I will come up again immediately to assist you. Renard, prepare the instruments."

While speaking, I led Mme. Ortègue, who followed me with a quasi-automatic step, from the room. On reaching her husband's study, where the Abbé Courmont was still in prayer by the dead man's side, I took her hand, which continued to clasp the bottle wrapped in the handkerchief. Her fingers yielded. I held the poison.

"You will live?" I asked her.

"Yes," she replied.

XXX

WHICH IS THE TRUE?

SHE lives. Weeks and weeks have passed; six long months since the day on which, still trembling under the abjuration of the dying man, I took the bottle of poison from her. I saw that she would keep her promise to live when she expressed a wish to be present at Ortégue's interment to the very end. Three days later she attended Le Gallic's funeral service. These two ceremonies resembled each other only in one thing: her presence. Ortégue, in a final codicil to his will, which explained to me the devout notary's consternation, had made a request for a civil burial. His aversion to Le Gallic was doubtless connected with this wish.

Oh! that sad afternoon at the beginning of November when we took him to the Passy

cemetery! He had had built there, formerly—lover of magnificence as he was even in death—a marble and mosaic monument. The crowd pressed behind the mortal remains of the illustrious surgeon.

What a contrast in every way with the humble funeral procession of the obscure lieutenant! After a low mass, said at eight o'clock at St. Thomas d'Aquin, we conveyed the body to the Montparnasse railway station, whence it left for Tréguier. The Breton soldier was to sleep there, in his native soil, that in which his father, his mother, all the ancestors who were repeated in him and whose faith he shared, were laid.

On comparing these two interments, I perceive a symbol in them. The officer lived in the communion. He died in the communion. He rests in the communion. My poor master, in death, remains solitary as he was in the last tragic hour of his life. I can still hear his voice saying to me, when he was so near his end, and in a poignant tone: "How alone one is!" With what emotion, when I

pass before that Passy cemetery, I contemplate the huge retaining-wall which overhangs the Avenue Henri Martin! I pierce—in thought—the high embankment and proceed on and on, until I find the vault where, in the cold, in the silence, in death, the remains of that man of genius and passion, Ortègue, are completing their dissolution. I pity him. I would aid him, and then I say to myself that, if he still suffers, it is not there.

Another person says the same as I do—his wife. At this very moment I am looking through the window on to the lawn whose verdant expanse stretches beneath the ancient trees of the hospital garden. A soldier is reclining on an invalid's chair. By his side are two crutches. His eyes are bandaged. He came to us blind and with a shattered thigh. We have saved his leg. But we could not restore his sight. Mme. Ortègue is seated by his side, reading to him. How much thinner and more emaciated she has become!

Her existence during these six months explains this falling away only too well. She

has lived, yes, and she is living, but in the midst of the daily wear and tear of an activity expended beyond measure on behalf of our wounded soldiers. With the prolongation of the war, our wards, alas! do not become less crowded. Many of us are growing tired. But not Mme. Ortègue. Her devotion during the first weeks even then called forth our astonishment and admiration. It arouses, since her husband's death, our admiration and dismay. We see her stay up night after night, and offer to carry out the hardest, most repugnant, most dangerous tasks. On the slightest suspicion of a contagious disease, she is there. She gives her days. She gives her nights. She gives her life. I—who know her secret—often have the impression that there is a suicidal intention in her charity. One would think that she was trying to satisfy at one and the same time the contradictory wishes of the two men who loved her so dearly: to live as Le Gallic asked her to do, and to die as she promised Ortègue.

To enable her to obtain a little rest, I have

begged her to devote herself particularly to our blind men. A humble task indeed! "But," as she was told by the Abbé Courmont, who is also anxious lest her health should be jeopardized by such an abuse of her strength, "there is no humble task of consolation." It was the priest who obtained her consent. The fact that he had this influence over her proves that a revolution is taking place within her. She is tormented by religious nostalgia. It is Le Gallic's personality which continues to act on hers, and this beautiful soul—as he described it—remains so faithful, so loyal, that even Ortègue, were he to be called back to life, could not be jealous of this action. The noble woman desires so passionately to believe only for his sake. Yesterday again—for she converses with me with a more open heart—she confessed to me:

"You reproach me, friend, with working too hard in the hospital. I have no other means of appeasement. When I am worn out with fatigue, after being on day and night duty, I say to myself: 'If Le Gallic's belief is

true, if there is another world, if my husband's soul is not extinct, if it is in suffering somewhere, perhaps the little help I give others will fall on him.' It is but a wish, and full of doubt. When I give way to it, an inexpressible feeling of calm fills me, as though a word of thanks were coming to me from somewhere. . . . But whence?"

This simple woman's question aims at nothing less than the stating of the heart-rending and inevitable problem of death. What, in reality, does the widow of the unhappy Ortègue ask? Whether there is an eternal rupture or a mysterious connection between the dead and the living; whether our present activity becomes exhausted, or else whether it is continued elsewhere, in a spiritual universe, the first principle and supreme explanation of the visible universe? Provided this prolongation exists, death assumes another significance; or, rather, it has only significance if this prolongation exists. Otherwise, it is but a termination, and what differ-

ence is there, apart from the pain, between one death and another? All are equal to the one who is dying, since they annihilate equally.

This problem, essential though it is, and one which all of us ought to have solved, or, at least, ought to meditate upon, we forget in the ordinary course of life. How is it possible not to be obsessed by it to-day, when a universal cataclysm, this huge long-drawn-out and terrible war, affirms it every day, every hour, from one end of Europe to the other, to millions of beings, to those who are fighting and to those who remain at home, to those who die and to those who survive, to individuals, to families, to countries, to the whole of our humanity? Has the shedding of so much blood and so many tears a significance elsewhere? Or is this world-conflict nothing but a frenzied fit of collective delirium, the only result of which will be the premature entrance of innumerable organisms into the cycle of physico-chemical decompositions and recompositions? It is also the problem which faces us at the close of this long narrative.

To the study of it I wished to offer a contribution. It has been offered. What is it worth?

I said, on beginning these pages, that I would write them as a "memoir,"—as an "observation." The master quality of a memoir is exactitude. These pages possess it. I can pay them that tribute. But I could not prevent myself writing them under the stress of an increasing agitation, in proportion as the episodes were revived in my memory; and agitation is not a scientific attitude. To weep into a microscope has never been conducive to seeing in it clearly. On the point of concluding, I will endeavour to resume that intellectual unconcern which is the condition of all objectivity.

Let us sum up, then, the facts the establishment of which results from this observation. They are to be grouped under two headings. I see, on the one hand, a superior man, Ortègue, furnished with every intellectual power, overwhelmed with all the favours of fate. Death suddenly rises before him. He faces it with

a certain doctrine. He cannot adapt himself to it. Death to him represents the annihilation of his whole sentimental psychism, and the deep energies of his affective life revolt against it. To him, I repeat, death represents the annihilation of his intellectual psychism. His pupils will doubtless continue his activity. The patients upon whom he has operated will survive him. His memory will not perish, but the most precious acquisition of his work, his thought, with the accumulated treasure of his reflections, that power of associating his person, through knowledge, with eternal laws—all this is going to be lost in nothingness. He ends by accepting this total collapse of his being with pathetic grandeur, but it is the grandeur of crushed resignation. It is the mind bending, with a gesture of desperate powerlessness, under the pressure of irresistible and sovereign forces, which to him are monstrous, since they have only produced him with the object of crushing him. Such is the first of the cases considered here.

I see, on the other hand,—and this is the

second case—a very simple man, Le Gallic, a man of action, but so modest in action. His intellectual representation of the world seems likewise very modest. He has not formed his doctrine; he has received it. An Ortègue despises him for it. Is he right in so doing? Does not a Le Gallic, without knowing it, bring to the interpretation of life the residuum of a long secular empiricism? Before him also death rises. This traditional doctrine enables him to accept it immediately, to make it the substance for his effort, an opportunity of enrichment for himself and others. His sentimental psychism adapts itself to it, since he is able in accordance with this doctrine, to offer his agony, with the conviction of a reversion of his sacrifice to those he loves. His intellectual psychism likewise adapts itself to it. He himself affirms it when he speaks of "his salvation." Salvation is the keeping alive of the best part of his being. His resignation is an enthusiasm, a joy, a love.

Where the other fails, he triumphs. Where

the other renounces, he asserts himself. To an Ortègue, death is a catastrophic phenomenon, a combination of an ambushade and absurdity. To a Le Gallic, it is a consummation, an accomplishment.

What conclusion is to be drawn? That, of the two hypotheses on death whose application I have been able to contemplate in the case of these two men, one is *utilizable*, the other not. I am well aware that this formula is simple to the point of seeming puerile. I agree that to me, with my particular turn of mind, it is burdened with such consequences. Nevertheless, my clinical education dictates that application should be the definite test of theories. In medicine, I accept nought save verified—that is to say active, and therefore experimental—truth. From this point of view, strange though this change of position may be, a Le Gallic appears to me to be more scientific than an Ortègue; just as Magendie showing an experiment to Tiedemann, who made the objection: "But what about Bichat's law?" replied: "I need not trouble myself

about that. The law is wrong if my experiment contradicts it.”

I resume, again in order to state the matter precisely, the analysis of the results of my own experiment, and I find this other formula: death has no significance if it is merely an end; it has significance if it is a sacrifice.—And by the way, what hidden riches language possesses, and how profound is this word *significance*, with its double meaning of *signification* and *direction* !—But sacrifice itself must have a significance. We believe we can detect this significance very clearly in certain cases: such as those of a Delanoë and a Dufour offering their lives in the trenches for their country. The sum total of these cases of devotion constitutes the army. It saves this country—France. There is nothing to be said unless it is this—that it is the present immolating itself to the future, and one cannot see why the future, which does not yet exist, should demand this privilege if an imperative order had not been given by conscience, which

receives the revelation of it from elsewhere. And behold we again come to Mme. Ortègue's question: "But whence?"

And suppose the sacrifice has no immediate result? Suppose the being for whom the devoted person makes the sacrifice does not receive the benefit, has not even an idea of it? Mme. Ortègue was at Le Gallic's bedside in time to hear him offer his life for her sake. She might not have been there. Every day soldiers are set down as "missing" who have killed themselves for their comrades, and the latter have not known it, have been lost perhaps in spite of this sacrifice. Nevertheless, the sacrifice was made. For it to have a significance, there must, then, have been, in the absence of human witnesses, *someone* to receive it, a mind capable of registering the act which man makes for man when this act has no result and no man knows it. If this witness of unknown and inefficacious devotions does not exist, they are as though they had not been. Everything in us revolts against that. On the other hand, is not this witness,

this conscience, the judge and conservation of our own to be met with in the world which physical experience reveals to us? Is this not a proof that physical experience does not exhaust reality?

I recollect some words which were uttered one day in my presence, at the close of a long discussion on religious experience, by the American psychologist William James, one of the sincerest scientists I have met, one who has brought himself most completely under the discipline of facts: "I believe that through communion with the Ideal a new energy enters into the world and gives birth to new phenomena." What did he mean by the Ideal? A force, since it is a source of force. Being also the source of intelligence, it must be an intelligence. Being a source of love, it must be love. There cannot reside in the consequent what virtually did not exist in the antecedent. William James also said of our higher psychism "that it forms part of something *greater* than itself, but of the same nature, something which acts in the

universe outside it and is able to come to its assistance . . .”

“That is the opening of the Creed, set down in other words,” replied the Abbé Courmont to me the other day, when I quoted these two passages to him. “Is not our: *I believe in God the Father Almighty this: something greater and of the same nature . . . which is able to come to the assistance of our higher psychism? . . .* William James speaks of *a new energy which enters into the world.* What difference is there between this and our: *who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven? . . .*”

So I seem to hear him. And since I have seen Le Gallic and Ortègue die, seen the moral fulness of the one death, and the stoical but barren distress of the other, it is impossible for me to prove, *experimentally*, that this priest is wrong. No more can I do so when he adds, alluding to Mme. Ortègue’s religious perplexities—and to my own, I imagine, for he is so acute:

“With what pain the poor tormented souls of to-day seem to seek for the truth, which is

there, quite simple, within their reach! Yet is not this very pain in the search after truth a prayer? When we feel the need of God, it is because He is quite close to us."

PARIS, May-August, 1915.

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