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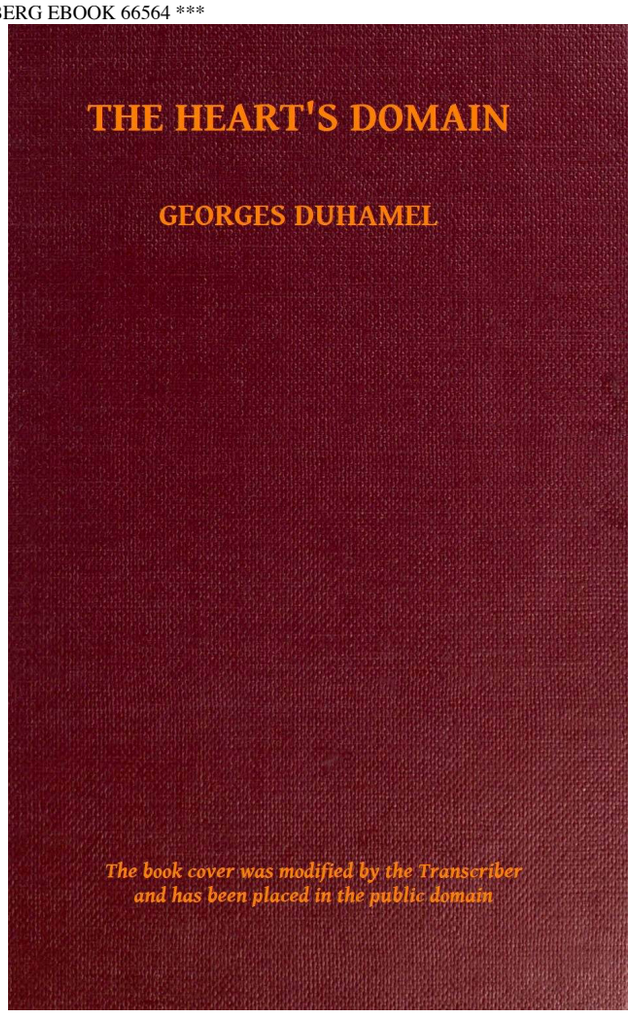

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THE HEART'S DOMAIN

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TO
MY SON BERNARD

PREFACE

I am beginning a book with what sounds like a very ambitious title.

I wish to say at once that I have no qualifications to discuss political, historical or economic matters. I leave to the scholars who are versed in these redoubtable questions the task of explaining, skilfully and definitely, the great misery that has befallen our time.

I thus at the same time renounce most of the opportunities and obligations of my title.

But I wish, with all my heart, to pursue with a few people of good will a friendly discussion the object of which remains, in spite of all, the heart's domain, or the possession of the world.

The possession of the world is not decided by guns. It is the noble work of peace. It is not involved in the struggle which is now rending society.

Even so, men will find themselves engaged in an undertaking that will threaten to overwhelm them with suffering and despair.

Fate has assigned to me during the war a place and a task of such a character that misery has been the only thing I have seen; it has been my study and my enemy every moment. I must be forgiven for thinking of it with a persistence that is like an obsession.

The whole intelligence of the world is absorbed by the enterprise and the necessities of the war; there is little chance of rousing it now from this in favor of the happiness of the race, in favor of that happiness which is compromised for the future and destroyed for the present. It is to the heart one must address oneself. It is to all the generous hearts that one must make one's appeal.

So, if I am spurred by an ambition, it is to beg the world to seek once more whatever can lighten the present and the future distress of mankind, to seek the springs of interest that exist for the soul in a life harassed with difficulties, perils and disillusionments, to honor more than ever the faithful and incorruptible resources of the inner life.

The inner life!

It has never ceased to shine, a precious, quivering flame, devoting all its ardor in a struggle against the breath of these great events, resisting this tempest which has had no parallel.

It has never ceased to shine, but its shy and faithful light trembles in a sort of crypt into which we fear to venture.

What has happened has seized upon us as upon its prey. During the first months of the war, during the first years perhaps, all our physical and moral energies were overwhelmed in this maelstrom. How, indeed, could one refuse oneself to the appetite of the monster? We did not even try to snatch from him our hours of leisure, our dreams. We simply abandoned such things, as we abandoned our plans, our welfare, and the whole of our existence.

You remember! It was a time when solitude found us more shaken, more disarmed, than peril. We reproached ourselves for distracting a single one of our thoughts from the universal distress. We gave ourselves day and night to this agonizing world; and when our work was suspended, when the wild beast unloosed its clutch, as if in play, and we returned for a few minutes to ourselves, we did not always dare to look the quivering inner flame in the face. What it lighted up in us seemed at times too foreign to our anxiety, or too filled with limpid serenity. And so we returned to our wretchedness, experiencing it to the point of intoxication, to the point of despair.

When I think of the year 1915, it seems to me that I still hear all those noble comrades saying to me with a sort of dejection: "I can't think of anything else! I can neither read, nor work, nor seek to distract myself to any purpose. When I'm off duty I think about these days, I think about them unceasingly, till I feel seasick, till I feel dizzy. I've just had two hours of liberty. Once upon a time I should have given them to Pascal or to Tolstoy. Today I have employed them in reading some documentary works on the manufacture of torpedoes and on European colonial methods. They are subjects that will always be outside my line, subjects I shall never be interested in. But how can I think of anything else?"

Perhaps it is not a question of thinking of anything else. It is not a question of turning one's back on the time, but rather of looking it in the face, calmly and collectedly.

When the first great excitement had passed away, those who had the wisdom and the courage to return assiduously to themselves found their inner life ennobled, augmented, enriched. For it does not cease to labor on in the depths of us. It is at once ourselves and something other than ourselves, better than ourselves. Like certain of our organs which are endowed with a marvelous independence and pursue a vigilant activity in the midst of our agitations and our sleep, the inner life comes to its fruitage even though we are full of ingratitude and indifference towards it. It is the faithful spouse who keeps the home radiant, arranges every comfort and spins at the wheel, behind the door, awaiting our return.

And behold we are returning!

To be sure, the storm still roars on. It grows greater, more furious, more unending. Never has it seemed more complex, more grave, more difficult. Peril has taken up its abode with us. Every sort of opinion holds up its head and vehemently solicits our belief.

But we have found once more the key and the path to the secret refuge. Nothing could turn us aside now. Nothing could prevent us at certain hours from plunging into solitude, there to find again the equilibrium, the harmony and those moral riches which we know, after the ruin of so many things, are alone efficacious, alone durable.

For long months now I have realized, watching the men with whom I live, that they are waiting for words of quietude, words of rest and love. They are like parched soil at the end of a blazing summer: they long to slake their thirst and grow green again.

In vain have destruction, disorder and death tried to break up the sublime and familiar colloquy that every being pursues with the better part of himself. That colloquy revives, it begins again, in the very midst of the battle, among the odors and the groans of the hospital.

Nevertheless, the daily work is done, well done; duty is properly weighed and accomplished; the soul simply is unwilling any longer to renounce its meditation upon all that is profound, imperishable, and immaterial in the present.

Tell me that we are going to labor in concert once more at the exploitation of our inner fortune. Tell me that we are going to labor to save from shipwreck that part of us which, in spite of all our errors, uncertainties, crimes and disillusionments, remains truly noble and worthy of eternity.

I am able to undertake this essay thanks to the leisure moments the war has been willing to grant me. It is not purely the fruit of solitary meditations. I do not live alone: my chosen comrades surround me; they share with me the confused space of our dwelling; we share together all the thoughts that fill this space.

Friendship has accomplished the miracle of transforming into a communion what, without it, would have remained a promiscuity.

I have a feeling that I am expressing the desires and the thoughts of many men. Very soon, those who are here will be going to sleep; I shall continue my writing, but with the secret certitude of not being alone in the task, of carrying with me their tacit assent. I feel that I have been entrusted with a sort of mandate.

I have no library, no documents. But do we need books in order to converse together of the things that form the very substance of our existence? Does it not suffice to consult our souls? Do we need any other guarantee than our devout desire in order to lift an open hand and make, for all those who await it in their solitude, the sign of concord and of hope?

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THE HEART'S DOMAIN

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I
THE HOPE OF HAPPINESS

I

It was necessary for me to pass middle age in order to become convinced that happiness was the object of my life, as it is the object of all humanity, as it is the object of the whole world of living things.

At first sight, that statement seems self-evident. And yet many a time have I questioned my friends, my relatives, my chance companions on this subject and I have received the most contradictory replies.

Many seemed taken unawares and, overwhelmed with their various burdens, would not trouble to seek an object: they were in pursuit of happiness without naming it. Others, excited by the play of argument, acknowledged as the object of life all sorts of states or manners of being which are nothing but steps toward happiness, means good or bad of seeking it, such as movement, stoical indifference, or prayer. Others confused the end with the object and named death. Still others, maddened by their misery, gave it as their bitter conclusion that unhappiness is the actual destiny of man, and these confused the obstacle with the aim. Finally, there were some who gave to happiness names dictated by their aspirations, their culture, their accustomed manner of using words, and called it God, or eternal life, or the salvation of the soul.

As for me, in spite of all, I am sure that happiness is the object of life. This certitude has come to me altogether from within, not from outside events, and not from the spectacle of other men. Like all the certitudes of the inner life, it is obstinate and even aggressive. All objections seem simply made to fortify it. It dominates them all. I have not been able even to imagine a new certitude that could invalidate or replace this one.

Upon reflection, the path and the end are identical. Happiness is not only the aim, the reason of life, it is its means, its expression, its essence. It is life itself.

II

One might well doubt this. The whole of humanity at this moment utters one despairing, heart-rending cry. It bellows like a wounded beast of burden, it simply does not understand its wound.

All convictions and all certitudes are at one another's throats. How can we recognize them, with that lost look they have, that blood that soils and disfigures them? In the hurricane, opinions, uprooted, have lost their soil and their sap. They drift like autumn thistles, dry thistles that yet have power to tear the skin. Men no longer know anything but their insurmountable suffering, a suffering that has no limit and seems to be without reason. They groan and desire nothing but to be alleviated. Will a century of pious tenderness suffice to bathe, drain, close the vast wound?

Without delay, O streaming wound, your living flesh must be stanched and bathed. From now on, no matter how long you bleed, you must be anointed and protected, and if you are opened up again ten times, ten times must you be anointed anew and covered once more.

Yet, do not doubt it, humanity even in this terrible hour seeks for nothing but its own happiness. It rushes forward, by instinct, like a herd that smells the salt-lick and the spring. But it will suffocate rather than not enjoy everything together and at once.

Happiness?

God! who has given it this painful and ridiculous idea? What were they about, the priests, the scientists, and the people who write the books? What has been taught the children of men that they could have been made to believe that war brings happiness to anyone? Let them declare themselves, those who have assured the poor in spirit that their happiness depends upon the possession of a province, an iron-mine, or a foaming arm of the sea between two distant continents!

It is thus that they have all set out for the conquest of happiness, since that is destiny, and there has been placed in their hands precisely what was certain to destroy happiness forever.

And yet, if you will bear with me, we need not lose all hope. So long as there is a single wall-flower to tremble in the coming Aprils over the ruins of the world, let us repeat from the depths of our hearts: "Happiness, you are truly my end and the reason for my being, I know it through my own tears."

III

I went, lately, to a laboratory, in the heart of a wilderness of glass and porcelain, haunted with inhuman odors. A friend dwelt there. I saw a great crystal cask full of distilled water; the sunlight quivered through it freely and majestically. There, I thought, is the desert. That water contained nothing, it was unfitted for life, it was as empty as a dead world.

But then we scratched the bottom of the cask and looked at it with the microscope. Little round, green algæ were growing in that desert. A current of air had carried the germs, and they had increased and multiplied. There where there was nothing to seize upon, they had yet found something. The taste of barren glass, a few stray grains of dust, that soulless water, that sunlight, they had asked for nothing more in order to subsist and work out their humble joy.

I thought of this virtue of life, this perseverance, as of a hymn to happiness, a silent hymn prevailing over the roars of the conquest.

Nothing discourages life except, perhaps, the excess of itself.

If Europe, too rich and too beautiful, is to be henceforth the vessel of all the sorrows, it is because happiness has assumed an unclean mask: the mask of pleasure. For pleasure is not joy.

Patience! The whole world has not been poisoned.

I know of mosses that succeed in living upon acids. The antiseptics, whose property it is to destroy living things, are at times invaded by these obstinate fungi which encamp there, acclimatize themselves and modestly fulfil their destiny.

One must have confidence in happiness. One must have more confidence than ever, for never was happiness more greatly lacking to the mass of men. So cruelly is the world astray, so immensely, so evidently, too, that we cannot wait for the consummation to denounce it and reprove it.

Like those algæ, those mosses, those laborious lichens that attach to the very ruins themselves their infinite need of happiness, let us seek our joy in the distress of the present and make it open for us, like a plant beaten by the winds, in the desert of a blasted world.

IV

You must understand that this concerns happiness and not pleasure, or well-being, or enjoyment, or the delight of the senses.

All cultivated people have created different words to designate these different things. All have committed their moralists to the task of preserving simple souls from a confusion which our instincts favor.

Delight of the senses, you who are the eternally unsatisfactory, is it true, intangible one, that you will always deceive us and that we shall always seek for happiness through you?

What seductiveness is not yours, O you who smile with the lips of love, O mysterious phantom of joy? How you lure us and enchain us! Well you know how to array yourself, at times, in the appearance of a sacred mission, a religious duty!

No, you are not happiness, divine though you are! To live without you is a bitter misfortune, but you are not happiness!

Why does happiness command us to sacrifice you often, to mistrust you always?

There is no happiness without harmony; you know this very well, you who are delicious disorder itself, death, laughter, strife.

Happiness is our homeland. You are only the burning country we long for, the tropical isle where our dreams exile themselves, never to return.

Happiness is our true kingdom. Delight of the senses, let your slaves hymn your praise.

V

During the summer of 1916 I found among the meadows of the Marne a flower that had three odors. It is a very common flower in France: it adorns a low and spiny plant which the peasants call "*arrête-bœuf*." Toward midday, at the hour when the sun exasperates all its creatures, this flower exhales three different odors: the first is soft, fresh and resembles the perfume of the sweet pea; the second is sharp and makes one think of phosphor irritant, of a flame; the third is the secret breath of love. This miraculous flower really has all three of these odors at once, but we perceive them more easily one at a time because we are not worthy of all this wealth.

This little discovery descended upon my weary head like a benediction. At that time we were leaving the miseries of Verdun behind and were just on the point of plunging into those of the Somme. The intermediate rest depressed us and enervated us by turns. In the walks across the fields which we took with our comrades, I grew accustomed every day to gather a root of *arrête-bœuf* and offer it, as a gift, to those who accompanied me, so that they might share my discovery.

Some of them, anxious about the world and their own fortune, took pleasure in this modest marvel. They breathed in with these perfumes the inexhaustible variety of the lavish universe. They distinguished and recognized, smilingly, the three odors of this one being. They honored these three ambassadors whom a people of unknown virtues had assigned to them. They interpreted as a revelation the little signs of the latent opulence which challenges and disdains the majority of bewildered men.

But others remained insensible to this delicate prayer, and these I thought of with chagrin as of men who had no care for the welfare of their own souls.

I know quite well you will say, "There is no relation between this flower and the welfare of the soul." But this relation does exist, emphatically and definitely. Truth shines out of every merest trifle that goes to make up the world. We must fasten our eyes ardently upon it, as if it were a light shining through the branches, and march forward.

I am sure, we are all sure, that happiness is the very reason for our existence. Let it be added at once that happiness is founded upon possession, that is to say, upon the perfect and profound understanding of something.

For this reason men who have a high conception of happiness aspire to the complete and definite knowledge of an absolute, a perfection which they name God. The desire for eternal life is a boundless need of possession.

Equally noble is the passionate desire of certain men to understand, to possess themselves, to have such an exact and merciless conception of their moral and physical nature as will give them some sort of mastery over it.

It is indeed a beautiful destiny to pursue the understanding of the external world with the weapons and the arguments of a science that is not the slave of conquest. Men who achieve this may indeed be called just.

Others wish to possess a house, a field, a pair of earrings, an automobile. For them possession is not understanding, it is above all else an exclusive and almost solitary enjoyment. They deceive themselves about happiness and about possession. They deceive themselves to the actual point of war, massacre and destruction.

If we wish it, we may possess the whole universe, and it is in this possession that we shall find the salvation of our souls. We may possess, for example, that unknown something which walks by the road-side, the color of the forest of pointed firs that rises sharply against the southern horizon, the thoughts of Beethoven, our dreams by night, the conception of space, our memories, our future, the odor and the weight of objects, our grief at this moment and thousands and thousands of other things besides.

Is my soul immortal? Alas! how can I still linger in this ancient, ingenuous hope? There are millions who, like me, can no longer give reasonable credence to such an impossible happiness.

But does my soul exist? Every thought bears witness that it does, and this life of ours too, and the inexplicable life that is all about us.

When Christians speak of the salvation of the soul, they are thinking of all sorts of assurances and precautions in regard to that future life which remains the greatest charm of religion and at the same time its most wonderful weapon.

We can give a humbler but more immediate meaning to this expression.

First of all, not to be ignorant of our own souls!

To think about the soul, to think about it at least once in the confusion of every crowded day, is indeed the beginning of salvation.

To think with perseverance and respect of the soul, to enrich it unceasingly, that will be our sanctity.

VI

We have all known those men who, at the first break of day, while they are still half awake and barely rested, fling themselves into the stress of business. They pass all day from one man to another in a sort of blind, buzzing frenzy. They are ceaselessly reaching out to take, to appropriate for themselves. If a moment of solitude offers itself, they pull note-books out of their pockets and begin figuring. Between whiles they eat, drink and seek a sort of sleep that is more arid than death. Looking at these unfortunates, who are often men of great importance, one would imagine their souls were like decrepit poor relations, relegated to some corner of their personality, with which they never concern themselves.

I was once returning from the country on a train with a young surgeon on whom that cruel fortune which we call success was beginning to smile. I can still see him, breathless and almost stupefied, on the seat facing me. He had been talking to me of his work, of how he spent his time, with a restless excitement which the noise of the train hammered and disjointed and gave a sort of rhythm to. Evening was falling. It gave me pleasure to look at the young poplars in the valley beside the track, their foliage and slender trunks transfigured by the sunset. My friend looked at them also, and suddenly he murmured: "It's true! I'm no longer interested in those things, I no longer pay attention to anything." Through the fatigue and anxiety of his affairs, through the jingling calculation of his profits, he suddenly caught a glimpse of his error, of his real poverty. His repudiated soul stirred in the depths of his being as the infant stirs in its mother's womb.

It is constantly awakening in this way and timidly reclaiming its rights. Often, an unexpected word strikes us, a word that comes from it and reveals it. I have as a work-fellow a quiet, studious young man who takes life "seriously," that is to say, in such a fashion that he gets himself into a fine state of mind and will die, perhaps, without having known, without having saved, the soul with which he is charged. At the beginning of the month of June of this year 1918, I found myself hard at work during one of those overwhelming afternoons that seem, on our barren Champagne, like a white furnace, a glistening desert. There were many wounded and the greater part had been uncared for for several days; the barrack that served us as an operating-hall was overcrowded; our task was a tragic one; the demon of war had imprisoned us under his knee. We felt crushed, exasperated, swamped in these immediate realities. Between two wounded men, as I was soaping my gloves, I saw my young comrade looking far away through a little window and his gaze was suddenly bathed with calm and peace. "What are you looking at?" I said to him. "Oh! nothing," he replied; "only I'm resting myself on that little tuft of verdure down there: it refreshes me so much."

VII

It seems childish and paradoxical to oppose to all the concrete and formidable realities that are considered as the hereditary wealth of mankind an almost purely ideal world of joys that have no price, that remain outside all our bargainings, that are unstable, often fugitive, and always relative in appearance, whenever we put them to the test. Yet they alone are absolute, they alone are true. Where they are lacking there may be a place for amusement, there is no place for true happiness. They alone are capable of assuring the salvation of the soul. We ought to labor passionately to find them, to amass them as the veritable treasures of humanity.

The future we are permitted to glimpse seems the very negation of happiness and the ruin of the soul.

If this is true, we must examine it with open minds and then, with all our strength, refuse it.

Just this moment, when the struggle for mastery goes on, to the great peril of the soul, among the peoples, just this moment I choose for saying: "Let us think of the salvation of our souls." And this salvation is not a matter of the future but of the present hour. Let us recognize the existence of the soul; it is thus that we shall save it. Let us give it the freedom of the city in a world where everything conspires to silence or destroy it. If it is true that this withdraws us from that struggle for existence, the clamor of which assails our ears, well, even so, I believe it is better to die than to remain in a universe from which the soul is banished. But we shall have occasion to speak more than once of this.

Let us not forget that happiness is our one aim. Happiness is, above all, a thing of the spirit, and we shall only deserve it at the price of the honors we render to the noblest part of our being.

VIII

There are people who have said to me, "My happiness lies in this very hurly-burly, this brutish labor, this frantic agitation which you spurn. Outside this turmoil of business and society, I am bored. I need it. I need it in order to divert my thoughts."

No doubt! No doubt! But what have you done with your life that it has become necessary to divert your thoughts? What have you made of your past, what do you hope from your future when this alcohol, this opium, has become necessary to you?

You must understand me, there is no question, if you are built as an athlete, of letting your muscles deteriorate. There is no question, if you have a great thirst for controversy, a natural aptitude for struggle, of letting that thirst go unsatisfied, that aptitude uncultivated. The question is simply one of harmoniously employing all these fine gifts, of enriching yourself with those real treasures the universe bestows on those who wish to take them, and not of wearing out your radiant strength in the labors of a street-porter, a galley-slave or an executioner.

Here is a man who says to me: "My happiness! My happiness! But it consists in never thinking of my soul." What a sad thing! And how gravely one must have offended others and one's own self to have reached that point!

For where shall he who loves torment, passionate restlessness, uncertainty, and remorse discover these terrible blessings if it is not in the depths of his own hateful ego?

IX

If anyone tells you something strange about the world, something you have never heard before, do not laugh but listen attentively; make him repeat it, make him explain it: no doubt there is something there worth taking hold of.

The cult of the soul is a perpetual discovery of itself and the universe which it reflects. The purest happiness is not a stable and final frame of mind, it is an equilibrium produced by an incessant compromise which has to be adroitly reëstablished; it is the reward of a constant activity; it increases in proportion to the daily corrections one brings to it.

One must not cling obstinately to one's own interpretations of the world but unceasingly renew the flowers on the altar.

In quite another order of ideas I think of those old-fashioned manufacturers who are immovably set against trying any of the new machines and perish in their stubbornness. That is nothing but a comparison: to justify the machine folly is quite the opposite of my desire. I simply wish to show that routine affects equally the things of the mind and of the heart, that it is a very formidable thing.

Kipling, I believe, tells the story of a Hindu colony that was decimated by famine. The poor folk let themselves die of hunger without touching the wheat that had been brought for them, because they had been used to eating millet.

If the sacred lamp of happiness some day comes to lack the ritual oil, we shall not let it go out; we shall surely find something with which to feed it, something that will serve for light and heat.

X

The will to happiness attains its perfection in the mature man. With adolescence it passes through a redoubtable crisis.

Nietzsche says: "There is less melancholy in the mature man than in the young man." It is true.

Very young people cultivate sadness as something noble. They do not readily forgive themselves for not being always sad. They have discovered the mysterious isle of melancholy and do not wish to escape from it again. They love everything about that black magician and his attitudes and his tears and his nostalgia and his romantic beauty. They have a fierce disdain for vulgar pleasures and take refuge in sadness because they do not yet know the splendor and majesty of joy.

But in their own fashion, which is full of disdain, reserve and ingenuous complexity, they do not any the less seek for happiness.

With age happiness appears as truly the sole, serene study of man. As he rests upon the moral possession of the world, he believes that with time and experience he can remain insensible to the wearing out of his bodily organs.

He who knows how to be happy and to win forgiveness for his happiness, how enviable he is!—the only true model among those that are wise.

It is now, just now, that these things ought to be said, in the hour when our old continent bleeds in every member, in the hour when our future seems blotted out by the menace of every sort of servitude and of a hopeless labor that will know neither measure nor redemption.

II
POVERTY AND RICHES

I

The Christian doctrine, which has all the beauties, has all the audacities too. It has endeavored to make the sublime and daring notion prevail among the mass of men that salvation is reserved for the poor. What a magnificent thing! And if this religion of poverty has degenerated in the course of the centuries, with what consolation has it not bathed those thrice-happy souls whom an unbroken faith guides through misery and humiliation!

But there has never been a religion which has been able to found itself upon renunciation without compensation. Is he poor, this man who consents to go unclad, roofless, unfed, up to the day when there will be showered upon him all the riches of the kingdom of God? Has he no thought of a supreme gift, of a magnificent possession, the man to whom his master, in person, has given the command: "Lay up your treasures in heaven, where they will not be lost"?

He does not exist, the hopeless being who does not hunger for some treasure, even if it is an imaginary one, even an unreal one, even one that is lost in a bewildering future.

In what an abyss of poverty should we groan if our kingdom were not of this world and were nowhere outside the world, either?

And now a generation of men has come that no longer believes in the supernatural felicities of the future life and seems no longer to have anything to hope from a world consumed by hatred and given over inevitably, for long years, to confusion, destitution, egotistical passions.

In truth, the programmes of the social factions have no consolation for us, there is nothing in them that speaks of love and the true blessings; all these monuments of eloquence bring us back to hatred and anguish.

The most generous of them only give us glimpses of new struggles, new sheddings of blood, when our age is drunk with crime and fatigue. To whichever side the individual turns he finds himself crushed, scoffed at, sacrificed to insatiable, hostile gods.

A few years ago Maeterlinck wrote: "Up to the present men have left one religion to enter another; but when we abandon ours, it is not to go anywhere. That is a new phenomenon, with unknown consequences, in the midst of which we live."

Having quoted these words, I hasten to add that the war is no particular consequence of this moral state of the world. The question of religion is not involved at all. The priests are quite ready to abuse these easy oppositions in order to obtain arguments in favor of their cause. But they know well enough, alas! that if the teaching of Christ stigmatizes wars, the religions have only contributed to multiply and aggravate them. They know very well that, in the conflict that now divides the earth, the religions have shown themselves enslaved to the states. No one has wished to take up the wallet and staff of the dead Tolstoy.

Humanity seems poorer and more truly disinherited than ever. Its kingdom is in itself and in everything that surrounds it; but it has sold it for a morsel of bread. And how can one reproach it for this? It is very hungry and its heart is not open to beauty.

II

We shall seek together the materials of our happiness. Together we shall pile up all those marvelous little things that must constitute our patrimony, our wealth.

We shall have great misfortunes and we shall often be bitterly deceived. It is because the war has succeeded in depriving the simplest and the most sacred things of the light of eternity. That is not the least consequence of the catastrophe. We must make a painful effort to recover that light and clear it of its blemishes. Silence, solitude, the sky, the vestiture of the earth, all the riches of the poor have been sullied as if forever. The works of art have been mutilated. They have taken refuge under the earth where they seem to veil their faces.

We ought to seek and gather together the debris so that we can take up and love in secret every day the fragments of our liberties.

We ought to think unceasingly of that "mean landscape" of which Charles Vildrac has spoken in one of his most beautiful poems. It is an unfruitful landscape, despoiled, denatured by the sad labor of men, and apparently worn out;—

> But even so you found, if you sought there,
> One happy spot where the grass grew rich,
> Even so you heard, if you listened,
> The whisper of leaves
> And the birds pursuing one another.
>
> And if you had enough love,
> You could even ask of the wind
> Perfumes and music ...

We shall have enough love! That shall be the principle and source of our wealth.

And so we shall not have a whole life of poverty. When love, that is to say, grace, abandons us, we shall perhaps know hours of poverty. That will help us all the better to understand our hours of opulence, and all the better cherish them.

III

If you wish, we can divide our task, enumerate the coffers in which we are to pile our treasures.

First of all, let us stop over a word. We have said: to possess is to know. The definition may seem to you arbitrary. On the chance of this I open my little pocket dictionary, which is the whole library I have as a soldier, and read: "To possess: to have for oneself, in one's power, to know to the bottom." Let us accept that. We shall see, page by page, if it is possible for us to satisfy these naïve, direct definitions.

What is most certain to attract our glance, when we look about us, is the world of men, our fellow-creatures. Their figures are certainly the most affecting spectacle that can be offered us. Their acts undoubtedly constitute, owing to a natural inclination and an indestructible solidarity, the chief object of our curiosity. Good! We shall possess them first of all. We shall possess this inexhaustible fund of other people.

We shall feel no shame then in contemplating, with a noble desire, whatever strikes our senses, the animals, that is to say, the plants, the material universe of stones and waters, the sky and even the populous stars. These, too, ought to be well worth possessing!

Already our wealth seems immense. Our ambition is still greater: we must possess our dreams. But have not illustrious men made more beautiful dreams than ours? Yes, and these men are called Shakespeare, Dante, Rembrandt, Goethe, Hugo, Rodin; there are a hundred of them, even more; their works form the royal crown of humanity. We shall possess that crown. It is for us it was forged, for us it was bejewelled with immortal joys.

It would be vain to extend our possession only into space. It overruns time: we possess the past, that is to say, our memories, and the future in our hopes.

And then we also possess, and in the strictest sense of all, our sorrows, our griefs, our despair, if that supreme and terrible treasure is reserved for us.

Finally, there will be times when we possess nothing but an idea, but this may perhaps be the idea of the absolute or the infinite. If it is given us to possess God, then, no doubt, nothing else will be necessary to us.

Every time that we possess the world purely we shall find that we have touched an almost unhoped for happiness, for it is always being offered to us and we do not think of it: we shall possess ourselves.

We shall share all our riches with our companions: that shall be our apostolate. And we shall manage in some way to resist the seductions or the commands of a society that is going to ruin, a society that is even more unhappy and abused than corrupt. If, in consequence, we are permitted to glimpse, even if only for the space of a minute, a little more happiness about us, a little more happiness than there is at present, we shall at last be so happy as to accept death with joy.

IV

The greatest of all joys is to give happiness, and those who do not know it have everything to learn about life. The annals of humanity abound with illustrious deeds aptly proving that generosity enriches first of all those who practise it.

Not to mention any celebrated instance, I shall tell you one simple little tale. It is of the truth I live on, my daily bread.

Just now, not far from me, there is a young English soldier from the neighborhood of York who is so severely wounded in the lower part of the stomach that the natural functions of the body have been completely upset and he has been reduced to a state of terrible suffering.

And yet, when I went to see him this morning, this boy gave me an extraordinary smile, his very first, a smile full of delicacy and hope, a smile of resurrection.

Presently I learned the cause of this great joy. The dying man pulled from under his pillow a cigarette he had hidden there, which he had secretly saved for me and now gave me.

V

There are many who preach an unpretentious life and the sweetness of possessing a little garden. The most magnificent of gardens is insignificant compared with this world in which nothing is refused us. Accepting the little garden we should have the air of those dispossessed kings who lose an empire to be ironically dowered with a small island.

If we find it pleasant to employ our muscles in digging the earth, there are a thousand spots where we can easily practise this wholesome and fruitful exercise. But we shall never really possess a single clod of earth because a legal deed has declared that it belongs exclusively to us. The world itself! Our love demands the whole world; the rocks, the clouds, the great trees along the highway, the darting flight of birds, receding into the evening, the rustling verdure high above that wall that vainly strives to shut in the private property of someone else, the shining glory of those flowers we glimpse through the iron railings of a park, and even that very wall and railing themselves.

According to the stretch of our wings, the scope of our desires, we shall possess whatever our hands touch with ardor and respect, whatever delights our eyes from the summits of mountains, whatever our thoughts bring back from their travels through legendary lands.

To possess the world is purely a question of the intensity of our understanding of it. One does not possess things on their surfaces but in their depths; but the spirit alone can penetrate into the depths, and for the spirit there is no barrier.

Many men to whom the law allows the gross, official possession of a statue, a gem, a beautiful horse or a province wear themselves out fulfilling a rôle to which no human being has received a call. Every moment they perceive with bitterness that men who have no legal title whatever to these material goods draw from them a delight that is superior to the enjoyment they themselves get from them as absolute owners. They often find, in this way, that a friend appreciates their beautiful pictures better than they do, that a groom is a better judge of their own stables, that a passer-by draws out of "their landscape" a purer joy than theirs and more original ideas. They take their revenge by obstinately confusing the usage of a thing with its possession.

Jesus said that the rich man renounced the kingdom of God. He renounces many other things as well. For if he shuts himself up within his proud walls, he abandons the marvelous universe for a small fragment of it; and if he is actually curious about the universe, if he appreciates its significance, how can he consent without guilt to hide a portion of it away from the contemplation of others?

In order to express the gross and exclusive possession of things society has invented various words and phrases that betray the weak efforts of men to appropriate for themselves, in spite of everything, in spite of the laws of love, the riches that remain the prerogative of all. They speak, for example, of "disposing of a piece of property," which means having it subject to our pleasure, being able to do as we choose with it. The sacrilegious vanity of this view of the world gives the possessor, as his supreme right, the power to destroy his own treasure. He could not, indeed, have a greater right than that. But what sort of desperate possession is it, I ask, that considers the destruction of the object possessed as the supreme manifestation of power?

The world has long known and still knows slavery. Lords and masters claimed the extravagant right of disposing of other human beings. They all insisted, as a mark of authority, on their right of dealing death to their slaves. But truly, what was the power of these despots compared with the deep, sensitive, voluntary bond that united Plato to Socrates, or John to Christ?

Epictetus suffered at the hands of Epaphroditus. For all that, Epaphroditus was not able to prevent his slave from reigning, through his thought, over the centuries. Epaphroditus' right of possession seems to us ridiculous and shameful. Who can fairly envy him when so many centuries have passed judgement on him?

VI

Every philosophy has given magnificent expression to these immortal truths. What can we add to the words of Epictetus, of Marcus Aurelius, of Christ in regard to the vanity of those riches which alone society admits to be of value?

But the poets have said to us, "Do not abandon the world, for it abounds in pure and truly divine joys that will be lost if you do not harvest them!"

The road that ought to be sweet for us to follow crosses now that of the Christians, now that of the Stoics. We may stop now at the Garden of Olives, now at the threshold of that small house without a door, without furnishings, where the master of Arrien used to live.

Our road will lead us even more often through wild, solitary places, or to the pillow of some man who sleeps in the earth, or to the smiling dwelling of some humble friend, or again into the melodious shadow where the souls of Beethoven and Johann Sebastian Bach forever dwell.

We shall not struggle with the mass of deluded man to possess the known, so long as the unknown remains without a master. We shall give up crude material possession in order to dream all the better of spiritual possession.

No, we cannot any longer renounce our kingdom when it calls to us, when for us it sings, hosanna!

And those of us who already have their place in the kingdom of heaven must not hesitate to demand their share of this world also; for the world has been given to all men so that each man, with the help of all the rest, may possess the whole of it.

III
THE POSSESSION OF OTHERS

I

In the exile of the war I have fifteen comrades, and we live side by side like seamen on the deck of a ship. Everything brings us together: work, sleep, play, food and danger. Even our quarrels reunite us, for, in order to quarrel well, you have to know your man: between strangers disputes have little savor.

I never chose these men for my companions, as I once thought I had a right to do. They have been given to me like a handful of fruit of which some is juicy and some green. They have been taken at random, as if by a drag of that net which respects nothing, from the swarming species of man. Thanks, therefore, to the blind and divine world which has thrown the net into the flood!

They are my treasure, my study, and my daily task. They are my purpose, my horizon, my torment, and my recompense.

Although far from my own people, far from those with whom I have carried on my life, I could not feel myself destitute, abandoned; the world is not empty for me since I have these fifteen men to manage, this cherished problem to ponder, this soil to work over, this vintage for the winepress.

I accept the gift, the restless opulence, the fifteen glances that open on fifteen different heavens where there shine neither the same seasons nor the same stars, those fifteen proud, vindictive souls whom I must win over and subdue like wild horses.

To be sure, a few of these men are frank, level in temperament, as plain to the eye as a smooth pebble on the beach; one touches them, holds them, grasps them in a moment like a big piece of silver in the hollow of the hand. But so many others are changeable, furtive, so many others are rough like ore in which only the fissures glisten and betray the inner nobility.

The more unresponsive and secretive they seem, without any obvious beauty, the more resolved I find I am to look upon them as a treasure, to search through them as if they were a soil that is full of wealth.

There are some of them that I love, there are some whom I think that I do not love. What does it matter! The interest I devote to them is not in the least dependent on the throbs of my heart. That one who never speaks and conceals, under his obstinate forehead, two little eyes of green glass,—certainly he does not naturally arouse my affection. Nevertheless, how different is the attention with which I regard him from the curiosity of a scientist watching the stirrings of fish in an aquarium! It makes me think, that attention, rather of the dizzy joy of the miser who weighs a gold-piece, the effigy on which doesn't please him. Gold, nevertheless!

True! How could I feel bored with these faces turned toward me, with this choir of human voices singing, each in its own familiar key, yet blending into the masculine clamor of an orchestra?

Everything they say is precious; less so, however, than what they keep to themselves. The reasons they give for their actions astonish me at times; those they do not confess, especially those of which they themselves are ignorant, always fill me with passionate interest. A word, fallen from their lips like a piece of paper from an unknown pocket, arrests me and sets me dreaming for long days. About them I build up daring and yet fragile hypotheses which they either obligingly support or destroy with a careless gesture. I always begin again, delighting in it; it is my recreation. I enjoy finding that my hypotheses are right, for that satisfies my pride; I enjoy finding I am wrong, for that reveals to me leafy depths in my park that are still unexplored.

And then I know that only a small part of their nature is involved in our intercourse. The rest branches off, ramifies out into the perspectives of the world. I think of it as of that side of the moon which men will never see. I reconstruct with a pious, a burning patience that life of theirs which is outside this, their true life, endlessly complicated, linked by a thousand tentacles with a thousand other unknown lives. So must Cuvier's mind have wandered as he turned and returned a fossil tooth, the only vestige of some vast, unknown organism.

There is all this in people, and then there is the past that each one has, his own past, his ancestors, the prodigious combination of actions and of souls of which he is the result. And there is his future, the unexplored desert toward which he stretches out anxious tentacles, and into which I dare to venture, I, the stranger, with trembling heart, the tiny lantern in my hand.

These are my riches today. They are inalienable: a man may flee from an indiscretion, he cannot escape the grip of contemplation and love. Even if he desired it, his very struggles would reveal his movements, betray the deepest secrets of his being, deliver him over bound hand and foot.

As for myself, eager to hoard up my treasure, I give myself up without a struggle. Rich in others, I yield myself into their hands. And if, in spite of myself, I attempt some evasion, am I not sure to render the prey all the more desirable, all the more beautiful?

II

They say of curiosity that it was the beginning of science. That is not praise enough, it sounds rather like an excuse.

What is more human, more touching than this religious reaching out toward the unknown, this sort of instinct which makes us divine and attack the mystery?

To take pride in not being curious! One might as well take pride in some ridiculous infirmity. It is true that even that is in the order of things normal, and that vanity finds its nourishment where it can.

Doubtless there is a sort of curiosity which is both weak and cowardly. It is that of men who dare not remain alone a moment face to face with themselves; they take refuge in loquacity and in reading the daily newspapers. Their fashion of interesting themselves in everything that goes on is a confession that they are unable to become interested in anything eternal. They depend as if for nourishment on that noise which those who have nothing to say are always making. They are like children who cannot amuse themselves alone, or like stupid monarchs who fear nothing so much as silence and their own thoughts, the emptiness of their own thoughts!

And then there are the easy-going people. They want to know everything, the number of your maternal aunt's children, the price of the furniture and the wages of the servants. They want to know everything and they will never know anything. Their life is spent in forced smiles and in gracefully holding a cup of tea.

Their souls contain vast lists of names, dates and other miserable things. They go through life like beasts of burden, weighed down under loads that have no value.

There are maniacs, too, perverts, freaks, people that are full of curiosity about a postage stamp, the handle of an umbrella; but of these I dare not say anything, for I remember an old and very wise master who used to say to us with a smile: "You who are entering upon scientific careers must begin right away to think about collections, even if you have to collect boxes of matches."

To tell the truth, is it our business to be wise, to be learned? Hardly! It is our business to be rich.

Well, then, there are not two kinds of curiosity. Let us leave out of the question all those dull stupidities we dare to call by this name.

The curious man seems strangely uninterested in that which excites the loquacity of trivial souls. He does not trouble himself to find out the year in which a house was built, or the honors accorded to the architect; he dreams in secret of the tastes, the passions of the man who had that little, low window pierced on the north side and that black tree with its twisted branches planted at the edge of the pond. He does not ask a young woman the name of her dressmaker, but trembles at the thought of understanding what made her choose that disturbing dress to wear this particular day. He does not question his mistress about her opinion of him, but seeks passionately to understand the opinion he has at this moment of her. He does not hasten to ask his travelling companions about their professions and the political opinions they uphold, because, as he watches their faces, he is studying discreetly and sympathetically the meaning of the little wrinkle that moves between their brows, or the significance of a glance, its source and its object. He does not solicit confidences, he receives them almost without wishing to; they come naturally to him; he is their sure and deep receptacle.

Curious about all this vast world, he seems especially concerned with its image in himself. He bears his curiosity like a sacred gift and exercises it, or rather honors it, as one would perform the rites of a cult.

Do not say you would not wish to be that man. You who feel pride in possessing yourself of a secret, in drawing out a confession, in meriting the confidence of another man, must realize that it is a marvelous fortune to be thus the tenderly imperious confidant who cannot be denied, though often the rest of the world knows nothing of it. And it is possible for you, even if you cannot become such a man at once, at least to labor to become one. Begin, with this in view, to deliver yourself from your little servile curiosities. Let us work together for this future. Let us enter so deeply into ourselves that people will say of us, "That man is not curious about anything." From that moment we shall have begun to chant the hymn of the great, the divine curiosity.

III

The possession of others is a passion, that is to say, it is an ordeal, a painful effort. This supreme joy, like all the joys to which we attach value, is born out of suffering.

We must experience men in order to know them, and our neighbor for whom, or through whom, we have never had to endure any anguish, has surprises in store for us, or else escapes us altogether: that is almost a truism.

Like all others, this treasure cannot be acquired without effort, without bitterness; but it knows no decay, it never ceases to grow through the mere play of the forces of our life and seems as if sheltered from the blows of fate. It does not, like money, depreciate in value or serve ignoble ends. It only returns to oblivion.

It is not strictly personal. It can be shared and bequeathed. Since it escapes destruction and death, it can become the most precious of heritages; it has this superiority over money, that its transmission is really valid only after it has been in some sort of way reconquered. It must fall into worthy hands that will know how to work to preserve, cultivate and build it up again. In certain points it resembles what we call experience.

To suffer, first of all! That is surely one of the grandeurs of our race, and we truly love our blessings for what they have cost us in tears, in sweat, in blood.

It is repugnant to the spirit to admit that anything can be a blessing which the war has given. The desperate folly of the Western world has engendered and still holds in reserve such great misfortunes that we cannot ransack all these ruins, these heaps of bones, with any hope of extracting from them, as rag pickers do with their hooks, some fragment that is good, some useful bit of waste. No! There is no excuse for this ferocious, immeasurable stupidity. And yet, men have suffered so terribly from one another that they have learned to know one another, that is to say, to possess one another mutually. In spite of my own denials, let me save this bit of wreckage from the general disaster. That is indeed one blessing so dearly bought that we shall not willingly give it up. And I do not speak here only of those who have fought against each other; I speak also of those who have fought side by side, who have shed their blood for the same cause and under the same standards.

Companions have been given us, imposed upon us, association with whom, even when casual and transitory, would once have seemed impossible to us. Living as free men, we sought to control the inevitable as far as possible, to choose our own road and avoid those whose opinions or points of view about the universe were likely to offend our own. We thus made use of that liberty for the most part in order to humor our irritable feelings, to lull our souls to sleep in a precarious security, and restrict the area of our inward activity.

Then came the war and we had not only to suffer from the enemy, to endure unforeseen attacks in regions of ourselves that we considered invulnerable, but to suffer still more from our own messmates, from those who commanded us and especially those whom we commanded.

Could it have been otherwise? No! No! If that suffering had been spared us, we should not have been men, we should not have gone to war, we should not have been those divine animals whom it is so beautiful and so shameful to be and whom we cannot help being.

We have been told that all suffering is sterile, hopeless and without redemptive power. That it only serves to nourish hatred. But how marvelous it is when it engenders understanding, that is to say, possession, that is to say, love!

I have observed that for many men, except in actual bodily encounter, combat face to face, the enemy has lost all individual or specific character and has become almost confounded with the great hostile forces of nature: lightning, fire, tidal waves. The bullet coming from so far away, the shell hurled from beyond the horizon, all these mortal powers are simply like a form of blind destiny. In spite of daily lessons in hatred, in spite of vociferations, these men die courageously, with a resigned despair, without hatred.

But with other, less noble souls, the tendency to aversion and quarreling, thus turned back from the enemy, seeks its objects in their immediate surroundings and finds them, creates them, alas!

My comrades, my comrades, if the uncertainty of your spirit, your agony, the rebelliousness of your afflicted flesh urges you to seek those who are responsible, do not look too angrily upon those who are about you, do not, in your aberration, accuse Houtelette because he is a chatterbox, Exmelin because he is an egoist, or Blèche because he is a rude, morose commander. Do not place your misery to the account of Méry, who is so slow in obeying, and be willing to admit that Maurin is not to blame for everything because his opinions are not the same as yours. At least, if you must draw your circle of animosity, make it so close about you that it contains only yourselves, and seek first of all in yourselves the causes of your unhappiness.

Better still, apply yourselves to looking your suffering in the face, putting it, with insight and precision, to the proof.

You know that a loathsome drink almost ceases to be loathsome when you drink it without haste but with a desire to appreciate the precise quality of its bitterness.

Exactly in this same manner you should endeavor to measure, to study your suffering. Instead of abhorring it, try in a way to understand it; it will become interesting, curious, I dare not say lovable.

If Méry carries out your orders badly, consider systematically how he can be made to become, in spite of himself, a really good servant. If Blèche exercises his authority in a way that incessantly wounds you, interest yourself in his brutality, try to analyze his movements, his expressions, his familiar habits, and you will then be in a better position, not to escape from him indeed, but to avoid at times the sting, the cut of his peremptoriness. You will make him restless by doing this, and you will set him thinking. It is not necessary for him to fear you, it is enough for him to recognize in you a free force with which he has to reckon, a force it is wise to propitiate. Meanwhile, to use a colloquialism, "you've got him." Every time you have obliged him to be less arrogant, more just with you, you can say that you have "had" him, as the soldiers so admirably put it.

This possession costs a certain amount of work. But you are willing to toil eight hours in order to earn ten francs that do not remain for a single day between your fingers; you can certainly afford a few minutes of your effort and your soul to acquire a treasure of which nothing will ever be able to deprive you.

IV

The very rich man owns several estates. There is always one that he prefers, that he frequents and cultivates by choice. There are others where he goes only from time to time, at the solicitation of some state of his soul which inclines him to seek, for a period, the mountains, or the ocean, or the open country. There are some, finally, which he does not love at all but of which, nevertheless, he will not dispossess himself because they are part of his fortune.

It is so with you who possess a family, friends, comrades, and adversaries. It is so with you who are able to draw, without let or hindrance, from the immense well of humankind. You must refuse nothing; you must accept everything, find out the value of everything, store everything away. The world of men is a rich patrimony, the exploitation of which is expressly confided to you. You must not be a bad administrator, you must make all your land bring forth its fruit.

Choose every day what is necessary to you, for you are the master.

You must know, besides, how to accept the inevitable and take chances, for you are nothing but a man.

Construct a scale, a clear, harmonious keyboard. Like an organist you must know the right moment to pull the stop of the oboe and unloose the thunder of the bass. The pipes are not at fault: it is for you to become a good musician. The face of Guillaumin suits you in the morning, and his ideas rejuvenate you like fresh water. The eloquence of Maurin is like a tonic in your hours of recreation. But there are desolate evenings when what you undoubtedly need is the deep voice of Cauchois and his affectionate silence.

V

In spite of the legendary ages, in spite of the religions, in spite of the poets, in spite of the marvelous traditions and, above all, in spite of our own deepest aspirations, we must unquestionably abandon the hope of an occult correspondence between souls.

It is a renunciation that it is hard to admit. Every day events envelop us that seem to revive the vanished perfume of mystery. Our reason is in no haste to dissipate these clouds, to pierce these appearances: too well they soothe the irritating need of not being quite solitary in the interior of ourselves, of not being quite exiles in an inaccessible desert.

That nothing outside our senses can reveal to us the proximity of a beloved person, the danger that is approaching him, the death that is coming to clasp him, is an extremity to which we find ourselves reduced without ever submissively making up our minds to it.

A few courageous men have halted before this mountain and undertaken to lift it. Let us leave them toiling in the shadow; let us aid them, if not by our effort, at least by our silence, and wait.

Let us wait, but let us not cease to go forth to other battles. The unknown never fails us. And as for what we shall choose, there is so much in the unknown to allure us, to enchant us! If we give up surmounting one obstacle another will always rise before our feet. From obstacle to obstacle we shall always be led to the foot of the same wall. We shall consume our whole life in the struggle, knowing that the very interest of life lies in that struggle and in those obstacles.

Now and then, detached by great efforts of the pickaxe and the mattock, a fragment of the somber mountain rolls at our feet. We stop it with rapture, we examine it, we lift it with a sort of sadness, in order to try its weight. There is no victory that demands so great a price or seems to us more desolate. It is as if we roused ourselves to a frenzy to destroy the unknown in order that our success might fill us with bitterness. Happily, the unknown is always there.

I find myself alone with the person who of all the world is the closest to me, the best loved, the most perfectly chosen. The silence exhales a light perfume, a unique perfume that seems that of our kindred souls. Oh! how we should like to believe that the essences of our beings, delivered at last, might communicate and unite with each other in the intermediate space, in the impassable abyss!

At this very moment we surprise in one another's eyes a common thought. Simultaneously, it escapes our lips with a sort of rapturous precipitancy, as if we were afraid of not arriving at exactly the same moment at the *rendez-vous*, as if we wished, with the harmonious precision of a well-rehearsed duet, to confess together some matchless certainty.

We are happy, filled with astonishment.... But I am not deceived.

I do not yet hold it, palpitating, for good and all, between my fingers, the proof that has been so long sought for. Not yet, this day, have I met face to face either God or the immortal soul.

Only too well I know that some slight sound, some rhythm outside us, the beating of a bird's wing, the boring of an insect in the old wood of the furniture, the sigh of the wind under the door,—that it is one of these things which has suddenly set our souls in tune, awakened the echoes of affinity in the abysses of our two separate selves. We have so many memories in common, we have so carefully matched our tastes, we have so well unified our material world and tried to blend even our futures together that the very touch of the violinist's bow suffices to make us vibrate in harmony.

But there must be the touch of the bow, there must be the perfume, so faint that one experiences its suggestions without being sure of its presence; perhaps there is necessary only one of those obscure phenomena which pass the limit of our senses in the twilight where our inadequate organs can only gropingly divine the world.

This is our meager certainty. Very well! Let us not reject it in our spite; for it has its depth, its beauty. We must make it our own, force it to enrich us.

Where the exercise of the intelligence seems to result in the fatal imprisonment of the soul within itself, love enables us to see how the soul can reach beyond its own limits into time and space. In vain does the intelligence prove to us that all this is only an illusion. That illusion is beautiful; let us make up our minds to give it shape. Through its very longings to escape from its confines, the soul may perhaps succeed in breaking them, and it is to love without a doubt that it will owe the miracle of its deliverance.

We possess only an imperfect means of communion. So be it! Let us labor tenderly to perfect that means. It is thus that the creators of science and industry labor, and we must admit that their stubbornness has succeeded in making a very great evil out of a small one. Let us not be less ingenious! This sinister progress ought to give us encouragement: moral civilization deserves as much care as the other sort.

With our brothers, our wives, our friends, let us freely seek to have so many things in common, let us strive so passionately to understand one another, that our thoughts, ceaselessly pressing toward this goal, may continually experience the sense of infinity and eternity.

There lies our path; if it urges us to possess the largest portion we can of the human world, let us first begin by intimately possessing what we love. This possession I am sure is the only real one. They knew it very well, those desperate men who have loved fiercely the mere bodies of women without ever receiving the real gift that can be yielded in a glance, from a distance, with the swiftness of lightning.

VI

There are men who set out from their homes in the morning in the pursuit of wealth. They walk with their eyes on the pavement, they fling themselves furiously into all sorts of petty labors. They dream of lost money, princely gifts, scandalous inheritances, lotteries. They think of gold as of an inaccessible woman whom they can strike down and ravish in a corner. They return home in the evening worn out, exasperated, famished, as poor as ever. They have not even seen the face of the man who sat next them in the subway. That face itself was a fortune.

Do you seek out your friend because, on occasion, he can lend you the sum you foresee you are going to need, because he can speak to some cabinet official on your behalf, because he is a jovial host? If that is the case, you are a slave, you possess nothing. Do you, on the contrary, love him for that way of smiling he has that so delights you, for the candor and tenderness his hesitating voice betrays, his gift of tears and his stormy repentances? If this is so, you are very rich: that man is yours and he is a treasure worth having.

Can you recall the use you made of your first five-franc piece? Most assuredly not! But you will never forget a certain expression which, in your eyes, distorted or made more beautiful some well-loved face when you were a little child. That has, and always will have, a place among your treasures: that day you really learned something of importance, and you have never ceased since to recall the victory and turn it to account.

If you have little inclination to squander your fortune, what is to prevent you from assembling it under one title-deed? A single face, a single soul, is yet an inestimable estate. One may believe one has exhausted all one's resources, but one is always deceived, for like the earth, the human landscape is always perpetually laboring and bears fruit every season.

The peasant who possesses only an acre is full of pride nevertheless, for he knows that his possession goes down to the very center of the earth.

For many years I have watched the same face, like the faithful horizon stretched across the aperture of a window. It contrives, that face, a thousand things, it expresses and reflects a thousand things, I alone know its touching beauty, since I alone am able to reap all its harvests, since I alone cannot, without a glance, allow the tiniest flower of every day to die.

VII

It is not wholly within your power to be without enemies; it behooves you, indeed, not to lack adversaries. Above all, it behooves you to know your adversaries. From that to conquering them is but a short step. From that to loving them is no step at all.

Do not dread an experience too much; consider your adversary attentively and try to imagine his motives, those that he declares as well as those that he conceals, those that he invents as well as those of which he is ignorant. Think long enough and with enough intensity to understand these reasons, and even to discover new ones of which your adversary has not thought; this will not be difficult for you if you have any knowledge of yourself.

Then make a strong effort to put yourself, in spirit, in the place of him you are combatting. Do not go so far as to detest yourself, but do not refuse this opportunity of judging yourself severely. For a test: perhaps you have entered upon this experience with your teeth and fists clenched; stop when you find that you are smiling and that your hands are relaxed.

One has no idea how much this exercise inclines one to justice, how profitable it is and how destructive of hatred. Too much imagination would perhaps lead you to neglect your own cause; stop in time, therefore, unless you wish to become, as the spectators may decide, either a fool or a hero.

For my part, I have no hesitation in counselling such a practice: it teaches one to conquer, to conquer smilingly. It teaches one to know one's adversary. And then, too, it is good as everything is good that forestalls and destroys hatred.

There is only one single thing in the world that is, perhaps, really hateful, stupidity. But even that is disputable, and moreover it is always a presumptuous assertion.

Happy is the man who has no enemies. But, I repeat, he who has no adversaries, he who has not accepted those that life offers him, or has not been able to procure any of his own will, is ignorant of a great source of wealth.

There is but small merit in understanding those whom we love; there is a great, a crowningly bitter pleasure, in penetrating a soul that is hostile to us, in making it our own by main force, in colonizing it.

Not to choose our friends, that is to be too self-denying, too modest. Not to choose our adversaries, that is altogether too stupid; it is inexcusable.

A voice whispers in my ear: "We do not choose our vermin, we do not choose our mad dogs...." Alas, no! but that is quite another matter.

VIII

Every time I hear someone use the word "promiscuity," I recall an experience I once had. An experience,—that is a great deal to say, it was such a slight affair after all.

It was in the days when there still used to be in Paris those omnibuses with upper stories. I was returning home quite late, on one of those fresh, airy nights when one suddenly draws in, through the fetid breath of the streets, a gust that comes from afar and seems unwilling to let itself be defiled, obliterated. I was dreaming all alone, quite to myself, about things of no interest to anyone but myself, but that happily filled the infinite space of the world.

Through the depths of this reverie I became aware of a slight, muffled blow against my right shoulder. This did not rouse me from my own absorption. A second time the blow came, followed by a soft, continuous contact. It gave me a disagreeable sensation.

By my side there was a young boy of sixteen or seventeen, dressed like an apprentice. The uncertain glimmer of the street-lamps lighted up his pale, weary face. His eyes were closed and he seemed overwhelmed with sleep. I noticed that every few moments his head, swaying with the jolts of the vehicle, would strike against my shoulder. He would raise it up with an instinctive movement, only to let it fall back the more heavily the next moment. Once he let it lie there. At the time I was so lost in my dreams that the animal in me alone rose to its defense: I pushed the young lad gently back into his place. It was trouble lost; the next second he abandoned himself anew against my shoulder with a sort of desperate ingenuousness. I pushed him back two or three times, then I gave it up and tried, in spite of this slight burden, to continue my glorious excursion in the interior of my own self.

But I did not succeed. An extraordinary, unforeseen, unknown sensation was sweeping over me. It was a penetrating animal warmth. It came from that head propped against my shoulder, and also from a certain frail, bent arm which I felt slowly digging into my side. The little apprentice was sound asleep.

I bent down my face and felt his breath like that of a child passing in little puffs over my cheek and my chin. From that moment on, I ceased completely to think of my important personal affairs and I had only one anxiety: to see to it that the boy did not awaken.

I do not know how long this sleep lasted: I was warm with a strange, delicate warmth; I had a sense of well-being, I was absorbed, I was penetrating into an unknown universe, as vast, as starry as my own. I could not understand how this contact could have offended me at first, even disgusted me. I had torn off the prickly shell and was tasting, like a nourishing kernel, that human presence and companionship. I was happy and interested.

We reached a place where there were shouts and lights. The little fellow sat up with a start, rubbed his eyes and ran stumbling towards the stairway and disappeared; he had not even seen me.

He did not know what I owed him and that he would never be forgotten.

IX

One must not, at first sight, say that a man is uninteresting and that his face is expressionless. One might as well say that the water of a river is empty when it swarms with vegetable and animal life.

In one's manner of listening to a man there may be prejudice and suspicion, there must not be indifference or indolence. The soul has, in its arsenal, lenses, microscopes, and powerful sources of light for exploring objects to their depths, through their transparencies, into the innermost recesses of their organs.

At the beginning of the war I lived for two years with a comrade who was invariably silent and indolent; his handsome face remained always so gloomy, his actions remained so devoid of purpose and significance, that I despaired of ever making him my prey; I was simply never touched with a desire to get hold of him.

Then a day came when I heard him greet some happening with a word, pronounced in such a challenging tone that I decided to undertake the expedition. I spent days and days at it, with the pickaxe, mattock, and little lantern of the miner. I have thought of him ever since with stupefaction, as of those subterranean, half-explored chasms where one finds rivers, colonnades, domes, blind animals and terrible shapes of stone.

The nature of the object should not discourage one's interest. The viper is a dangerous and vindictive creature. The naturalists who have been able to study it have only been able to do so because they have studied with passion, that is to say, with love.

So much to tell you that that sort of zoological curiosity you may bring to the study of your neighbor no more authorizes cruelty than it allows you to dispense with affection.

Extreme attention resembles affection. Contemplation is pure love.

X

It is after my own taste that I mean to enjoy my possessions.

First, I wish to have part possession of my companions. There is no question of my being the only one to possess them, or of my limiting my empire to one or two of them. What I plan is to undertake each conquest separately. This word, we shall see, does not signify seduction, but a knowledge that is full of respect, a profound, lasting interest, an enthusiasm, a passionate contemplation.

Observe them, your comrades: say you have twenty-three of them; you will find through them twenty-three distinct representations of yourself, and that in spite of yourself, through the mere play of everyday life. One of them knows chiefly your tireless patience; another, who works beside you all day, knows that you are painstaking and irritable; he is, however, ignorant of what a third, the friend of your fireside, knows,—that you are a careful and anxious father. There are others for whom you are, above all, a soul torn by religion or a mind familiar with everything that concerns social questions, or a great lover of reading. Others, finally, see in you only a good billiard-player, or a crack shot, or a courteous companion.

You are, of course, all these things. The totality of these various aspects is, indeed, you, provided that we add also many other qualities that no one suspects. But each one of your comrades sees an aspect of you that is different from what his neighbor sees. For this reason, avoid confusion, avoid mixing things. Be lavish of yourself in every sense, but begin by being prudent, careful of your resources and skilful in the art of grouping them.

One day you were having an affectionate conversation with Maurin. You were delighted with one another, delighted to be together, satisfied with your fellowship, your mutual possession. You were not talking of anything very private. But then Blèche came up, Blèche with whom you have such profitable, such intimate talks, and all the charm of Maurin's company disappeared without your being able to compensate yourself with the usual pleasure you take in the society of Blèche. This was because, in the presence of both, you could not give each one what you are accustomed to give him, nor could you ask from him what he gives only to you.

These combinations, like those of the chemists, demand much care and judgment. Don't protest! Don't exclaim that such notions are too subtle, too complex: you do not receive all your friends pell-mell. However much of an epicure you may be, you still give more attention to the selection of your guests than to the composition of the menu. Of what importance is the most delicate fare in comparison with the delight the conversation of carefully chosen human beings gives us?

That is why, when you are sure of two persons for whom you feel an interest that borders on passion, you experience such a delicious anxiety at the moment of presenting them to one another, of bringing them together in your presence.

You are like the maker of fireworks who is about to mix changeable substances with explosive properties in his mortar. You weigh them carefully and combine them in well-defined proportions. You take time preparing each of the spiritual elements of this mixture.

And when the union is accomplished, you seem to be saying to each of them: "I have prepared a magnificent gift for you. Come, now, and know one another."

Your heart throbs, because each of them is not only going to know the other but is going to learn to know you through the eyes of the other.

Could there be a better reason for living?

XI

However brief may be the intercourse we have with a man, we always come away from it somewhat modified: we find we are a little greater than we were before, or a little less great, better or worse, exalted or diminished.

I have learned this from having, in the course of my life, approached many men, both famous and obscure, who do not dream what I owe them or the harm they have been able to do me.

We instinctively recognize and classify individuals according to this faculty they have, some of drawing us out, others of crushing us. It is a faculty they usually exert without knowing it, even against their will: they are tonic or depressing just as one is short or tall, just as one has black eyes or green. But the comparison breaks down in this respect, that it is always possible to modify the reaction we produce on others.

In this matter we exhibit a special sensibility that may be compared to the tropisms which push plants up toward the light or make them struggle against gravitation. We go toward some and flee from others, regardless of our interests or our prejudices.

The man whose companionship we seek because it stimulates us is not necessarily he who strives to give us a good opinion of ourselves. Often he is taciturn, sometimes surly, occasionally ironical and cutting. Nevertheless, there emanates from his whole person something like approbation, a confession of confidence. Even if he insists, harshly, noisily, upon calling attention to our faults, he does not make us despair of ourselves and our future. And if he never speaks to us about ourselves we yet know, by some imperceptible gesture, by some tone in his voice, by a gleam in his eye, that he is interested in us.

Every time we leave him we like him better, we like ourselves better, we like all humanity better, we look at everything with a smile, we are as full of plans as a tree in April.

The other sort of man, on the contrary, is forever deluding himself. He pursues before our very eyes an end which we see, with grief and bitterness, he regularly fails to attain. Whatever he does, whatever he says, he always shows us that he is a stranger to us, that he is superior and that we do not interest him. Even in his manner of wishing to give us his attention, he exhibits a certain difficulty in seeing us at all. If he tries to seem talkative, important, majestic, his natural gifts turn against him; his cordiality disgusts us, his bearing irritates us, his self-importance makes us want to laugh. We cannot forgive him anything, and especially the fact that we always leave him with the same vague depression, the same disgust of life, and the same distrust of our own undertakings. What we are always escapes him, and although what he is does not escape us, we are discouraged by him all the same.

We must be the first of these two men, he who is, amid all things, in spite of all things, a rich man, he whom the poet of the *Livre d'amour* justly called "a conqueror."

XII

You must not violate your gifts, you must simply study their possibilities. It is what we do with trees and animals in which we are able to instil virtues they do not seem to possess at all naturally.

However humble your position in society may be, however great your poverty, in the crude sense men give to this word, you may none the less become rich and successful without so much as leaving the room where you are in conversation with your comrade, your wife or your favorite adversary. Find your study there. You have observed that when two men meet they begin by sacrificing to the old custom of enquiring briefly about one another's health and affairs, after which, without waiting for the other's reply, each one begins to speak of himself. This is such an old usage that they do not even know they are doing it. Each one speaks of himself for a few moments, then allows the other to talk about himself for about the same length of time. When this has gone on long enough they separate, and each preserves for his partner a vague feeling of gratitude, not so much because he has listened as because he has made a pretense of listening to matters that were of no concern to him.

This fact suggests a great lesson. The majority of men suffer from a sort of neglect, they suffer from not being possessed by anyone, from offering themselves in vain. Stretch out your hand and seize them. Learn to say the word that will assure you the mastery, the domination.

It is inconceivable that so many spirits, tormented by the need for power, by the passion for authority, should waste and sterilize themselves in order to hoard money, win rank, obtain a title. They gain nothing from it but a pride that withers them; they clasp only the shadow of what they pursue.

Seek a little and you will soon find that they are legion who ask nothing better than to cast themselves into your nets. Do not believe that they are always the mediocre victims. It is not only the wretched who wish to be understood and consoled. There are many sceptics who await with anguish the touch of a hand to deliver them from their scepticism. There are many happy men, too, who cannot bear to be alone with their happiness, for man has even more need of help in joy than in sorrow.

It has often happened, while walking with a comrade, a stranger or an adversary, that I would find him hard, defiant, rebellious at every touch. Thereupon, I would set out openly, under his very eye, to capture him. I would begin to speak to him about himself. I would say to him: "The unique things about you are...." And I would confide to him everything I thought about him, being particularly careful to say nothing more about myself. I would interest myself in him, not fictitiously—that is a barren and a perilous game—but with all my heart, with all my intelligence. I would tell him what I knew, what I already possessed of him, his virtues and his faults. Confused or irritated, he would come to my feet, he would appear as if before a bar to give thanks or to plead, to show his claws or to purr. The things I had said to him might be very severe; I still felt that he was grateful to me for having cared about him, even in order to attack him. No longer was he in any haste to leave me. Often he would come back on the days that followed and make me unexpected visits; though I could see that he was provoked, I knew nevertheless that he had come to pay homage, to attest that he was a faithful subject.

"The unique things about you are".... That is a chance phrase. There are others, there are a thousand of them. When you are ready, a grip of the hand or some other human sign may take its place. I remember the story of a certain prefect who, having no worse enemy than a traitor in his department, had the happy thought one day of asking him to have a drink and going away without paying for it. This extraordinary proof of confidence attached the man to him forever.

Not that all your victims will be so tremblingly easy. There are proud souls who set a high price on their conquest, fantastic and sick souls whom one has to seize suddenly and overthrow almost before they are aware of it.

You must set the time and choose the hour of the attack.

Do not accost the business man in the roar of the Exchange; attempt the field rather at the hour when, wearied, he is counting over and reckoning his disillusionments. Do not seize the man of action on the battlefield, but in the moment of leisure when he does not know what to do with his solitude.

What marvelous opportunities must the shy Las Casas have glimpsed at Saint Helena, even though he was pursuing other aims!

I once saw a simple soul publicly congratulate a master surgeon whose skill had for long years placed him above all felicitations. And the celebrated man blushed, bowed, gave in.

A successful lawyer said to me one day: "Each one of my clients imagines that I think only of him, that I occupy myself exclusively with him."

Remember, too, that certain women never capitulate twice: they never forgive themselves for having yielded completely even for a moment. The same thing is true with others who are offended with you because you have "taken" them by force. Do not regret this sacrifice too much: it leaves a beautiful jewel in your casket.

Truly the whole vast race of men belongs to you.

Take and eat, you cannot find more noble food.

See, there is the world you must conquer. It is not that for whose possession proud peoples are driven to declare war; it is indeed quite another world than that which Satan showed Jesus from the summit of the mountain.

IV
ON DISCOVERING THE WORLD

I

The world contains not one single object that might not be a source of happiness. Sorrow springs from this, that man outdoes himself in misusing everything. He turns against his own body or his own spirit all sorts of things that seem well made for his joy.

Every being contains an unbelievable store of happiness, and this one virtue reveals the angle from which he ought to be judged.

Your true business man makes a practice of weighing everything in terms of gold: a human being, a field of wheat, a beam, a precious stone. His tables of value are false, but the principle of valuation remains none the less efficacious, fundamental. The mistake of these persons is in testing everything by a single measure, in reducing everything to this gold which enables them to seek their chosen pleasure. If it is drink, or woman, they transmute an orchard into wine or into women, losing terribly by the exchange. They thus produce a sort of analogy to what the physicists call the degradation of energy: little by little, the traffickers degrade their pleasures until they obtain those they prefer. But happiness is higher than this: it cannot be degraded, bought, transmuted. It is a pure relationship between the soul and the world. It will never be the mere object of a transaction. Many are the men who have fastened their hope, their future upon the acquisition of some material good only to experience after years of effort and privation a burning disillusion. That is because happiness is too proud and free a thing to obey the commands of merchants. It follows laws of its own that seem like inspirations, it does not come at the bidding of business men. The castle we have coveted so long may open at the appointed hour; joy will not take up its abode there unless we have deserved it.

It must be repeated again: the principle of evaluation is at the base of our moral life. But each thing should be valued in itself and for itself.

A tuft of violets is worth a great deal for its perfume and its beauty, it can bring joy or consolation to a great many hearts. But it has only the slightest commercial value; estimated in terms of building lumber or freestone it signifies nothing, or virtually nothing.

That so many men should cut and sell wood, shape and barter the stone of which our houses are built, go gathering violets through the May thickets to sell them to townsfolk, is undoubtedly right and necessary. The real question is quite a different one: we must first possess for their own sakes all the blessings that are offered us, and not obstinately transform them, without an important reason, beyond our strict needs, at the risk of forever losing our understanding and our true possession of them.

It is almost a truism that men who are obliged by their profession to handle, store or sell substances famous for their power of giving pleasure, perfumes, fruits, silks, end by losing all appreciation of them and even by contracting a disgust and contempt for them. Cooks have no appetite. Let us not be cooks, then, in the presence of this vast world; let us know how to preserve or restore to each object its original savor and significance.

I say “restore” intentionally, for the world seems to be more and more turning from its true sense, that is to say, its human sense, the only one for us.

A stone is a beautiful thing, beautiful from all points of view; its grain, its color, its brilliancy, its hardness are all so many virtues that exercise and satisfy our senses, excite our reflections. We have a thousand noble uses, speculative or practical, to which we can put such an object. We shall be the kings of the universe if we assert boldly that we find in these uses and in our joy the very destiny of the stone.

I remember seeing hills that had been disemboweled by a bombardment and were sown with long splinters of twisted iron; the base of a monstrous shell appeared before me, one day, under these conditions, and it seemed to me truly inhuman, this product of the work of men: the noble metal, with which so many good and beautiful things can be made, took on a hateful appearance. Man had achieved the mournful miracle of denaturing nature, rendering it ignoble and criminal.

Truly, we are equally guilty every time we turn an object aside from its mission, which is altogether one of happiness. We are guilty again every time we fail to extract, for others and for ourselves, all the happiness an object holds in store and only asks to be allowed to yield.

II

It is because every fragment of the earth is a source of happiness that men ceaselessly dream of winning that source for their own profit.

They do not wish to have all humanity refresh itself, plunge its feverish face and lips in the cool waters.

Once the springs were the delight and the wealth of whole peoples; they were conducted magnificently along majestically proportioned aqueducts; their liquid opulence, crossing valleys and mountains, entered the cities with a great outburst of architectural joy; it shone and sparkled in the sunlight from a thousand embellished apertures before it went to bathe and nourish the people.

The statues of the gods watched over this treasure.

Today, the most beautiful springs are guarded by railings; one goes to a wicket and pays in order to drink there.

In the same way, all the springs of joy seem to have been sequestered for the profit of a few people.

This is not always for the sake of gain. In most cases it is simply for exclusiveness. The man who owns something capable of giving joy naïvely imagines that he will be happier if he is the only one to drink from this inexhaustible breast. He becomes infatuated with it and thinks of nothing but how to shut up his treasure. He puts up a wall and provides it with fragments of sharp glass, so that the wall may show its teeth, so that it may be not only defensive but, in some sense, offensive. At times, yawning with ennui in the very midst of his material prosperity, he makes an opening in the wall, only to correct this imprudence with a ditch; and from behind this he seems to say, “Now see how rich I am; look and proclaim it in a loud voice, you who pass by, for I am beginning not to be so sure of it myself.”

To shut up a picture, a beautiful tree, a sumptuous tapestry for one’s own exclusive benefit is, after all, only a trifling folly; but there are some who undertake to capture a river, a mountain, a horizon, the sea.

A few years ago, I visited the shore of the Mediterranean, between Cannes and Menton. I was struck by a strange thing: the road that follows the edge of the sea, at the foot of the hills, through a thousand natural beauties, continually loses sight of the waves; it seems as if pushed back, held aside.

People have appropriated the horizon; they have driven their fortune like a wedge between the divine sea and the road of the common folk. They wish to be the only ones to possess the ocean, dawn, the gold and sapphire of moon, the tempests and the thunders of the open sea.

Do not be alarmed, mistaken brothers, do not tremble; we shall not throw down your walls. Live in peace in your sumptuous prison, our portion remains so beautiful and so great that we shall never exhaust it.

Close your gates, you will not shut in the perfume of your shrubbery, nor all the wind, nor all the sky. You will not imprison the fragrant odor of your flower-beds. We shall breathe them, as we pass, lovingly, and continue on our way. We shall go on still further, for we have many things to acquaint ourselves with, we divine so many, many of them that a whole life is short in the light of such a destiny. But if it pleases you to join our vagabond company you will discover, perhaps, the other side of your own walls, which are hung with flax-weed and wild geranium. The road that skirts them outside leads to joy also.

And besides, one does not find these ingenuous walls everywhere. The greed of men has not yet subjected all the beauty of things. You have snatched up in your fingers a fleeting draught of water: the ocean does not seem to be aware of it.

You must understand that we really possess nothing by ourselves. Veil, if you wish, the faces of your women and visit every day the gold in the depths of your vaults. Exclusiveness yields you no wealth save that which is dead and unproductive.

But he is truly rich for whom life is a perpetual discovery.

III

Discovery! It seems as if this word were one of a cluster of magic keys, one of those keys that make all doors open before our feet. We know that to possess is to understand, to comprehend. That, in a supreme sense, is what discovery means.

To understand the world can well be compared to the peaceful, enduring wealth of the great landowner; to make discoveries is, in addition to this, to come into sudden, overflowing riches, to have one of those sudden strokes of fortune which double a man’s capital by a windfall that seems like an inspiration.

The life of a child who grows up unconstrainedly is a chain of discoveries, an enriching of each moment, a succession of dazzling surprises.

I cannot go on without thinking of the beautiful letter I received today about my little boy; it said: "Your son knows how to find extraordinary riches, inexhaustible treasures, even in the barrenest fields, and when I set him on the grass, I cannot guess the things he is going to bring out of it. He has an admirable appreciation of the different kinds of soil; if he finds sand he rolls in it, buries himself in it, grabs up handfuls and flings them delightedly over his hair. Yesterday he discovered a molehole, and you cannot imagine all the pleasure he took in it. He also knows the joys of a slope which one can descend on one's feet, or head over heels, or by rolling, and which is also splendid for somersaults. Every rise of ground interests him, and I wish you could see him pushing his cart up them. There is a little ditch where on the edge he likes to lie with his feet at the bottom and his body pressed tight against the slope. He played interminably, the other day, on top of a big stone; he kept stroking it, he had truly found a new pleasure there. And as for me, I find my wealth in watching him discover all these things."

It is thus a child of fifteen months gives man lessons in appreciation.

Unfortunately, most systems of education do their best to substitute hackneyed phrases for the sense of discovery. A series of conventions are imposed on the child; he ceases to discover and experience the objects in the world in pinning them down with dry, formal labels by the help of which he can recognize them. He reduces his moral life little by little to the dull routine of classifying pins and pegs, and in this fashion begins the journey to maturity.

Discover! You must discover in order to be rich! You must not be satisfied to accept the night good-humoredly, to go to sleep after a day empty of all discovery. There are no small victories, no negligible discoveries: if you bring back from your day's journey the memory of the white cloud of pollen the ripe plantain lets fall, in May, at the stroke of your switch, it may be little, but your day is not lost. If you have only encountered on the road the tiny urn of jade which the moss delightedly balances at the end of its frail stem, it may seem little, but be patient! Tomorrow will perhaps be more fruitful. If for the first time you have seen a swarm of bees go by in search of a hive, or heard the snapping pods of the broom scattering its seeds in the heat, you have nothing to complain of, and life ought to seem beautiful to you. If, on that same day, you have also enriched your collection of humanity with a beautiful or an interesting face, confess that you will go to sleep upon a treasure.

IV

There will be days when you will be like a peaceful sovereign seated under a tree: the whole world will come to render homage to you and bring you tribute. Those will be your days of contemplation.

There will be days when you will have to take your staff and wallet and go and seek your living along the highways. On these days you must be contented with what you gain from observing, from hunting; have no fear: it will be beautiful.

It is sweet to receive; it is thrilling to take. You must, by turns, charm and compel the universe. When you have gazed long at the tawny rock, with its lichens, its velvety mosses, it is most amusing to lift it up: then you will discover its weight and the little nest of orange-bellied salamanders that live there in the cool.

You have only to lie among the hairy mints and the horse-tails to admire the religious dance of the dragon-fly going to lay its eggs in the brook, or to hear in early June the clamorous orgy of the tree-toads, drunk with love; and it is very pleasant, too, to dip one's hands in the water, to stir the gravel at the bottom, whence bubble up a thousand tiny, agile existences, or to pick the fleshy stalk of the water-lily that lifts its tall head out of the depths.

There are people who have passed a plant a thousand times without ever thinking of picking one of its leaves and rubbing it between their fingers. Do this always and you will discover hundreds of new perfumes. Each of these perfumes may seem quite insignificant, and yet when you have breathed it once, you wish to breathe it again; you think of it often, and something has been added to you.

It is an unending game and it resembles love, this possession of a world that now yields itself, now conceals itself. It is a serious, a divine game.

Marcus Aurelius, whose philosophy cannot be called futile, does not hesitate, amid many austere counsels, to urge his friends to the contemplation of those natural spectacles that are always so rich in meaning and suggestion: "Everything that comes forth from the works of nature," he writes, "has its grace and beauty. The face wrinkles in middle age, the very ripe olive is almost decomposed, but the fruit has, for all that, a unique beauty. The bending of the corn toward the earth, the bushy brows of the lion, the foam that drips from the mouth of the wild boar and many other things, considered by themselves, are far from being beautiful; nevertheless, since they are accessory to the works of nature, they embellish them and add a certain charm. Thus a man who has a sensitive soul, and who is capable of deep reflection, will see, in whatever exists in the world, hardly anything that is not pleasant in his eyes, since it is related, in some way, to the totality of things."

This philosopher is right as the poets are right. As our days permit us, let us reflect and observe, let us never cease to see in each fragment of the great whole a pure source of happiness. Like children drawn into a marvelous dance, let us not relax our hold upon the hand that sustains us and directs us.

V

Chalifour was a locksmith. I knew him in my childhood. You would have said that he was just a simple country laborer. Why has he left the memory of a rich and powerful man? His image will always be for me that of the "master of metals."

He worked in a mean, encumbered room, full of the pungent, acrid odor of the forge, which seemed to me a sort of annex to those other underground vaults that used to be peopled by the earth-spirits.

How I loved to see him, with his little apron of blackened leather! He would seize a bar of iron and this iron at once became his. He had his own way of handling the object of his labor that was full of love and authority. His gnarled hands touched everything with a mixture of respect and daring; I used to admire them as if they were the somber workmen of some sovereign power.

It seemed as if some pact had been made between Chalifour and the hard metal, which gave the man complete mastery over the material. One might have thought that solemn vows had been exchanged.

I see him again with his pensive air working the panting bellows and watching the metal whose incandescence was almost transparent. I see him at the anvil: the hammer, handled forcefully, delicately, obeying like a subject demon. I see him before the drill, starting the great wheel, following the measured exigencies of a ceremonial rite. Especially I see him before the smoky window with its pale flood of light, surveying, with that fine smile under his white beard, the conquered piece of metal, the creature of his will, which he had charged with destiny.

O ancient laborer, great, simple man, how rich and enviable you were, you who aspired to just one thing: to do well what you were doing, to possess intimately the object of your toil! No one better than you has understood the ponderous, obedient iron, no one than you has worked it with greater love and constancy.

Somewhere there exists, I believe, an unhappy man eaten up with nerves and stomach-disorder. He lives crouched up against his telephone, and sends his orders to all the stock exchanges of the world. People call him the "iron king," for some reason that has to do with finance. I don't believe he has ever touched or weighed a morsel of real iron. Let us smile, Chalifour! Let us smile, my master!

VI

I should like to tell you about Bernier, too. They say he is a very poor man because his coat is all shiny from wear and his shoes have the weary, wretched look of things that have never been young, because the sweat of many summers has soaked and stained the ribbon of his hat and his baggy trousers give him the air of always kneeling.

Bernier has a poor little drooping moustache with nothing glorious about it. You know only too well that he earns a hundred and twenty francs a month in some government bureau and that people say of him, "He's a poor devil with a miserable job."

As for me, I know that Bernier is rich, and I have seen him smile in the hour of his wealth,—for the true wealth has its times of slumber and its awakenings. Bernier possesses something which is quite strange and almost inexpressible; it is a space, a white space, vast and virgin, and it is his power to be able to trace there certain harmonious lines which he alone knows how to trace in the right way.

Why have you never seen, why have you never been able to see Bernier at the moment when he begins his work, when the whole sickly light of the office seems concentrated on the beautiful white page? His face is serene, smiling, assured. He half closes his eyes and draws back his head; he holds, adroitly and elegantly, a certain chosen pen, flexible, with a good point, a pen that belongs to him alone, which he has prepared for himself and which he would throw away if some blundering fool happened to touch it. And then he begins!

His kingdom is ranged all about him: ink pure from all dust, a brightly lined ruler, a collection of pens with all sorts of points. He begins, and the black line obeys him, springs up, curves in, stops, bounds forward or falls back, prances, yields. Look at Bernier's face: is it really the face of that poor wretch you have just described to me? No! No! It is the face of a masterful man, calm, sure of himself and his wealth, who is doing something that no one can do as well as he: across a snowy, limitless desert he directs, as if in a dream, a black line that advances, advances, now slowly, now dizzily, like time itself.

VII

You are willing to pay ten francs to see an acrobat or a trained dog. Perhaps you have never watched a spider about to prepare its web. In that case, do not miss the spectacle at the very next opportunity. When you have had a good glimpse of the extraordinary creature revolving about the center of the work and fastening, with its hind leg, so quickly and accurately, the thread that it unwinds in just the right quantity, you will be so delighted that you will want to show the marvel to all those you love.

It is strange what a contempt men have for the joys that are offered them freely. And yet this does not argue a shallowness in our natures: there is a certain beauty in our prizing an object just because it has cost us some trouble. You must not imagine, however, that the marvels of nature come for nothing: they cost patience, time and attention.

An unhealthy curiosity and the taste for anomalies incline us to take pleasure in seeing a creature perform an action for which its own organism seems unsuited. It palls very quickly. For a long time now, for example, the flight of aviators has ceased to excite our interest: we know all about that unmysterious machine; its very sound and its presence in the sky defile the silence and the space whose virginity was a refuge for us. On the other hand, I assure you I never cease to be fascinated by the mysterious manœuvers of a swarm of gnats, their interweaving curves, the spherical movement which, from instant to instant, transports the whole group of insects and seems the result of some secret password, and so many other subtle and profound mysteries that remain, for the imagination, full of allurement, full, one might say, of resources.

And do you think there is nothing disturbing in the beauty of the imperious flight of the great dragon-fly, in its sudden, meditative pauses, in its peremptory starts that lash the air like a supple, furious whip?

To whatever school of philosophy they belong, the great observers of natural phenomena, the Darwins, Lamarcks, Fabres, give us a magnificent lesson in love. But why do we nourish ourselves only on their harvests instead of providing our own? Why do we buy and read their books without drawing any real profit from them, without ever taking the trouble to look down at our own feet, without ever going to live, with the creatures of the sand and the grass, their minute, thrilling existence, in which everything would be for us full of novelty, discovery, suggestion?

VIII

The world is so generous and I feel my heart so full, so overflowing, that I do not even dream of arranging in order all these things I have to say to you. I should wish first of all to see your brow relax, to hear you say that you are less dispirited and that you refuse to be bored.

I should like to know all of you, and each in particular, to take you by the arm and walk with you through one of the streets of your town, or along the highroad if you live in the country. You would tell me of your cares and we should search together and see if there is indeed nothing in the universe for which you are especially destined, if there does not indeed exist, all ready for your wound, the precise balm that is necessary to anoint and heal it.

I came out this morning from my shelter of planks. The barren, chalky soil that surrounds it is surely the most sterile in all Champagne, but it had rained and the storm had brought up out of this miserable soil, which is almost without vegetation, all sorts of kindly odors. They were worth more than all the perfumes of Florida, for they were the humble gift of poverty.

At the end of next February I could show you, some morning, if the sun were out, the color of the birches against the blue of the winter sky. All the slender branches will seem ablaze with purple fire, and the sky, through this delicate flame, will survey you with an exquisite tenderness. You must wait, you must drink it in deeply, and not go on your way before you have understood it. From it you will be able to store up enough happiness to last you till another winter comes and gives birth once more to this prodigy of light.

Last year, during the hard summer months on the Aisne, I used to escape each day, for a second, toward the end of the afternoon, from the overheated tent where we carried on the bloody work of the ambulance. One of my comrades was in the habit of eating an apple at this hour. I used to ask him to be good enough to lend it to me for a moment. I loved to breathe its delicate, penetrating perfume which, every day, changed with the fruit. That was indeed a rare, a beautiful moment amid the fatigues of that concert of suffering and death.

I requisitioned this imponderable part of another's wealth; then I returned the apple to my comrade. I could have wished that you had all been with me to taste that poignant little joy.

When peace comes again, if you wish to see me in May, I will take you out under the great sycamore that is turning green at the bottom of the meadow. And there as you listen to the flying, the humming, the loving and the living of the millions of creatures that people its cool foliage, we shall set out together on a journey so rare that you will leave your heaviest sorrows along the way.

IX

Some years ago, a magazine undertook to ask a number of writers in what chosen spot they would like to pass a few beautiful hours. Emile Verhaeren answered:

"In a certain corner of the harbor of Hamburg."

Verhaeren is among those who have revealed to us the mournful grandeur of city views, of factory towns, those places that seem accursed and from which one might think that happiness was forever exiled.

The aspirations of our souls are so plentiful, so tenacious, so fertile that we find something to console us, satisfy us, exalt us in those very spots where suffering rules tyrannically, where the valley of Gehenna is most precipitous.

I visited the docks of Liverpool with a sort of horror. There were tall brick buildings, their roofs lost in the smoke, windows covered with grime, their interiors nothing but monstrous heaps of cotton bales. Men were climbing about there like flies. Everything smelt of fog and mould. Narrow pavements, slimy with rain, ran along by the dry-docks where the steamers, like immense corpses, were being assailed by the frantic crowd. The workers toiled amid a bombardment of hammers, a whirl of sparks. The drills snarled like whipped cats. A hideous light, smothered by the smoke and the mist of the Mersey, drowned everything in its fetid flood.

And yet, since then, I have often dreamed of that terrible spot and felt the need of living there.

For two years I attended the wounded of the First Army Corps, all of them men from the north, stained by the coal on face and chest, men from the factories or the mines. I walked with them through the smiling landscapes of the Aisne, the Vesle, the Marne, when those lovely valleys had not yet been too much disfigured by the war. Certainly they all enjoyed the slopes with their gracious groves of trees, the beautiful cultivated fields, draped like many-colored shawls over the shoulders of the little hills, but they all thought most, with love and regret, of cylinders, mine shafts, machines, and a smoky horizon.

I can understand it: one's native soil, one's own habitude, the familiar human landscape, moulded upon the other and transfiguring it. Above everything we have to recognize that the soul is sensitive to many infinitely varied and often contradictory things. Grace of lines, rustic charm are qualities that attach us to a country; fierce and desolate grandeur is another such, and this indeed has almost the strongest nostalgic power of all.

When beauty seems to have abandoned the world, we must realize that it has first deserted our own hearts.

X

Between your five senses, open like the dazzling portholes on the side of a ship, do you really believe there is nothing, nothing but the void, the night, the dumb wall?

I do not know, I do not know.... I cannot believe....

The sound rises, rises like the skylark, and the ear rises with it. And then comes a moment when the sound still rises and the hearing stops, like those birds that do not frequent the loftiest altitudes.

Tell me, are they lost truly and forever, those sounds that hold sway at the gates of your soul, those sounds to which your senses are not equal?

Wait! Hope! Some day perhaps we shall know.

You will say to me: "The light is so beautiful, so beautiful! It adds luster to so many things that are dear to me. Have I any need to dream of other rays than these? My eyes have already so much to do that they are overcome by their delight. The beauty of sound and silence ceaselessly intoxicates my ear."

True! Your soul has active purveyors. They do not leave it idle. They come and heap at its feet riches that demand its enthusiasm and its solicitude.

But often there is in your soul something your senses have not brought there, an exquisite joy, an inexpressible sadness. Do not forget that you live bathed in a multitude of rays to only some of which you are sensible. The others are perhaps not quite strange to you. What is passing, in contraband, across the frontiers of your being? Do not obstinately try to bring it under control. Submit, experience, be merely attentive and respectful to everything. Some day we shall perhaps know more things than we are able to divine now.

XI

One of the greatest delights of the religious faith is to abandon ourselves to gratitude, to be able to thank, from an overflowing heart, the moral being to whom we feel indebted for our wealth.

Why then, since I have long lost this faith, do I still feel each day, and several times a day, the great need of singing the canticle of Francis of Assisi, the lovely canticle in which he says:

> Praise be unto Thee, O Lord, and unto all Thy creatures, especially our gracious brother the sun, who gives us the day and through whom Thou showest us Thy light. He is beautiful and radiant with a great splendor. He is the symbol of Thee, Most High.
>
> Praise be unto Thee, O Lord, for our sister the moon and the stars, fashioned by Thee in the sky, clear, precious, and beautiful.
>
> Praise be unto Thee, O Lord, for our mother the wind, and for the air and the clouds, for the pure sky, and for all the time during which Thou givest to thy creatures life and sustenance.
>
> Praise be unto Thee, O Lord, for our sister the water, who is so useful, precious and clean.
>
> Praise be unto Thee, O Lord, for our brother the fire, through whom Thou illuminest the night. He is lovely and gay, courageous and strong.
>
> Praise unto Thee, O Lord, for our mother the earth, who sustains us and nourishes us, and brings forth divers fruits and flowers of a thousand colors and the grass.

A poet has transposed these divine strophes into the harmony of French verse and sings thus:

I shall praise you, Lord, for having made so lovely and so bright
This world where you wish us to await our life.

Now, I know very well that in this world I am not awaiting life, I am living. I know very well that it is here I must live and lose no time about it. My gratitude is all the more pressing, all the more intense.

What if it does rise to an empty heaven, that infinite gratitude!

It will not be lost. And is that heaven ever empty to which we breathe out so many dreams, where there trembles so much beauty!

The sweetest of human voices has said: “Lay up for yourselves in heaven the treasures that do not perish.” Perhaps we shall be pardoned if we dare to murmur: “Lay up for yourselves, in this world, the treasures that do not perish.”

They will not perish, these treasures, O my son, and all you whom I love, they will not perish if you thirst to discover them only that you may share them with others, that you may bequeath them to a devout posterity.

They will not perish if they find their being, their supreme reason, in that region of the soul where believers have raised up the tabernacle of a God.

V
THE LYRICS OF LIFE

I

During the cruellest hours, when the war about me has been heaping agony upon agony, when I have been able to find nothing, nothing to which I could any longer attach my confidence and my need of hope, I have often been surprised to find, running through my head, one of those airs that I know so well, those airs that I love and that escort my soul, like watchful and radiant personages, through the chaos of the days. And I would think bitterly: “Just fifteen quite simple notes! but they carry a meaning so beautiful, so profound, so commanding that they would suffice, I am certain, to resolve all conflicts, to discourage all hatreds, if men knew them well enough to sing them all together with the same attentive tenderness.”

It may be that the philosophy which absorbs you is one that leaves no room for indulgence. Perhaps you feel yourself full of bitterness for your fellows, perhaps you have made up your mind not to see in the activity of the living any but motives of greed and covetousness. Do not laugh! Do not be in too great haste to prove yourself right! Above everything, do not rejoice in being right in so dismal a fashion.

I say it again, if certain pages of Beethoven were better known to those who suffer and slaughter one another they would succeed in disarming many a resentment, they would restore to many a tense face a soft, ineffable smile.

If you do not believe this, you are not accustomed to living among simple people, you have never watched an irrepressible class of little children whom their master dominates and calms by making them sing, you have never heard a multitude of people intoning a hymn in some cathedral, you have never seen a great flood of workingmen, in some foul slum, break into the rhythm of a revolutionary song, perhaps you have never even seen a poor man weeping because a violin had just recalled to him his youth and the obscure thoughts he believed he had never in all his life confessed to anyone.

Think of all these things and then form some notion of what it is the thoughts of the great masters can do with the soul. Why, why is it not better known, this thing which is, indeed, knowledge and revelation itself? Why does it not reign over the empires, this which is sovereignty, grandeur, majesty? Why is it not more ardently invoked in the hour of crisis, this that teaches, equally well, fruitful doubt and serene resolution?

II

True, he who says ecstatically, “The world is governed by love, goodness, generous passions,” surrenders himself to a childish error. But he who cries, “The whole world is enslaved by egoism, violence and base passions,” speaks foolishly.

As we look about us, we might perhaps imagine that from one or the other of these two moral attitudes there is no escape. Must we believe that the spirit of system has such an irresistible hold over everyone who sets about the business of living?

The world! The world! It is much more beautiful and complex than that. It always upsets our prearrangements, and that is why we cherish it so dearly. But we also love to foresee things, and system seems to arrange them so that we can.

What does it signify in a world that is capable of everything? Amid the evil and the mediocre there will always shine forth consolingly something noble, something wondrous. Is it not shameful to predict the basest things so glibly only to close our eyes the more obstinately before the beauty that is unknown and unforeseen?

I assure you, in spite of all, that two lines of music can turn a multitude back and agitate the deepest springs of its behavior. If the miracle does not result from harmonious sounds, it will be borne, perhaps, of ten warm, rhythmical words, or the sight of a statue or the evocation of an image.

The worship of immediate realities leads us to those easy victories that intoxicate the coarse spirits. At times it results in irreparable disasters, for it inclines us to misprize those secret and delicate things that pave the way for the soul’s most daring flights and ventures.

Some other time I shall tell the story of the general who, in order to allay the grievances of his mutinous troops, offered them a cask of wine and, thanks to this blunder, suffered a defeat.

People who reason in a wholesale fashion get along successfully from day to day till the hour when a tiny error destroys their success forever.

III

If the thoughts of great men no longer cause miracles it is because they are too little understood, or are misunderstood, or are purposely distorted. You are mistaken if you think they are powerless because they are beautiful.

The war, which has crushed such great masses of men, has brought us face to face with this melancholy evidence, it has enabled us thoroughly to examine many individuals and to put many experiences to the proof. It has permitted us to measure the whole humiliation of moral civilization before that other, the scientific and industrial civilization which we might still better call practical civilization.

Gifted, serious, good men have said to me, “First of all one has to live. You can see, in the midst of this hurricane, what would become of a people weakened by idealism and given over to the works of the spirit. My son will study chemistry. The coming century will be a hard one, my son will perhaps never have the time to read Emerson or acquaint himself with the works of Bach! Too bad! But first of all one has to live.”

Does it not seem as if error had a dazzling power to seduce us and overwhelm us? Men are always hoping to conquer it by yielding to its demands. No one has the courage to turn his own steps away from its shifting shore. No one, for example, says to me: "The moral culture of the world is in peril. Mechanical progress monopolizes and swallows up all human energy. The generous soul of the best men is forgotten, in exile. Let us, with a common voice, with all our strength, summon it to come back to us, or let us go and die in exile with it, in an exile that is noble and pure."

IV

I shall speak to you again of all these things; we must talk a great deal more about the future if we wish to enter it without blindness, shame, and horror.

For the moment, glance at the people who surround us, the restless people we see on all sides. There are some of them who know what is beautiful. They rejoice in it, almost in secrecy, and despise those who do not share their faith. As for the others, they do not know it, and that is all one can say. They are, according to their several characters, ignorant and sceptical, or just simply ignorant. They see how works of art and the spirit miraculously survive the decadence and the prosperity of empires: that astonishes them without convincing them. Many divine that this has something to do with a secret and sacred power, but they do not dare and they do not know how to avail themselves of it. They catch glimpses of the feast of the heroes and they cannot realize that their place is marked and waiting for them.

Among my everyday companions are many educated men upon whom the universities have lavished their care and their degrees. Many of them are interested neither in their duties, nor in their comrades, nor, one would say, in their own thoughts. They play cards, read the papers, think about women and complain of ennui, for the war has enthroned boredom. And yet these souls, I assure you, are of good material and full of energy and resource.

What is to be done? How is one to introduce them to a larger, fuller life? How can one dare to do that without presumption, and also without fear of pomposity? How do it with affection, without lecturing them, without preaching to them? How be useful and friendly with simplicity? They have suffered, they have experience and obstinate views of their own. They do not believe that they have been dispossessed of anything. You have to listen very attentively to hear their soul groaning in the depths.

I spoke to one of them about music. He replied with an indifference in which there was a touch of discouragement; "For my part, I don't understand music. It can't interest me." We went on talking and I discovered that he was strangely sensitive to architectual matters, that he had a very subtle understanding and lacked nothing but enlightenment, knowledge, to have applied himself to it with passionate interest.

It is usually that way. The field of moral activity is so large that it has in reserve for every soul a path of his own choice, accessible and full of allurement. I do not believe there is a single individual who cannot end by meeting, in the limitless realm of art, with a mode of expression that touches him, conforms quite accurately to his powers and tastes.

V

You see I have waited a long time before pronouncing the word. I must at last make up my mind to call art by its name. Listen and do not confuse modesty with timidity.

The past century has produced important artists in every country in the world. That was a beautiful, fertile and truly generous century! And yet it witnessed the birth of a misunderstanding that grows more obdurate, that increases as it grows older. Should one ever allow a misunderstanding to grow old?

The romantic writers and, following them, all the artists of their epoch, intoxicated with their own genius, honored art as a religion. It was natural enough since at that moment, as we know, mankind was beginning to detach itself from its divinities, and it is hard to live without God. I cannot bring myself to condemn that enthusiasm. I love art too well, and I shall always hold it as one of the distinguishing marks of man and one of the greatest things in this world.

But the priests of this new God have acted like all priests: they have hurled anathemas and brought in a reign of intolerance. They have grown mad with pride, when there was reason and when there was no reason for it. They have cried out at all hours of the day, "Away, profane ones!" Many of them, who have had very noble souls, have discouraged, as if designedly, those whom their radiant face has fascinated. Others, instead of struggling, have held the epoch responsible for their ill-fortune. All of them, poets, painters, musicians, have let it be understood that they exercised a divine power and that the mass of men must only wonder and be silent, without themselves attempting anything of the sort.

No doubt there is a certain virtue in this attitude; it has lavished solitary consolations on those who have turned their backs on fashion.

The worthiest heirs of these illustrious men have confirmed their tradition. They have devised a splendid isolation, raised up a tower of ivory and dug all about it a moat that every day grows deeper. They have also stirred up childish and shame-faced adversaries with a desire for the commonest sort of popularity, and the confirmation of billboard success.

Yet humanity is waiting and longs to be treated neither as intruders nor as children.

VI

It cannot be said any longer that pure art is of no use: it helps us to live.

It helps us to live, in the most practical manner and every day.

Every moment you make instinctive, reiterated, and forcible appeals to all the forms of art. And that not only in order to express your thought, but still more and above all to shape your thought, to think your thought.

You find yourself in the midst of a landscape, and there is an image at the back of your eye. The manner in which you accept and interpret this image bears the mark of your personality and also of a crowd of other personalities which you call to your aid without knowing it.

The day when the painters of our continent invented that convention we call perspective, they modified and determined, for many long years, our way of seeing things. It must be recognized equally that since the reign of impressionism we have understood, possessed in a new way, the colors of the world.

You live in a sonorous universe where everything is rhythm, tone, number and harmony: human voices, the great sounds of nature, the artificial uproar of society envelopes you in a vibrant and complex network that you ought unceasingly to decipher and translate. Well, this you cannot do without submitting to the influence of the great souls who have occupied themselves with these things. The understanding of movements, harmonies, rhythms, only comes to you at the moment when the musicians reveal their secret to you, since they have been able, in some fashion, to interest you in them.

And this is true in regard to everything. If you discover something in your environment, if you perceive an interesting harmony between two beings, a curious relation between two ideas, you will succeed in throwing them into relief, in giving happy expression to them, only by means of the poet's art, and if you cannot find terms and images of your own, you can freely borrow them from Hugo, from Baudelaire, from those unknown artists who have elaborated the common language of men.

We do not think alone. Resign yourself, therefore, to being the delighted prisoner of a vast, human system from which you cannot escape without error and loss. Become, with good grace, the friend and the guest of great men.

VII

They will introduce you to a profound, passionate, lyrical life. They will aid you to possess the world. Art is not simply a manner of moving the pencil, the pen or the bow. It is not a secret, technical process. It is, above everything else, a way of living.

If your business is to grow wheat or to smelt copper, perform it with interest and skill. That will render service to other men whose function is to assemble colors, shapes, words or sounds. They will know how to render service to you, in their own fashion, repay you in turn. But do not imagine that their works are destined merely to divert your leisure. They have a more sacred, a more beautiful mission: that of placing you in possession of your own wealth.

Art is the supreme gift that men make of their discoveries, their riches.

No one has possessed the world better than Lucretius, Shakespeare or Goethe. What do you know of Croesus, who heaped up his gold to such an abnormal and monstrous degree? Nothing has remained of that chimerical fortune but a vague memory. But the fortune of Rembrandt has become and will remain the fortune of

our race.

To follow the example of these masters is not so much to try, with pen or palette in hand, to imitate them, as to understand with them, and thanks to them, what they have understood.

This cannot hurt your pride or hinder the expansion of your own personality. Quite the contrary. This studious humility is the surest path toward the conquest of your own soul. The anatomists will explain to you that the human embryo adopts successively, in its quick evolution, all the forms the species has known before its actual flowering. This great law rules also in the moral order, and do not count on escaping it. It is by first knowing the world through the masters that you will succeed some day in grasping it in your hands, dominating it yourself.

Ambition is an intoxicating passion, but to go to school to genius is a prudent measure and a sweet experience, too.

VIII

If you are unhappy, oppressed, if you have melancholy doubts of your future, of your ability, of your power to love, and if nothing in heaven replies to your prayer, to your need for deliverance, remember that you are not abandoned without resource. Men remain to you. The best among them have made for your consolation, for your redemption, statues, books and songs.

Open one of these books, therefore, and plunge into it! Sink into it as into a cool forest, as into a deep, running brook.

A man is speaking to you of himself or of the world. Read! Read on! Little by little the harmonious voice envelopes you, cradles you, lifts you up and suddenly bears you away. The tightness in your throat seems to relax, you breathe with a sort of fervor and exaltation. Generous tears start to your eyes or your whole soul shakes with laughter.

This great and wholesome exaltation people attribute to the miraculous presence of beauty. No doubt, no doubt! But that vague and simple explanation is an almost mythical one.

For you must realize that the man with whom you have just been having a sort of intimate colloquy has comforted you and carried you out of yourself mainly because he has been able to prove to you that you were neither abandoned, nor destitute, nor truly disgraced. He has seemed to you great but, in recalling to you that you are of the same race as himself, he has effaced himself before you. He has given you happy, courageous, new thoughts, and you have suddenly seen that you were thinking them also. For a second you have both communed together. And you have felt yourself once more in possession of a treasure that was escaping you.

It is true, all these thoughts are your own, since it is enough for you to see them in writing to recognize them. It is true, you too have your grandeur, your nobility and infinite resources. How could you have forgotten it for a moment? It is enough for you to open that book or to hum that song to remember it. It is true, your life also is astonishing and full of adventures. How did you fall into that despair? What did that discouragement signify?

IX

During the winter of 1917, I made the acquaintance of a young provincial musician who was serving in the same unit with me. At Soissons we found a room where we were able to meet and play together.

Our new comrade was a simple man with a country accent.

He played the violin carefully and with talent. Often, during our concerts, we watched his face as it bent over the instrument, and it seemed to us that in those moments that humble violinist was in communion with the great souls of Bach, Beethoven, and Franck, that he was holding a brotherly and affectionate conversation with them. I felt then that he had nothing to envy in the princes of this world. And it is a fact, I believe, that he did not envy them anything.

Do not tell me that you do not know how to play any instrument. That signifies nothing. There are two skilful professional musicians in my group who play their instruments only just enough to enable them not to lose practice for their calling. They are a sort of mechanician. As for you, you have a heart, ears, and a memory. And that's the main thing.

Believe that what you hold in your memory is more precious than everything else, for you carry that with you wherever you go, through all your days.

Do you think I can ever bore myself, with all those thousands of airs that sing in my head, that secretly accompany all my thoughts and offer a sort of harmonious comment upon all the acts of my life?

If this does not seem possible to you, remember that you possess the immense library of humankind and all its museums. Think of all you have read and admired. Think of it with pride and affection. Think of all that remains to you to see and to read and tell yourself how marvelous it is to be so ignorant as to have such riches in reserve, to have such treasures to conquer.

Amid the ordeals and the disillusionments of your existence, lift your soul every day toward those divine brothers who are our masters, and repeat with a proud humility: "It is sweet to sit down at your feast! And how good to think that it is to you we owe our opulence and our prosperity!"

VI
SORROW AND RENUNCIATION

I

If, concerning an old man, some one said to us: "He has been perfectly happy all his life, he is going to die without ever having suffered," we should be incredulous at first; then, if we were obliged to admit the truth of the remark, we should feel for this old man not so much envy as pity. With our astonishment would be mingled, in spite of all, something a little like contempt.

Happiness is our aim, the final reason for our living. But is it fair to say that sorrow is opposed to happiness?

There are sorrows that one cannot, that one should not, escape. They are the very price we pay for happiness. It is by means of them that we travel toward our own development. They prepare us for joy and render us worthy of it. Without them, could we ever know that we were happy?

If I believed, O my unknown friend for whom today I am hoping these consolations, if I believed that you could reach happiness, that is to say, the harmonious prosperity of your soul, without experiencing any agonies, I should not undertake to praise your suffering. But you suffer, I know it, and you are called to other sufferings. Henceforth I shall not refrain from praising what wounds you. For one does not console anyone by depreciating his grief, but by showing him how beautiful, how rare, how desirable it is, and your suffering can truly be called that.

I do not dream, then, of depriving you of your wealth. I only hope that you will be able to appreciate its full value. I beg that you will pardon me if I chance to hurt you by placing my hand upon your wound. I do it, you may be sure, with the affection and the solicitude of a man who has consecrated his life to such tasks.

They will tell you, my friend, that I am seeking to flatter your distress by reasonings that are full of guile, that I am singing to lull you to sleep and deceive you, that I am dressing in the gilded clothes of an age that is past the black demon that torments you. Let me still have your confidence: I have only one ambition,—it is your own greatest joy. I could not lead you astray without shame and without deceiving myself; for are you not indeed myself, O my friend?

II

There are some material fortunes which humble and reasonable men do not desire because they divine, in spite of the pleasures that result from them, what a crushing load they are.

By contrast, among the spiritual riches that we are able to possess, grief seems surrounded by a simple aureole. It is tyrannical, redoubtable, mutilating; its favorites are its victims. It does not descend upon its chosen ones with the softness of a dove, it pounces like a bird of prey, and those whom it carries off into the sky bear upon their sides the marks of its clenched claws.

But it is the sign of life; of all our possessions it is the last to leave us, it is the one that escorts us to the brink of the abyss.

It gives us the measure of man. He who has not suffered always seems to us a little like a child or a pauper.

The bitterness of men who have been often visited by sorrow is so truly a treasure that, if they could, they would not rid themselves of it for anything in the world: it resembles authority.

Through his tears, through his martyrdom, he who is charged with a great sorrow feels that he is the abode of some terrible thing that is also sacred and majestic. Great griefs command our respect. Before them knees tremble and heads bow as in the presence of thrones and tabernacles.

He who has suffered greatly makes us feel timid and humble before him. He knows things that we can only guess. We gaze upon him with passionate admiration as upon a traveller who has journeyed over oceans and explored far countries. It is at the time of his first wounds that the young man discovers his soul and plumbs his inner nobility.

Our grief is so precious a blessing that for its sake we dread inquisitive contacts. We preserve it jealously from the touch of those who might, through clumsiness or stupidity, debase this terrible and precious treasure. We long only that people should leave us alone with this bitter possession! Let them beware of frustrating us when they imagine that they are working for our relief!

When sorrow leaves us too soon, we feel a sort of shame and think less well of ourselves: it shone out of its shadowy casket, out of the deepest depths of the chest where we heap up our true treasures, and now, behold, it has vanished! We find ourselves almost miserable and utterly dispossessed.

The man who beats a retreat before a great ordeal fills us with distrust and pity. Something in us rejoices that he has not suffered. But something regrets that he has not given his measure, that he has not been the hero, the potent, exceptional man we hoped he would be. And that is not a mere perversion of our need for the spectacular: we are not less exacting with ourselves.

When sorrow comes to us, and we manage to escape it, the first sense of deliverance we feel is marred by an obscure, obstinate regret, as if we had lost an opportunity to enrich ourselves.

Tell me, what man among us did not, at the outset of the present great catastrophe, interrogate his own fate with a double anguish: the anguish to know what sufferings were in store for him, the fear also that he might not suffer enough, that he might not receive, and quickly, an adequate share of the ordeal.

III

This religious respect we experience in the face of grief gives its meaning and beauty to the feeling of sympathy.

We do not wish to admit that a great grief can live side by side with us without demanding that we should share it. As a man of lowly station wistfully approaches the table of princes, so we revolve about the grief of others in the hope of being invited to partake of it.

It is an overmastering impulsion that rises from the depths of our natures. The eagerness we are able to bring to the sharing of others' joys is but lukewarm beside the insurmountable urge that makes us share in their sorrow.

This is because our taste for joy is stamped with a keen quality of reserve, an irreducible delicacy. The joy even of those who are nearest to us can easily become repugnant to us. We are too proud to seem eager for it. True grief, on the contrary, attracts us, fascinates us. It disarms our critical sense and leaves us only an obscure feeling of envy.

Sympathy stirs us gently without overwhelming us; it is for this reason too that we find it so full of savor.

Although we recoil from the terrors of the leading part, sympathy permits us to play passionately the rôle of supernumeraries.

It is not we who are struck down and yet we can taste the mystic horror of the wound. The chosen victim bestows alms upon us and we accept them without shame. We have the perfume of the Host on our lips and it is not our blood that has paid the sacrifice. We are the guests at a sumptuous and tragic feast. We bear the reflected light of the great funeral pyre, without undergoing the flames and the destruction.

That explains our leaning toward those works of art that find their strength and their subjects in human grief. It is for this reason, surely, that we love so dearly to shed tears at the theater. The great artists have drawn from grief their most beautiful inspirations. We vow eternal gratitude to those who can revive in us a faithful image of our torments and call them back to our forgetful souls, to those who know so well how to give us a foretaste of the delights that future suffering has in store for us.

IV

Not all griefs exalt us and add to us. There are some that are sterile, withering, unconfessable.

Such griefs bring only misery and impoverishment. In the moral order they stand for debts and failures. However great may be our blind indulgence for ourselves, we cannot, on principle, impute them to ourselves. They do not bear the stamp of destiny but of our own baseness.

Who, indeed, would wish to share them with us, when we do not even let them appear?

Who would wish to associate himself with our weaknesses, our shames, our jealousies, our betrayals? Who can feel sympathy for a grief that disavows everything pure and generous that exists in us? No mention is made of these griefs in the Beatitudes.

Christ himself might ask us to kiss the face of a leper. But what charity could so sacrifice itself as to embrace our shame and our degradation?

That is the cup we must put away from our lips.

V

The stoics pursue their strange happiness with an impassibility that is worse than death. Epictetus writes: "If you love an earthen vessel, tell yourself that you love an earthen vessel, for then if that vessel is broken you will not be troubled by it. If you love your son or your wife, tell yourself that you love a mortal being, for then if that being chance to die you will not be troubled by it."

Comes our wisdom at such a price? If so, I renounce and abhor it. Better trouble and sorrow than this inhuman serenity!

Certainly I willingly renounce the earthen vessel; the sound of its breaking will never be loud enough to interrupt the conversation our souls pursue. But those dear faces that are my horizon, my heaven and my homeland, can I think without anguish of losing them forever? How irreparably I should despise myself if, on that condition, I succeeded in winning my own salvation!

This philosophy is poor, forsaken, desperate, rather than truly wise. It renounces, by degrees, everything, for the sake of an ironical peace. It withdraws from life the least debatable motives for continuing it. It seeks to close the heart to sorrow. But since that remains inevitable, it is better to love it, better to make an ally of it, better to conquer it by main strength and possess it intimately.

Dryness of heart cannot be a good thing. What, is everything to be taken away from me, even my grief, even that grief which remains to us when all other blessings have been ravished away?

The resources of philosophy are poor and destitute unless the heart can anoint them, sanctify them, and invest them with its own supreme authority.

VI

The fanaticism of grief is a fact so profoundly human that religions and governments have exploited it successfully. This almost mystical passion flourishes so well among peoples that are permeated with the ancient traditions of suffering and renunciation!

Nevertheless, the path does not lie through this sublime error, which is altogether too favorable for the enterprises of criminal ambition.

Sorrow cannot be a thing that one covets. It is, it ought to be, simply a thing that one accepts. Like certain terrible dignities, like certain overwhelming honors, one receives it, one does not seek it. Destiny brings a sufficient burden of mourning and cruelty, it should not be tempted. The noble life demands that we shall be courageous, it does not require us to be foolhardy. To him who "seeks while he groans," suffering will never be wanting.

At this hour the whole world is intoxicated with it, satiated, it would seem, for all time. At this hour there rises an immense cry of pity and supplication.

All generous souls are wounded to the quick and stagger. It is not in the moment when they beg for mercy that one would desire a superaddition of martyrdom. It is enough to assume the sanguinary wealth with which we are overwhelmed.

No one will ever be deprived of it who lives for love. We shall all be honored according to our merits. And we shall know that grief is its own reward; for it is in sorrow and abnegation that our soul becomes supremely aware of the beauty of the world and of its own virtues.

We cannot ask to be indemnified for our riches....

VII

In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children!

It is true! Our child was born in sorrow, in your sorrow, O my friend! I am jealous because of it. Forgive me!

Forgive me, for your part is more beautiful than mine, inasmuch as it contains more suffering. Let me look upon you with envy. Let me think of my own lot with regret.

You have borne, you have brought forth, you have nourished. It was not in my side that this little body lay. It is not my flesh this tender, greedy mouth has clung to. I have known nothing of that suffering. You have kept it all for yourself. I have only picked up the crumbs, like a beggar, like a pauper.

I have not suffered! I have not suffered enough! I look on my happiness as upon something usurped. It is your happiness that I share. It is your wealth that overflows even upon me.

I know that a day may come when we shall both suffer together because of this son. But whatever may be our common anguish, you will always keep the first place, you will always walk before me. You have forever outdistanced me along the shining road.

How can I help regarding you with envy, I who have not suffered enough?

VIII

Exalted spirits, struck by our many resemblances to the beasts, have striven to find what was the distinguishing mark of man. It is a noble solicitude, for wheresoever the mark of men may be it is that way we must go. If we really possess a characteristic virtue of which the animals are deprived, it is that which we must exalt, in order to be completely, proudly, men.

Pascal said: “Man is obviously made to think; and his whole dignity, his whole merit, and his whole duty lies in thinking rightly.”

Can we indeed believe that no other being has this grandeur to any degree? Are we so sure that “a tree does not know it is miserable”?

Even art, which may turn out to be the instrument of our redemption, is not certainly the lot of our race alone. Song and the dance triumph among the animals and often appear like the beautiful inventions of a gratuitous activity, with no other end than themselves and the emotions they give or interpret.

In renunciation, perhaps, lies our distinction, the trait which stamps us and sets us apart.

I say “perhaps,” because animals also offer us examples of abnegation. Sacrifice beautifies even their habits. With them, too, the individual sacrifices himself for the group, the hero sacrifices itself for the race. At the moment when I am writing these lines we are in autumn; a swarm of bees is dying of cold on a branch beside me. They are dying with a sort of resignation, in order that their hive, so poor in resources, may survive the winter.

Why not share, then, with these humble victims, our most beautiful quality? Why refuse to possess something in common with them, since it is a virtue? Why cut ourselves off haughtily from the rest of life?

Over and above this, the renunciation that has no particular or general motive of interest, the pure and absolute renunciation which is a heroic folly, is undoubtedly our business. I am not speaking now of the renunciation of the better religions, the renunciation that counts on celestial rewards, but of the renunciation which is an end in itself, which finds in itself its own sorrowful recompense.

IX

Can we ever forget, my friend, that woman who was the lesson of your youth, your counsellor and your example?

She lived in that dark, low room where you so loved to go and to which you used to show me the way, a way that seemed to me that of veneration itself.

Disillusionments, griefs, sickness and, without doubt, a great need for renunciation had gradually sequestered her in that unlovely place of refuge, encumbered with old books and full of the odor of dust. She seemed cut off from the world; but in the shadow of that retreat her eye sparkled so vivaciously, she spoke with so melodious a voice that the world pursued her who had abandoned it even into her retirement: the friendship of young people, that friendship which is so pure and spontaneous, was for her a constant testimony. This was the only thing she would not renounce, her only ornament, her last elegance, her possession.

Year by year death came to snatch from her affection those of her own blood. Every sort of happiness withdrew from her as she retired into her abode, light itself she dreaded more and more, and more and more renounced.

Every time we passed through her little door, so slow in opening, we had at first an insurmountable feeling of being suffocated, for we were still intoxicated with our radiant life, our destiny and our ambitions.

But soon our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, our souls recognized the humble, penetrating odor of the hangings, and we found again that beautiful, commanding glance, that voice with its supernatural freshness.

Her malady struck her new blows. This woman who still possessed the space of three rooms had to shut herself in one of them. And then, even of this she possessed no more than a corner. Her world was only a little wall and the wood of an old bed.

That ardent eye still shone. That spiritual voice still prevailed. One day the voice faltered and sank, like a ship disabled in a storm which gives up all resistance.

That day we were sad, sad, we who had not learned to renounce.

X

Delivered from romanticism, the nineteenth century toward its close and the twentieth century at its beginning, exalted an image full of the pride of physical life, of impetuous health.

Never had humanity seemed more intoxicated with its carnal development, with its splendid animality, than at the very moment when the war broke out. Our humanity! behold it now, covered with wounds so deep that for long decades the sight of them will baffle us and fill our pity with despair.

Behold it now, like a vast race of invalids. It creeps over a world where now there are more graveyards than villages.

We have had an unparalleled experience of sorrow and renunciation.

And yet the desire for happiness is deeply rooted: the unanimous voice to which our world listens repeats, from amid the sobs: “We shall renounce nothing!”

To him who listens with an attentive ear, it says again, it says particularly: “We shall renounce nothing, not even renunciation!”

But let us leave this immense grief to itself. Let us leave it to satiate and appease itself with its own contemplation—Silence!

VII
THE SHELTER OF LIFE

I

Two immense worlds remain faithful to me when the others discourage or betray me. Two refuges open to my heart when it is weary, faltering or harassed with temptation.

I should like very much to tell you about them, since you are my friend. I can tell you, since you have nothing to envy me, since you bear within yourself two such worlds, two kingdoms that will submit to you undividedly, without contest.

Yesterday I was watching some prisoners working. They were pushing the trunk of a tree lashed to a cart. Sweat was rolling down their faces, for the heat was great, the slope steep and the load heavy. An armed soldier was watching them. Large letters were printed on their clothes to proclaim their servitude. And I thought: they live, they do not look too unhappy, they do not seem crushed by their condition. And if this is so, it is not because they have the placidity of beasts. No! Look at their eyes, listen to their voices. It is precisely because they are men and they carry everywhere with them two refuges, whither the gaoler cannot follow them, two precious possessions that no punitive discipline can snatch from them: their future and their memories.

The longer I watch, from close by, those men who, for four years have led the inhuman life of the army, the better I understand the meaning of their incredible patience: between the future and the remembered past they have the air of awaiting the passage of a storm. They are gulping down, you would say, hastily and with closed eyes, this bitter and criminal present, in order to reserve their hearts all the better for the things of the future and the past. One feels in their conversation only these two luminous existences. They seek and unite them unceasingly above the bloody abyss. I have also observed that, in the concerts they give themselves to cheer their periods of rest, their souls always return, with the same rapture, to their former way of living, to their old sons, their familiar ways of being sad or joyous. The artistic attempts that are carried on to interest them, at the bottom of their hearts, in the formidable present, remain sterile and, as it were, dry.

They seem to reply, silently: "What have all these things to do with us? Isn't it enough for us to live them? Isn't it enough for us to do them, every day with our blood and tears? Give us back our dear kingdom. Give back to our souls that memory which is their most imperishable and marvelous possession."

II

Between the future and the remembered past, man is left to struggle with what he possesses least, the present.

And yet this present is lavish of all sorts of materials that we can transform into riches. It is our liquid fortune, mobile and in circulation. It is the well-filled purse upon which we draw for our daily needs.

It reaches us out of the depths of time, like a great river, loaded with sailing-ships and steamers, deep, flowing, beautiful with all its reflections, and rolling gold in its sands.

But it has its rages, its whims, its cruelties. According to the season, it overflows and desolates the land or suddenly dries up and deserts the fields that it refreshed with its floods!

So be it! If the present refuses to yield its manna, we will draw upon our last resources. If the times overwhelm us with bitterness, we will flee to our refuges, where we have nothing to fear from intruders or masters or tormentors.

Common-sense folk, who have the secret of debasing life in the name of a reason that is more mischievous than actual stupidity, are in the habit of devoting an almost superstitious worship to the present reality. To tell the truth, they are greatly afraid that the taste for memory and hope will turn young men away from that immediate action which is necessary for the conquest and preservation of material wealth.

They honor with great pomp the origins in the past of those traditions that are favorable to them; and the way they invoke and prepare for the future loads the present with chains and shackles.

They dread, in reverie, an enemy of action. As if there were any great actions that have not their source in great dreams!

These people deceive themselves. They sacrifice an unequalled consolation to the needs of a fleeting fortune. But do not imagine that the failure of their fortune leaves these men utterly abandoned: the refuges open gladly, even for those who have despised them.

III

An intimate friend once said to me, as he watched his little son playing: "You see; he's no longer the baby you knew last year. He's another child. I have been cheated of the one I had last year. I shall never have him again. I have lost a child."

O dear, big heart, how beautiful and how unjust those words are! How human! How they overflow with ingratitude and with adoration!

You know quite well that every object that appears on the horizon of our souls has, for us, two existences. One is sudden, sharp, almost always penetrated with an intense and, so to say, corrosive flavor: that is the existence of the present. Men agree in recognizing that its duration is hardly measurable. But the other existence is perennial, as ample as the measure of our life and our thoughts; in this sense it is almost infinite.

Thus each moment of the present survives in memory for years, and doubtless for centuries, since posterity can gather up and prolong the best of our acts and our works.

It is true, my friend, that each moment dispossesses us, even of the object we never withdraw our arms from. The miser, infatuated with his material riches, may well suffer agony of mind over them, but we, we? Do we not know that each moment restores to us, transfigured, all the treasures it has snatched away from us? It robs us of the frailer blessings, it offers us imperishable blessings, less mortal than ourselves.

You have conquered one whole happy day. Contemplate without regret the sleep that marks its end, for you will continue to live this day during all the rest of jour life. And if this day was truly beautiful, do you not know that others after you will continue to live it, down, ever farther down, the succession of the years?

Let your son grow, without too much anxiety, like a beautiful tree: the child he was once, the child he was but now, the child he is at present, you will not lose them, O insatiable heart! They will escort you toward old age, like a beloved multitude that increases every day and cannot die.

Owing to the war, I have seen my own child only seven times, and each time I have hardly recognized him. Seven times I have believed him lost. I know now that I have seven lovely images in my soul, seven children to adorn and hearten my solitude.

IV

There are beauties which the present fails to appreciate. That is natural, because it is greedy, disordered, care-ridden. Memory exists to see that justice is done. To it falls the divine rôle of restoring and, at times, pardoning. (It is memory which, in the last resort, vindicates and judges. It is in its light that things appear to us under the aspect of eternity.)

None of our thoughts would be really happy that had not received the approbation of memory, that did not find themselves sealed at last with its sovereign imprint. We do not know the true value of our moments until they have undergone the test of memory. Like the images the photographer plunges into a golden bath, our sentiments take on color; and only then, after that recoil and that transfiguration, do we understand their real meaning and enjoy them in all their tranquil splendor.

Days of ours that had seemed to us dull and hopeless show themselves in memory luminous and decisive. Journeys undertaken without eagerness, without enthusiasm, and without any of the freshness of surprise, become, from a distance, fruitful in revelations and discoveries.

Every reality develops with time a thousand aspects of itself that are just as real, as charged with meaning and consequence, as the original aspect. We cannot foretell what memory will contrive for us. It is a treasure all the more precious and unexpected because it is so independent of our rudimentary logic. For the logic of memory is more subtle than ours; it seems entirely free from our miserable calculations; it draws its inspirations from our true interests, which we ourselves are forever misapprehending. The slow task it pursues testifies to so rare a virtue and so munificent a wisdom that man, struck with his own unworthiness, might well seek there the signs of a divine intervention.

Sometimes it is a friend, whom we have misunderstood or misjudged, who takes on in memory his true aspect and his true stature and reveals the profound influence which, without our knowing it, he has exercised over our thoughts.

Sometimes it is a word which we heard at first with an inattentive or distrustful ear, and which we find again engraved in letters of gold over the portico of the secret temple where we love to collect our thoughts.

Like some skilful goldsmith, memory seizes the materials that our life accumulates haphazard. It submits them to the touchstone, fashions them, embellishes them and imprints upon them that mysterious sheen which gives them their distinctive meaning and their value.

V

The cult of memory should not turn us away from the present out of which memory itself draws its nourishment.

We sometimes meet men of whom plain people say, with profound wisdom, "Their mind is elsewhere." It is true; they are the timid and tormented souls who have early sought in memory a refuge which nothing, it seems, could ever make them renounce.

Let us beware of troubling this retreat. Some day, perhaps, we may long for one like it. But however deeply one may seem to have taken refuge in memory, one cannot escape the clutch, the invasion of the present.

It is best, therefore, and with all the strength that is in us, to accept, honor, love this present as the principal source of our riches.

If the true cult of memory were a less exceptional moral usage, many men would hesitate to create bad memories for themselves; for our worst memories are not those of our sufferings, our ordeals, our privations, but of our shameful acts, our cowardices and our betrayals.

Our weakness lasted only a moment; must we really, for thirty years, feel the hostile stare of that moment resting heavily upon us? Who knows? Hope, even so, in the clemency of memory, which is able to mitigate and pardon everything. It is indulgent and full of pity. In a world given over to spite and reprisals, it remains the only inviolable refuge of the outcast, as the cathedrals used to be in the days of the right of sanctuary.

For him who descends with true fervor into his own depths, memory always preserves some corner pure from all baseness. Do we not know, moreover, that in order to console us memory consents to work in concert even with its enemy, forgetfulness?

VI

Who can dispute with us the world of memory? No one! And who would dare, without fear, to do so? It is because we are more ardently attached to this possession than to any other.

At times, a clumsy or malevolent hand succeeds in smirching one of our dear memories. Then we experience an indignation and a despair as lasting and profound as if these sentiments recognized their cause in the loss or the fall of a loved being.

Happily this criminal work implies a rarely evil spirit, a sort of perverse genius of which humanity is none too prodigal. And then our memory is a territory too vast, too mountainous, too impregnable as a whole for the rage of hostile destruction to be able to defile or mar large portions of it. The best of our memories thus remain in safety and for us alone. Besides, we keep careful watch around this fortune.

Our great memories are actual moral personages, so necessary to our happiness that we bear them under a sacred arch, sheltered from all injury, from all contact. It is into this solitude that we go ceaselessly to question them, invoke them, call them to witness.

A past in common does not always give memories in common, so true it is that the heart defends itself, in its innermost retreat, as the physical self defends its flesh against the intrusions of the stranger.

It sometimes happens that men find pleasure in recalling in our presence the episodes of an existence that was passed, by themselves or by them and us, in companionship. It is then that we measure the road our soul has travelled on its solitary path: these things of which they speak to us, these deeds which, it seems, we have performed, these landscapes which they remember having crossed in our company, we no longer recognize; we do not even wish to recognize them. We smile in an embarrassed, awkward, unhappy way. Our whole attitude says: “Is it really true that we have drunk from the same cup? For all that, it was not the same wine we drank, and my intoxication is not yours.”

We cannot give to one who is dear to us a greater proof of love than to admit him to the intimacy of our memories. We have need of all our tenderness to help us to introduce another soul into the subterranean basilica, to lead that soul as close as possible to the refuge where, in spite of all, there is only room for one.

Perfect communion in memory is an extraordinary favor, and an admonition. If it is given to you to enjoy it, open your arms and receive one elect soul.

VII

No doubt you have had the experience, when passing through a country where you were travelling for the first time, of stopping short, as you rounded a mountain, before some unknown horizon, and finding it strangely familiar.

No doubt you have had the experience of arriving at night in a dark square where you knew you had never been before, and briskly finding your way through it, just as if you were resuming some old habit.

At times the spectacle of a smiling valley arrests you at the top of some hill. You thought you knew nothing of this country, and yet strange and sure impressions guide you; they are like old memories. You advance, and behold, you are looking at everything as if you recognized it. That road which winds between the pastures, as supple and sinuous as a beautiful river of yellow water,—you are almost certain you have followed it long ago, in some misty, far-off existence which, nevertheless, is not your own.

There are times, too, when you are dreaming, as you sit alone, and suddenly a memory passes over you: the memory of some act the man you are surely never performed. Yet it is not a fabrication, an invention. You know, you feel, that it is a personal memory. A memory of what world? Of what life?

Do not reject this shadowy treasure, and do not tremble! Do not accept complacently the explanations of the superstitious or of the pseudo-scientists. The flesh of your flesh was not born yesterday. Something survives in it that is contemporaneous with all the generations. Many a revelation awaits us. Let us keep for them a soul that is accessible, experienced, and not too distrustful.

VIII

Do not imagine that to possess memory is to possess a dead world.

Among your friends there is surely one who has a house and a garden. From time to time he invites you to visit him. Every time you enter his house you observe some striking change: he has connected two parts of the building which till then had no means of communication. He has planted some new trees. The old elms are flourishing. Some rosebushes have died. Urns have been set out on the lawn. The life of men, of animals, of plants has drawn the inanimate world into its toils, modeled it, sculptured it, forced it to take part in the movement of the soul.

It is in like fashion that the domains of memory cultivate themselves and live. They are not ruins, inalterable, rigid, fixed forever in the ice of some past epoch. Life still penetrates and moves them; they do not cease to share in its enterprises, its labors, its festivals.

When a man has opened for you several times the same gate in the wall, when several times he has related the same adventure to you, with intervals of a few months or a few years, observe closely the spots to which he leads you and the persons to whom he presents you. Every time you will find new things, you will find that roads have been laid out, underbrush cut down, windows opened and unexpected supernumeraries called in.

Is it true then that that was a dead tale, wrapped up in what we call the shroud of the past?

The world of “living memory” is so indissolubly bound up with our resolutions and our acts that in accumulating memories we feel we are preparing, erecting our future itself.

IX

There is another refuge!

“What makes hope so intense a pleasure,” writes M. Bergson, “is that the future, which we fashion to suit ourselves, appears to us at one and the same time under a multitude of forms, all equally smiling, equally possible. Even if the most desirable of them all is realized, we must have sacrificed the others, and we shall have lost much. The idea of the future, pregnant with infinite possibilities, is therefore more fertile than the future itself, and that is why we find more charm in hope than in possession, in reverie than in reality.”

The idea of the future alone interests us: that alone is our treasure, that alone is endowed with existence. It is that indeed which we call the future. And if M. Bergson, at the end of these admirable lines, creates a distinction between the future and the idea of the future, he does not make us forget that he has just, and as if by design, caused the confusion; for what “we fashion to suit ourselves” is the idea of the future, and nothing else. But, following the example of M. Bergson, let us call our idea of the future the future itself.

This idea is our cherished fortune. Certainly we take a passionate interest in seeking, in what flows out of the present, something that resembles the realization of our dreams. And yet their realization, like their failure, marks, in every sense, their end, their exhaustion. And that is insupportable to us. Whatever fate the present reserves for our imaginings, we labor every day, as fast as time devours them and destroys them by making them finite, to push them further back into the infinite, to prolong them, to reconstruct them, so that we may never have less of a future at our disposal.

This need of a future, which has no other connection than our hope with the rugged actuality of the present, is so deep-rooted, so generally human a thing, that one cannot contemplate it without a respect which is almost religious. In order that this future, so pregnant with dreams, should be as necessary as it is to the moral life of most men, it must represent a truly incomparable treasure. The embrace we throw around it is the close and powerful embrace we reserve for those possessions that lie nearest our hearts. And, since we have already detached the word “possession” from the gross meaning that is usually attributed to it, let us say that the possession of a dream, when it assures our happiness, is a reality less debatable and less illusory than the possession of a coal-mine or a field of wheat.

But as there is no possession without conquest, without effort, we must merit our dreams and cultivate them lovingly.

If people who have taken the mould of reason reproach us with distracting for a moment the men of that practical reality which pretends to be preparing the future, we are ready to reply to them:

“Glance at those men to whom our words are addressed. You know that they are crushed with fatigue and privation. They have experienced every danger and every sort of weariness. By what right will you hinder them from taking refuge in a world which is henceforth the least contestable of their domains? Do not, on their account, be afraid of reverie; it could never fill them with as much bitterness as does this modern reality of which you are the unpunished builders.

“If you are not weary of glimpsing your future through the specifications, the account-books, the cage-bars, and the unbreathable fumes of industrialism, at least allow these to cherish a marvelous and, in spite of all its disappointments, an efficacious future. It is not a question of forgetting life,—that is too beautiful and too desirable, but rather of amplifying and fertilizing it. Whatever may be the outcome of a generous dream, it always ennobles the man who has entertained it. Allow the unhappy to be rich in a possession that costs them only love and simple faith. Do not let your reason dispossess them of the only treasure that your greed has not been able to snatch from them. It is the cult of the future and of memory that sustains man in the uncertainty of the present hour. If he walks by instinct towards these refuges, do not turn him aside, and think, O priests of reason, of the warning of Pascal: ‘It is on the knowledge of the heart and of the instincts that Reason has to lean, and establish there the whole of her discourse’.”

X

I have seen thousands of men suffer and die. Every day I see new ones enter the somber arena and struggle. My part is to help them in this torment, to assure them aid and hope. I have a wide experience of these things now and I know that men are never denied a future, even when life is on the point of betraying them.

Philosophers and poets, led astray by religion or by a mystical passion for death, have given the severe counsel that we should never conceal from the dying the approach of their annihilation. It is a theoretical view of charity, an artificial, mischievous doctrine that does not stand the test, that should not be put to the test. Its partisans suspect falsehood where there is only pity and modesty, for it is not the part of man to be so proud of his own judgment as to take away from someone with the certitude of life that fabulous future which is more precious than life itself.

I remember, in 1915, a wounded man, who had just received the visit of a priest moved by praiseworthy intentions and a clumsy exaltation, saying to me suddenly, “I know now that I am going to die!” and beginning to weep terribly. I went to see the priest and reproached him for his behavior. “What!” that eloquent man replied haughtily, “do you who are incapable of preserving this unhappy man’s earthly life blame me for assuring him his future life?” Alas! Alas! I still think of the sobs of that wounded man; they were those of one who has just lost his supreme wealth and to whom nothing else can make amends.

Soldiers who, in the full vigor of their youth, suffer a severe, a final mutilation experience at first that is like a veritable amputation of their future, so true is it that every part of our physical self is intimately bound up with the labors of our dream. Then, with surprising rapidity, and long before the disorder of the tissues has been exorcised, one sees them filling in the moral breach, raising up the crumbled wall, propping it hastily and reconstructing, quite as new but quite complete and tightly shut, the sacred fortress outside which their soul remains vulnerable and disarmed.

In truth, the man who is condemned to death is still rich in the future, even when his body sinks, ten times pierced by bullets, even when he has only one drop of blood left, one flickering spark of life.

XI

O present hour, magnificent, foaming fountain, you know very well that we shall be faithful to you! With your thousand animated faces, your landscapes, your problems, your combats and that heavy burden of jostling ideas you carry with you, you will always attract us, you will see us all together drinking of your waters.

But when you no longer contain for us anything but anger and hatred, greed and cruelty, then indeed we must each of us abandon you and turn to our refuges; we must each of us withdraw into the Thebaid where all things still respond to our voice, to our voice alone.

May our fate preserve us from the greatest of all misfortunes! May our refuges never lose in our eyes their virtue and their security! This supreme affliction at times befalls us, and it is then that our souls, exiled from their homeland, must set themselves humbly to the search for the lost grace.

VIII
THE CHOICE OF THE GRACES

I

What man, tell me, what man, were he suddenly delivered from disgust with himself, from terror of the world, from the sadness of an age that is without pity, from remorse for a thing he has done, from the fear of things he has to do, what man, suffering from one of these evils, or from several of them or from all at once, would not experience an immense relief, would not feel a certain absolution for the errors of the universe, a certain alleviation of his own in the contemplation of this little osier-bed which I descry this evening, at the turning of a lane?

What is there so profound, so divine in that scene?

Nothing, nothing, no doubt. Everything, perhaps. For who would venture to maintain that there is anything in the world that might not be a sign for my heart and yet be nothing more? I was following a stone wall, an indecipherable wall at present, without significance, without compassion, an enemy. It shut in my view and my thoughts, it was covered with cold mosses and all the dampness of winter. And then, all at once, the wall ended and there was a little valley crowned with these osiers. Yes, I mean crowned, for it seemed as if all its desires had been granted, all its aspirations satisfied, all its prayers fulfilled.

Thousands of crimson branches rose in a chorus toward heaven, like clusters of some smooth, straight, up-springing coral. All the branches rose together, with one brotherly impulse, like the desires of a world freed from ambitions and vowed to the one, the noblest ambition of all. But why seek for words, why strive to paint it? Surely it was not the flaming sap of the young shoots any more than the little rivulets smoking like censers at their feet,—it was neither of these things that promised relief and deliverance. It was the entire world that manifested itself in this, its smallest fragment, just as the most secretive man will betray himself by the trembling of his little finger or the flutter of an eyelash.

II

I was once saved by the tarpaulin of a humble delivery wagon. That tarpaulin certainly knew no more about it than did the men who owned it, or had the use of it here below. There are, in every object, qualities we are ignorant of and that are precisely those through which this object fulfils its most beautiful rôle in the universe, those to which it inclines as if toward some miraculous purpose, which are indeed its vocation and its true destiny.

I remember it was a morning in February, one of those hopeless mornings which we feel do not deserve the evening and will hardly attain it. I do not know what I had done to myself or to my men to have so completely lost all courage and purpose; but that morning I was certainly the most destitute of beings and the least worthy of an act of grace.

Yet for all that, grace was shown me, for that marvelous tarpaulin appeared. It was of heavy canvas, yellow and green. Its color, its folds, its whole appearance, the form it concealed, in fact I know not what element in it, showed me that I still could live, that my faults were forgiven me, that nothing about me was irremediable.

I am willing to pass for a man who is eager for forgiveness, a man who is satisfied with little. We wish to set our own value on everything, as if the things of the spirit meant the same thing as money, as if they did not depend upon quite another spirit than that of the accountants and geometricians.

I met a priest,—it was since the war began,—with whom I often talked about penance and contrition. I asked him one day what price he would ask for the remission of the heaviest burden on one’s conscience. He answered without hesitation: “Three paters and three aves.” This man was corrupted by the customs of the world and its authorities. He filled me with a sort of desire to insult him, and I confess I gave him some rude shocks. Since then I have reflected. I have not become reconciled to the memory of that priest, but I believe that grace touches us in a most unforeseen way; it shines out suddenly, without any reason, like the radiant blue in a sky where one has not expected it. It manifests itself without regard to the efforts we make to deserve it, and the occasions it selects are not in proportion to our distress. But how sovereign it is, how much the most desirable of all blessings!

Remember, remember! you were walking through the streets, a prey to some irremediable pain. Your poverty seemed unlimited, for it could not be palliated by more money, an improvement in your health or the renewal of a broken friendship. And yet, nevertheless, you suddenly breathed in the wind an imperceptible odor, familiar, charged with memories, you suddenly encountered in the color of a house, or in the look of an unknown face, some mysterious sign, and you felt that your wealth had been given back to you, that it flowed through you once more as the saving blood returns to the heart of the dying man.

I was walking one day along the banks of the Aisne, the prey of an illimitable mental torture which, just because there was no reason for it, seemed incurable. The image of a bridge in the water suddenly gave me back my confidence in myself and my accustomed joyousness. It was only a reflection; but never believe those who tell you that these things are nothing but reflections.

III

When a man who is cruelly wounded in his body or his spirit preserves a cheerful faith and never ceases to be the master of his misfortune, I say that he has grace.

When a true man is able, for an hour, to contemplate without uneasiness his own thoughts and actions, I say that he is touched with grace, and I hope that hour may last a day and that day an entire life.

Like a sailing-vessel that stretches through the air its slender, vibrant cables, probes the sky with its strong and supple masts, offers to the wind, at ever-varying angles, the white resistance of its sails and marvelously dominates all the forces of the air while seeming to obey them, the man who possesses grace enjoys a communion that is profound, perfect, exquisite, not only with whatever in the world is perceptible to us, but above all with what is unknown.

That man weighs much in the baskets of the winnower. That man does not see only within the limits of his own flesh. He fills in his own self almost the whole universe, participates gloriously in the infinite.

I know that it often happens that the beautiful ship sees its sails sinking in distress and no longer feels its ropes trembling in the wind. The time comes when it stops painfully in the stupor and indifference of noon.

The time comes when the rich man suddenly finds himself on Job's dung-heap. The time comes when, without reason, grace deserts the heart.

Wait expectantly, with sails spread like an ear, with rigging firm, and perhaps, where others less trustful would find themselves abandoned, you will perceive a certain relenting breeze.

You must never lose contact with the universe if you wish to live in the state of grace.

IV

Welcome your own true thought, whatever may be the hour at which it visits you. If it chooses to rouse you in the middle of the night, rise to do it honor and look at it with clear eyes.

There are some who have just missed an hour of greatness because they preferred to slumber under the warm eiderdown. The spirit called them in a low voice, in the darkness of the cold room; they did not rise and they will never know what they might have become. They will try to console themselves by thinking they have dreamed; will they ever console themselves?

There are some who, suddenly, through the mist of tobacco smoke, have seen their souls, like some long-awaited supernatural being, watching them.

At the moment they were playing cards or reading their paper; they thought: "Wait, I'll join you in a moment." The game ended, or the paper thrown aside, the visitor had departed.

They rushed forth in pursuit, their hearts convulsed with shame and anguish. Alas! the deep melancholy glance will perhaps never shine upon them again. Perhaps they will never again come face to face with themselves.

In the midst of pleasure, when you are enjoying the company of a woman or the conversation of bold, intelligent men, if you chance to hear the voice of solitude singing like a siren at your feet, leave everything to flee with her.

V

When Epictetus said: "Our good and evil exist only in our own will," he misstated the problem. That is one way of solving it, but more often it is a way of assuming that it has been solved, an expedient for passing it over.

I am not happy today; I am not pleased with myself, I am not pleased with anyone; I feel quite certain that everything I undertake will be a failure, above all, above all, I do not want to undertake anything; I view all things with an unprofitable eye, an irritable and apparently dried-up soul. I am driven to suffer myself and make others suffer. Oh! I am without grace! I know it and I am far from admiring myself. Secretly I long to feel grace at last descending on my head and shoulders like a mantle of soft sunshine, like the honeyed perfume that falls from the lime-trees.

What does that old man want? Why does he repeat with a sort of obstinacy: "It depends upon you to make a good use of every event"?

No doubt it depends upon me!

But what are we to do when nothing can be blamed upon events? And what when, indeed, there are no events.

Is it true that it depends upon me to be myself at such times also? Answer me, great, silent trees! Answer me, fir-tree, weighted down with sleet and dreaming—Heine has told me—of the palm consumed with burning heat in the tropics.

"Drive out," replies the philosopher, "drive out your desires and your fears and you will never again suffer tyranny."

True; but I have only one fear: not to be the best man I may; only one desire, not to give in to myself.

The sage shrugs his shoulders and then says in a gentle voice: "Bear and forbear." And he is not thinking only of the storms that come from without.

He says this because he well knows that in order to be happy one must be visited by grace.

All the stoics have drawn up rules of virtue. Not one has suggested the means that will give us the strength to apply them. For the wish is not enough. The gift is necessary, that secret impulse which is grace itself.

VI

Praise be to thee, divine world, that hast delivered me from anger by revealing to me in time that trembling blossom of the convolvulus!

Praise be to thee, divine world, that, at the very limit of my fatigue, in the midst of my perils, hast chosen mysterious ways to light me with an inner smile!

Millions of unhappy men who are suffering at this moment on the fields of distracted Europe are aware that at the blackest moment of distress a strange consolation can penetrate them; it is as if the fingers clutching one's heart suddenly relaxed their grip. There are some who call this God. Many others give no name to the miracle, but long for it on their knees all the same.

The voice no longer speaks from the burning bush. Sometimes it is the sound of last year's leaves still rustling in the branches of an oak. Sometimes there is no sound; only the speaking glance of a veronica in ecstasy among the April fields.

I am quite willing to bear, but I do not wish to forbear. I do not wish not to meet grace halfway, not to seek for it in the night flooded with frosty perfumes, in the tossing forest where two interlocked branches groan through the long hours, on the plateau haunted with thistles that labor with feverish piety to perpetuate their innumerable lineage.

I ask only to be allowed to interrogate the earth like those who seek minerals and water-courses, and to experience every morning the green ascent of the spring-time over the rocky slopes.

I do not know by what path joy will come; I ask only to be permitted, none the less, to go to meet it, for truly I cannot sit here by this mile-post at the cross-roads, and placidly await it.

One joy has come to me during the war, one that is undoubtedly the greatest joy of my life: that of having a child. My reason did not revolt at it, it did not dare to tell me that it was foolhardy to desire a child at a time when the human world was left without defense against confusion, disorder and crime. Yes, I rejoiced to have a man-child born to me now when the future of men seems to be corrupted for long years to come. I even hailed the child as a savior. You see, the paths of joy are as unknown to us as those of grace.

I shall not forbear, therefore, and when I feel my heart bleeding from an unjust wound I shall go with respectful steps and recover myself in the world of solitude. I shall not ask in the name of justice, I shall not insist, I shall not importune; I shall wait until it manifests itself and sets me free, I shall wait until at last it bestows upon me the grace which, like a fine sap, like mother's milk, it always contains.

Solitude! I can still conquer it among a hundred thousand chattering companions; I know how to sing to myself little songs that surround me with the silence of the steppes.

I will go back again to the ravine where, the whole summer long, a blackbird I know of whistles that same liquid song that grows purer and more perfect from week to week. Ten notes are his whole career and his reason for being. Perhaps on a day that music will be just what my soul needs to recover its flight, like a stranded bark which a lazy wave has just set floating.

I will go back to the spots where I have been happy, and I do not think this will be very imprudent; for, like the perfume a woman leaves in her garments, like a drop of wine in the bottom of a glass, a little happiness often remains attached to things.

I shall go out again behind the hamlet, where I know that every morning a couple of turtle-doves mingle a plaint that secretly cuts the silence, hollows it with a melodious tunnel.

And I shall stretch myself out there, my face to the sky, like a well-exposed vine that longs to ripen some fine fruit.

I am saying what I shall do, with the sole purpose, with the deep desire, that you will all do the same, and that you will each turn to your favorite star; and all this with the earnest desire that you will not be content to remain sheep marked, without redemption, for the knife.

It requires little at times. The soul is not more exacting than the body. I have seen exhausted soldiers whom a single swallow of brandy raised up again to the heights of courage. I have seen seriously wounded men brought back to life when their bodies were turned a little in order to facilitate the uncertain flow of the blood.

The soul is no less fragile, no less sensitive. If the western view keeps you sad, turn lightly to the south. We do not know what the divine world holds in store.

VII

Happy are those who are able to pray. It is thus that Christians solicit grace.

It is easy to fall on one's knees; but to be able to pray one must already possess that grace which one implores. It is so great a gift, the gift of prayer, that it is almost indelicate to desire anything else from it.

To drink is a small matter. To be thirsty is everything.

Why do the Christians, who counsel us to pray in order to obtain grace, never tell us what we must do in order to be able to pray? It is not for nothing, nevertheless, that they arrange the play of light and shade through their stained-glass windows, the odor of stones and incense, the silence of the vaults and the propitiatory sights of the organ, all those harmonious snares set for the wandering prayer.

As for me, I shall take a staff and go out seeking the solitude of the world. If this world is a city street at dawn,—that will do! A misty dock, its outline broken by rails and masts,—that will do! A sunken road, lighted by the flowering broom,—that will do! The court of a barrack, the muddy enclosure of a prison-camp, oh! pitiful as it may seem to me, may it still seem good!

If I can walk, straight before me or far and wide, I can pray. If I can see a scrap of the sky, I can pray. And with all nature offered to my soul, I can pray, I can pray in spite of everything and as if without willing it. I must see that osier-bed, or the radiant awning of that wagon, or the image of the bridge in the water. I must hear the moaning of those interlaced branches; then I am able to feel myself bathed in grace.

Grace! It is indeed the fleeting consciousness man has of his divinity.

And now, now especially, and more than ever, we say to ourselves, man must have faith in his divinity!

IX
APOSTLESHIP

I

The beautiful legend of the multiplication of the loaves of bread is miraculous only in the material order to which we try to confine it. But the infinite multiplication of moral nourishment is our daily spectacle, our joy, our encouragement.

We know that the possession of material goods inclines us to exclusiveness, solitary satisfaction: if I wish to share with you this beautiful apple I hold in my hand, I must make up my mind to enjoy only half of it myself. And if there are four of us the part each one has will be proportionally reduced. Ah! blessed would be the wonder-worker who could refresh us all with a single glass of water, stay us all with a single mouthful of bread.

That miracle flashes forth every day before our eyes. All moral wealth seems to increase by being possessed in common. The more a truth is spread abroad the more its beauty, its prestige, and in a way its efficacy, grows. The veneration a hundred peoples throw round a painting of da Vinci's, a song of Glück's, or a saying of Spinoza's has not partitioned these lovely treasures but has added to their importance and their glory, has developed and opened up the whole sum of joy that lies latent in them. Great ideas have such radiant strength! They cross space and time like avalanches: they carry along with them whatever they touch. They are the only riches that one shares without ever dividing them.

This fact invites each one of us to make himself the modest and persevering apostle of his own truths, the propagator of his discoveries, the dispenser of his moral riches. Our own interest demands it imperatively, no less than the interest of others. We shall never be really happy until we have admitted and converted to our joy those whom we love; and we shall love them all the better for having brought them some joy, for being among the causes of their comfort.

The journeys we have made alone without companions leave us a memory that is melancholy and without warmth. It is because we have had no one to whom we could communicate our admiration, our wonder. Seated alone before the most majestic landscapes, we have had no one to whom we could express our enthusiasm, and deprived of this expansion it has been stunted, it has remained, we might say, poor. Sharing it would have enriched it.

We love solitude, indeed; it is the cold and silent fountain at which our soul is purified and confirmed. But what would it profit us to have amassed great riches, by the help of solitude, if we had no one to whom to offer them?

It is because he feels this anxiety that man seeks a lasting union. Among a thousand generosities, love offers him the opportunity to enjoy companionship without renouncing solitude. A happy home is the solitude of many a soul. The man who has entered into a beautiful union is sure of at least one person to whom he can give the best that he possesses.

II

Perhaps you will say to me: "How can I be an apostle when I have in myself only a wavering faith? I would enjoy being generous, but I am obliged to beg from the generosity of others. Such advice is for those rich souls who, precisely because they are rich, have no need of advice. It is with this kind of fortune as it is with money, it crowns those who already possess it! My soul is poor and timid; what sort of comfort would it be for other souls that are poor and timid also?"

O my friend, how deceived you are in yourself! How much like ingratitude your modesty seems! First of all, let me tell you that the heart that doubts its resources is rich without knowing it. The passion of humility weighs it down; let it free itself without becoming proud! In the realm of the intelligence, you have surely observed, it is only actual imbeciles who never doubt their faculties. The man who can admit his own insufficiency at once gives proof of a rare perspicacity. In the same way, if you think you are poor it is because you are not. The only natures that are truly arid are those who do not recognize and never will recognize their own sterility.

This morning you went out at dawn to take up your duties. In the marsh that slumbers along the edge of the road there were such delicate green and purple reflections that you were struck by them. You spoke to me about them, very subtly and sensitively, as soon as you were able to see me. You were generous with me. You shared your good fortune with me. Thank you!

Who spoke to me about Faisne's unhappiness? Who suddenly opened my eyes and made me realize the profound misery of that soul? It was you! I am still touched by your affectionate insight, I still marvel at your fortune.

You remember that night when we were lying stretched out together in the fields, looking up at a sky that was rippling with milky light. You said nothing to me, but I understood that evening that you were possessed, to the point of intoxication, with an immense, terrible idea, that of infinity. Thanks to your silence, I shared with you that overwhelming treasure.

Who lent me that beautiful Swedish book I did not know? Who spoke to me so enthusiastically about it? It was you, you again!

Who sings to me, when I am tired, that song as poignant and serene as a breath that has come from beyond the midnight oceans? You know very well, my friend, it is you.

I could tell you of a thousand instances of your generosity, a thousand apostolic words that have issued from your lips.

Ah! my friend, can you disavow such riches? Can you show at the same time such bitterness and such prodigality?

Every day you discover a means of transforming into happiness the elements that others possess and neglect. Do not hesitate, therefore: show them the fruitful use they ought to make of their blessings.

And do not ask any other recompense than the pleasure of having been the giver, the initiator.

The total amount of joy that prevails on the face of our world is of great importance to you and to me. One must always labor to augment it, whoever the direct beneficiaries may be. There is no one who, in the end, will not catch its echo, who will not receive his own personal profit from it.

And that is also why, in the present immense misery of the world, the selfish pleasure-seekers feel themselves ill at ease, even when their untimely pleasures are seen by nobody.

III

If you will, we can begin with the resolution never to undeceive anyone who thinks he possesses anything.

There are some who make it their care and pride to deprive their neighbors of those illusions that Ibsen calls "the vital illusions." The characteristic of these illusions is that they cannot be replaced. To tear them away leaves a man mutilated, without any possible reparation.

Young people, assuredly, have a very exuberant sap and all sorts of encumbering shoots. Skillful and careful shears may well cut off, here and there, these over-greedy branches—and the tree will bear heavier and more fragrant fruit.

But can you without guilt take away his wealth from that old man whose illusion is his only pleasure? Beware of cutting off all its leaves from that old trunk that will never bring forth again and has nothing but its foliage with which to subsist and feel the sun.

Distrust those men who have what is like a false passion for truth. They are swollen with presumptuous vanity. They do not know that real truth exists only where there is faith, even faith without an object. Of what importance is the object? It is in faith itself that our grandeur lies.

In my childhood, I often used to stop in to see a certain humble, white-haired shopkeeper. She vegetated in a dark little shop and was always sitting behind her window, where the dust lay thick over the toys and trinkets. Her business was very poor, but she loved to say at night: "The passers-by were very good today. They looked in the window a great deal."

I noticed, in fact, that nearly all who went by turned toward the dark shop a long, dreamy look, full of unusual interest, that sometimes caused them to stop short.

One day, as I was myself passing before the poor little display, I suddenly understood what it was the passers-by looked at so kindly: it was their own faces reflected in the dark window-pane.

I was still very young, but I realized vaguely that it would never do to disclose this disastrous discovery to my old friend.

IV

But this passive good will is not enough. It is not enough not to harm things. Marcus Aurelius, I believe, has said; "One is often as unjust in doing nothing as in doing what one does." You must understand, therefore, that not to share your inner fortune is, in some sort, to rob those who surround you.

We must first declare our blessings: we must try to do this without shame and without arrogance. Those who enjoy an intense and efficacious inner life draw from it a great deal of pride; they would gladly communicate it if they did not know that these treasures seem ridiculous to the common men; it is really shame, therefore, that prevents them from being proud.

In spite of the cry of Hamlet, it is through words that one discovers and possesses the world.

The rhetoricians have done their work so well that at times words seem dry, empty of pulp, empty of juice. They are no longer nourishing food, they are discordant sounds.

It needs only a little confidence and generosity to restore their meaning and their weight. Then they become precious and faithful. We call them, like devoted persons, to our aid; they come at once out of the shadow and show themselves docile to our wishes.

Marcus Aurelius, of whom we have just spoken, has said this also: "I wish always to define or describe the object that presents itself to my thoughts, so as to see, distinctly and in its nakedness, what it is in its substance, considered as a whole, and separately in all its parts, so as to be able to tell myself its true name as well as the true names of the parts of which it is composed and into which it can be resolved. For nothing is so suited to elevate the soul as to analyze as much as possible, with method and justice, everything that one meets with in life, and always to examine each object so as to be able to recognize at once to what order of things it belongs, of what, use it is, and what is its importance in the universe and, relatively, to man."

It is with words that this task is accomplished.

I have noted another beautiful expression on this subject; it is from M. Anatole France. "Words," he says, "are ideas.... I think the highest race in the world is that which has the best syntax. It often happens that men cut each other's throats over words they do not understand. If they understood each other they would embrace each other."

Be very sure then that the words of which we make use are deserving of all our care, all our respect. They are the witnesses of our thoughts. They will betray us if we degrade them to base uses.

Choose them with great tenderness; that is a quality as enviable as precision. And by means of these choice words, loyally express your fortune.

Tell what you have discovered, what you know. In affirming your possession you render it sure, positive. You labor for others and for yourself. You give form to your treasure and yield it, as if perfected, to those who truly wish to avail themselves of it.

V

Yes, in acting in this way, you are also working for your own profit. Do not let us leave this burning subject too quickly.

If I were not afraid of giving a conviction the form of a whim, I should say: "You do your work and it does good to you."

Among the ideas that are dear to you and that you are glad to express are not only certainties, verified results, the testimony of experience. There are many wishes, many longings, too. By virtue of being enunciated, these end by reacting upon you, by gently imprisoning you. When you speak of virtue, or happiness, or the spirit of adventure or courage, you further certain things that are indeed your own; you further also many other things that you passionately wish to have become your own, your unique and recognized quality. By virtue of expressing them, it comes to pass that they in turn react upon you; a moment arrives when you are morally constrained to become the product of your opinions. In this sense your work does for you the good that you have done for it.

Admit, therefore, that if it pleases you to see and to paint your life in generous, harmonious colors, it is inevitable that harmony and generosity should little by little imprint their stamp on your serious thoughts and on your acts.

Therefore speak, speak of your dream. Every time someone tells you: "You do not live up to what you say," think, with a smile: "Not yet, undoubtedly; but I feel sure that one day my words, that is to say, my thoughts, will prove to be truer than my vagaries."

When you have tried and proved this method, you will attempt to bestow it upon others.

To that end strive to win a reputation among uncertain, hesitating people. Be prudent: this is the time when it is of great importance to choose the right ideas and words. But if you see one of your companions torn between two opposing reputations, imprison him in the better of the two.

I once knew a man who had done many good acts and a considerable number of reprehensible ones. One day, when I saw him hesitating between these two different tendencies, I began to address certain phrases to him that opened somewhat like this: "You who are so good.... You who have done such and such fine things." ... And the result was that that man became really good, in order not to betray the reputation he had gained.

I foresee that you are about to pronounce the word vanity. Stop a moment! It is not a base stratagem that causes a barren soul to bring forth a fine harvest. If I had called the attention of that man to what was mean and sordid in his character, he would have perhaps become a villain altogether, and that would have been a shame for him, for me, and for everybody.

VI

We have discovered together, you will recall, that the world is offered to all men that it may be possessed by each with the help of all. You see, then, that in your modest rôle of apostle there is a means of making others rich while securing their help for your own undertakings.

Estimate your wealth according to the importance of what you give. Dispossess yourself boldly. Everything will be returned to you at the right time and a hundredfold.

If the great apostles were able to bring the good news, it was because they had faith; but nothing could have exalted their faith more than to bring the good news.

If you have been interested in something you have read, in a walk, if you have been astonished at some spectacle, invite all those whom you know to read what you have read, to take that walk, to contemplate that spectacle. Show some discernment in your invitations. Distrust the sceptics a little, the ironical, cruel, or contradictory spirits. Distrust them, but do not abandon them: they are the strayed sheep whose return ought to rejoice your heart supremely. When you have made them admit: "Yes, there's something really fine! Yes, there's something interesting, there's something worth the pain of living!" you may fall asleep with a smile; your day will not have been lost.

At times, you will make a discovery so rare, so delicate that, by some secret warning, you will know it cannot be communicated, that it is strictly individual, that it ought to remain as a private relation between the world and your soul. In that case, keep your own counsel. Perhaps a day will come when your thought will have gained in precision through being amplified; on that day you will be mysteriously informed that your treasure has lost its private character, that it has become suitable for sustaining your communion with others. When that day comes, speak forth. Until that day, however, be patient; do not fall into the error of those spirits who are called obscure because they offer us impressions that have been insufficiently ripened and experienced, impressions that are not for all humanity.

On the other hand, when someone offers you one of these obscure impressions, do not reject it, do not laugh with disdain. Force yourself to feel what has been pictured for you in this faulty fashion. You will do your partner a service in visualizing his discovery, and you will perhaps be able to increase your own stock. Perhaps there will be something worth seizing and understanding at the bottom of it.

Always seek communion. It is the most precious thing men possess. In this respect, the symbol of the religions is indeed full of majesty. Where there is communion there is something that is more than human, there is surely something divine.

When you deem that you have grasped a truth do not forget, in communicating it to others, that there are two conditions of truth. Any truth one receives is but a small fortune in comparison with the value of that which one experiences. Therefore persuade those you love into the experiencing of truths, into the religious, courageous, persistent experiencing of the well-beloved truth.

VII

One dreams of a life in which everyone would be the apostle of what he possesses and where all would be the disciples of each.

If you wish to be an apostle, begin by never mislaying any of your wealth.

I once had a friend who said to me almost every day: "This morning I had a beautiful thought; but I can't find it again, I've forgotten it, I've lost it."

You have a purse to contain your money; condescend to have a scrap of paper on which you can put your thoughts, where you can set them in order. It is a slight means to what will eventually be a great end. Be economical of your treasures so that you may be lavish of them at the opportune moment. Do not lose what you wish to give away.

You are like the seeker after gold, on your knees by the bank of a river that rolls with sand and with nuggets.

The rushing flood of your soul flows by, and you watch it with fear and delight. Every sort of thing is in it: mud, grass, gold, flowers, formless and nameless debris. Gather to one side what you deem worthy to be preserved, do not let it escape in the torrent.

This mass of thoughts that crowd and elbow one another, this storm that tumbles its way over you, this unending dream that you have when you are awake, when your soul abandons itself to its natural, spontaneous impulses, there, indeed, is matter to terrify you! So many things appear and are swallowed up again that scandalize or horrify you; so many contradictions bewilder you, so many jewels shine furtively forth, that you are by turns filled with consternation, stupefied, dazzled.

You must choose among all these things. You must draw out of the current what you recognize as of value to you, and let the rest sink.

I beg you, keep the reckoning of your own soul. Keep a little book in your pocket that is carefully brought up to date. And do not trust your memory; it is a net full of holes; the most beautiful prizes slip through it.

You must not have too much fear of not being up to your task when you are approaching great problems and great works.

That is something worth meditating for him who sets himself to obtaining possession of the world, who wishes to invite his companions to do the same.

Though it may have all the appearance of naïveté, confidence is less to be feared than the terror of ridicule that paralyzes so many souls at the beginning of the most beautiful adventures.

The fear of enthusiasm does as much harm as obvious wickedness.

It is better to pass for a simpleton and become the laughing-stock of the disillusioned than to miss the opportunity to serve as the apostle of one's beloved verities. It is better to squander one's fortune than to run the risk of being the only one to profit from it. There will always be a farthing to fall into eager hands.

The main thing is to be, above everything else, a man of good will.

The true enemy, if there is any such, is the pharisee, the man of outward observance, he who adopts every religion as a matter of fashion, who speaks frequently and passionately of his soul in the same way in which he speaks of his necktie.

VIII

If you are only two against a thousand in leading this beautiful, pure life, rejoice that there are at least two of you and do not despair of your course of action.

Is it not Renan who has uttered this profound saying: "The great things in any race are usually accomplished by the minority"?

Do not rejoice because there are slaves. Let their example be a fearful warning to you; let it fill you with an overmastering desire to free them from servitude.

To the apostle Paul is ascribed that disquieting utterance of the conquering soldier: "Oportet hæreses esse."

Yes, undoubtedly, whoever wishes to fight needs an enemy.

The dazzling chance of such conquests is not, alas, the thing you will be most likely to miss. But every conquest is vain that does not tend toward peace.

One thinks with ecstasy of the joy of a universal communion, from which no one would be left out, in which no one would be the victim.

Must there be heretics? Yes! To convince them, but not to vanquish them, and still less to put them to the stake.

X
ON THE REIGN OF THE HEART

> "The knowledge of external things does not make up for me, in times of affliction, for my ignorance of the moral world; but my knowledge of the moral world always consoles me for my ignorance of external things."—*Pascal*.

I

It has come, the time of affliction!

Whatever may be the outcome of this war, it marks a period of profound despair for humanity. However great may be the pride of victory, however generous such a victory may be, under whatever light the distant consequences may be presented to us, we live, none the less, in a blighted age, on an earth that will be devastated for long years, in the midst of a society that is decimated, ruined, crushed by its wounds.

Among all our disillusionments, if there is one that remains especially painful to us it is the sort of bankruptcy of which our whole civilization is convicted.

Man had never been prouder than at the beginning of the twentieth century of the discoveries he had realized in the domain of what Pascal called "the external sciences."

We must admit that there was some excuse for this intoxication, this error. In its struggle with matter, humanity had experienced a success that was so daring, so disconcerting, and above all so repeated that it lost a just conception of its adversary and forgot that its principal enemy was itself.

Events have recalled this to it in a flash. In the last year or two it has expressed its discomfiture through millions of simple lips. It has asked with anguish how "a century so advanced in civilization" could give birth to this demoralizing catastrophe. Stupefied, it sees turning against itself all those inventions which, it had been told, were made for its happiness. For hardly one is absent. Even those that seemed the highest in moral significance, even they, have contributed in some degree to the disaster. Only the fear of creating an uncontrollable situation has prevented certain of the belligerents from forming an alliance with the very germs of epidemic diseases and thus debasing the noblest of all the acquisitions of science.

A doubt has grown up in all hearts: what, after all, is this civilization from which we draw such pride and which we claim the right to impose upon the peoples of the other continents? What is this thing that has suddenly revealed itself as so cruel, so dangerous, as destitute of soul as its own machines?

Eyes have been opened, spirits have been illuminated: never did barbarism, in all its brutality and destructiveness, attain results as monstrous as those of which our industrial and scientific civilization has proved itself capable. Is it indeed anything but a travesty on barbarism?

What inclines one to believe this is that the peoples which have dedicated to the gods of the factory and the laboratory the most fervent and the most vainglorious worship have shown themselves in this way by far the cruellest, the most fertile in inhumane and disgraceful inventions.

M. Bergson has said, of the intelligence, that it is "characterized by a natural incomprehension of life." To this one might add: and by a complete incomprehension of happiness, which is the very aim of life.

With its retinue of ingenious inventions and clever complications, the intelligence plays the part of something irresponsible or criminal in the great disorder of the world. It seems not only incapable of giving happiness to men, but actually adapted to bewilder them, corrupt them, set them quarreling. It knows how to provoke conflicts; it is unable either to exorcise them or to resolve them.

Scientific and industrial civilization based upon the intelligence is condemned. For long years it has monopolized and distracted all human energies. Its reign has ended in an immense defeat.

II

It is toward the resources of the heart that our hope turns. Betrayed by this clever intelligence, whose formidable works have at times the very look of stupidity itself, we aspire to the reign of the heart; all our desires turn toward a moral civilization, such as is alone capable of exalting us, satisfying us, protecting us, assuring us the true burgeoning of our race.

It is by juggling with words that people have been able to attach the idea of true progress to the development of the mechanical, chemical or biological sciences. True progress concerns nothing but the soul, it remains independent of the expedients and the practices of science. This latter is able to triumph even when the true progress, the ascent of mankind toward happiness, is interrupted and thwarted in its profoundest tendencies.

There are not lacking people to tell us that the war will mark with precision the advent of a new world, that it has bought in the blood and the flame the moral elevation necessary for a fruitful and final peace. We cannot share this optimism of official eloquence. It is not the performance of tasks of murder that opens to men the road to justice and converts them to good customs. Humanity must grow unaccustomed to crime, and it is not the armed intelligence that can accomplish this miracle. The pacifying work of the war will remain in peril if everything that is healthy and generous in humanity does not labor to dethrone this scientific civilization which still abuses society after having reduced it to helplessness.

I consider as negligible the objection of the stoics who say that these miseries do not depend upon us and that we ought obstinately to seek our happiness through them, isolate our happiness from the surrounding degradation. No! These miseries do depend upon us. In spite of its disdainful nobility, the stoic resignation has here too much the look of egoism.

This moral civilization, when its hour comes, will revive Christianity and propagate it; it will not leave the human race in the abandonment of the desperate misery of today.

III

The naturalists and the sociologists have contributed to spread this idea that moral progress is, for individuals, a function of the anatomical complex, and for societies of the complex of habits, institutions and industries. It is on this understanding that they have undertaken the classification of species and arranged the various human hierarchies.

That is a view entirely external to things, it cannot be verified as regards individual thought, it is a sheer fabrication as regards collectivities: the war is a bloody refutation of it.

If we mean by moral progress that which affects the conditions of happiness, nothing permits us to conjecture what advantages have been realized in this direction by the vegetable and animal organisms that have not chosen us as confidents. Habits, as we observe them, cannot be a criterion, even if we admit that we ought to seek for evidence among them; they seem as if designed to baffle all theories.

Those animals whose anatomical structure closely resembles ours, not to say that it is exactly analogous to ours, such as cattle and sheep, give proof of a moral activity that is insignificant beside the real genius shown by the bee and so many other insects whose nervous systems are still rudimentary in comparison with those of the mammals.

Certain sea animals, the barnacles, have suffered, because of their sedentary existence, an anatomical regression. We know that the mobile larvæ of the barnacles possess more complicated organisms than those of the adult and stationary animal. To conclude from that that this anatomical regression is a lowering of the species is to assume a great deal, and it is to accord to movement a very debatable significance.

There exist species of plant life, especially among the conifers and the ferns, which, for thousands of centuries, seem to have remained in an almost stable anatomical and functional stage. These species are none the less very widely scattered and very long-lived, very adaptable. They offer an outward appearance of happiness and prosperity. On the other hand, nothing permits us to affirm that certain species, like the orchids, which have undergone a delirious evolution resulting in forms of extreme anatomical complexity, have attained a true progress, have improved, that is to say, their moral destiny: we see them subject to innumerable external servitudes. Their reproduction, even, is only possible thanks to the intervention of outside agencies and is fraught with perils. A seductive argument that smacks of anthropomorphism inclines us to believe that these species, intoxicated with their material difficulties, ought to have a less free and less serene philosophical existence.

The complexity of the individual organism, which corresponds strictly to the political, economic and scientific complexity of societies, adds neither to the possibilities of life, nor to its scope of activity, nor to its hopes.

Certain fish, the pleuronectes, have sought their salvation in a very bold, precocious development that ends in a displacement of their eyes, of their mouth and in a profound disorder of their original symmetry. Looking at them, one has the impression that this development has thrown them into an impasse, into a *cul-de-sac* from which it would be difficult for them to escape into a new evolution; one has the impression that this whole biological stratagem has considerably restricted the destiny of the species.

Besides, and the naturalists know it very well, the species that are most highly evolved, most differentiated, to employ the consecrated expression, are in a certain sense the oldest species, imprisoned in their own tradition and scarcely to be counted upon for a new adaptation, a profound reformation of their organs and their habits.

IV

This digression, too long for our restlessness, but too succinct in view of the facts it involves, raises several criticisms.

One might, in the first place, object that evolution is a thing which species undergo and which they cannot influence themselves. If that is true, humanity finds itself forced into an adventure against which it is puerile and presumptuous to contend.

This attitude implies a submissive fatalism that denies both our sense of experience and our thirst for perfection. We are apt to construe our lessons in such a way as to draw instruction from them. We have shown this in many moments of crisis, and we feel a certain repugnance to thinking that we cannot turn to our own profit the most majestic lesson that has ever been given to men.

Certain minds, on the other hand, have concluded that humanity is altogether too old, too highly evolved a species to be capable of ever again renouncing what is fundamental in its inveterate intellectual traditions, its scientific acquisitions and the customs that have sprung from them.

If this conception of the world did not appear as if stamped with lassitude and scepticism, it would seem to leave us in the presence of a desperate alternative: either the acceptance of a life without restraint, given over to every sort of folly, exposed to every sort of lapse into crime, or the solitary search for an oblivion that only waits for death.

But will the peoples who have struggled so fiercely for their material interests remain disarmed in the face of the moral danger that threatens the very morning of the race, will they undertake nothing truly efficacious for the sake of posterity?

That is the anxiety that haunts generous souls today.

The political arrangements that will mark the end of this war will be of no real interest if the minds that control the spiritual direction of the peoples do not labor, from now on-and in the future, to modify the meaning of the ideas of progress and civilization.

We cannot believe that humanity is so deeply sunk in its convictions and its intellectual habits as to remain forever incapable of sudden change and reform.

The human world has already passed through important crises; it has already been forced several times to reshape the idea it had formed of culture and civilization.

It has always been amid its ruins that it has meditated the conditions of a new life. If it is true that ruins demand the revolution of customs, let us admit that the heart of man has never been more urgently entreated than today.

In any case, there is no question of giving up those customs that form an integral part of our vital economy. It would be fantastic to consider the regeneration of a society that was deprived, for example, of the means of communication which have obtained for a century and which we could scarcely abandon now without suicide. But it is fair to consider how great and dangerous is the hold of the false needs which the study of the "external sciences" creates in us and not to permit our ideal activity to be blindly enslaved any longer by our material ingenuity.

There exist in our nature ardent forces that one cannot condemn without appeal and that will manifest themselves against all discipline.

The passion of the sciences must be deeply-rooted when we see men, in love with love, peace, humanity, consecrating themselves, as if in their own despite, under the cover of some abstract sophistry, to tasks whose results may contribute seriously to the wretchedness and the debasement of society.

If one might gather together all the faculties of the spirit for the single cause of happiness!

At least, and from now on, let us cease to consider that the monstrous development of industrial science represents civilization; otherwise let us withdraw from this word its whole moral significance and seek another for the needs of our ideal.

Let us cease humiliating moral culture, the only pledge we have of peace and happiness, before the irresponsible and unruly genius that haunts the laboratories. Scientific civilization, let us say, to allow it to keep this name for a moment, has been for us so prodigal in bitterness that we can no longer abandon it uncontrolled to its devouring activity. We must make use of it as a servant and cease any longer to adore it as a goddess.

V

We must revise all our definitions, all our values, our whole vocabulary.

All fervent spirits should set themselves to this work, and their task will be all the heavier the more widely extended they are assured their influence will be.

We must strive to make our stunned humanity realize that happiness does not consist in travelling at the rate of sixty miles an hour, rising up into the air on a machine or talking under the ocean, but above all else in being rich in beautiful thoughts, contented with its work, honored with warm affections.

We must restore the cult of the arts which contribute to the purification of the soul, which are consoling in times of affliction and remain, by their nature, incapable of serving ignoble ends.

We must employ our strength to altering the meaning of the words "riches," "possessions," "authority," to showing that they are things of the soul and that the material acceptance of these terms corresponds to realities that are perfidious and ironical. We must at the same time transform the ideas of benevolence and ambition, open a new career to these virtues, create for them new ends and new satisfactions. Those who consider such a program with irony or scepticism make a great mistake. Its realization may seem illusory, but it will undoubtedly become a necessity. The material goods at the disposal of humanity will find themselves considerably reduced both by the destruction of which they have been the object and by the long arrest of the production of them.

Their rarity and their growing expensiveness will be the source of grave and almost insoluble conflicts, which new effusions of blood will only make more venomous.

Humanity can hurl against this terrible future a defiance full of grandeur. It can, under the influence of its spiritual masters, seek its happiness in a wise and passionate transformation of its desires.

Let us not urge it toward resignation but toward the conquest of the true riches, those that assure it the moral possession of the world.

VI

The economists, whose science the war has so often tested, are laboring to define what will be the conditions of life in the period that will follow the world war; their estimates leave little room for the hope of an agreeable and easy material existence; they hold over the mass of men, conquered and conquerors alike, the menace of desperate labor and slight and wretched returns.

These learned researches, added to the similar conclusions of common sense, do not seem to discourage the laborious race of men. They have been told they must work, and even now, while they are struggling against a hundred fearful perils, they are mentally preparing to earn their difficult living, if only the war does not take away their lives.

The modern industrial monster sets these conditions in advance. We already know that competition will be pitiless, we know too that enjoyment will only be for the highest bidder. Individuals, at the sight of this future, mutually urge one another to be stubborn. The world is preparing to take up again, obstinately, the old order that has cost it so many trials. As yet no one speaks of a new life.

There will be so many voices to praise these desperate resolutions, so many books will be written to persuade men to persevere in their old hatreds that a timid voice may well raise itself to protest against the consummation of the error.

A man whom I love and esteem above all others once said to me:

"When peace is signed and I return home, I shall have to give up all the distractions I used to have if I wish to work as much as will be necessary to recover a situation as good as the one I had before."

Believe me, O my friend who said these words to me, I love work too well to blame your decision; but I was thinking only of your happiness, and it was of your situation that you spoke to me. Are you sure that they are rightly related, those two words, those two ideas? What do you hope from the future if you are not going to allow a large place in it to the soul?

What compensation will be left for our passion of today if we take up all our prejudices again, if we return to our own vomit?

The old civilization seems condemned. To break with it, we must first of all seek our individual satisfaction outside money, our happiness outside the whirlpool of pleasure. We must flee deliberately from the tyranny of luxury. In this way even the events of the present oblige us to seek our true path. Must we keep blindly and obstinately to the ways of slavery? We have slighted the best sources of interest, joy and wealth; shall we misprize them now that they remain the only fresh and faithful things in the aridity of our time? Shall we neglect our souls again to seek a false fortune that can only betray us? Shall we contend with exasperated brutes over possessions we know to be unstable and deceptive?

No! No! Here should lie the lesson and the one benefit of this war: that we should undeceive ourselves about ourselves and about our ends! Let us not devote our courage to choosing a ferocious discipline devoid of the ideal. Let us once for all reject our calculating and demoralizing intelligence. Let us organize, in the peace that returns, the reign of the heart.

VII

The search for happiness cannot ignore the conditions of the material life. Undoubtedly, well-being, comfort, dispose us to a happy view of things; but will they ever replace what a poet has called "the contented heart"?

The Anglo-American peoples, susceptible as they are to all the moral and religious revolutions, have applied themselves to altering the original sense of simple well-being so as to identify it with luxurious comfort. That is a way of giving a moral aspect to pleasure, making an honest bargain with the corruptions of money.

The exigencies of this sort of life have largely contributed to involving these peoples in a frenzied whirlwind of business that wears a man out and bewilders him. The anonymous writer of the "Letters of an Elderly American to a Frenchman" says to my countrymen: "Your most beautiful country-houses and your best hotels are occupied most of the time by foreigners, while your own people have to content themselves with miserable little cheap holes. Isn't it absurd!" Perhaps, O Elderly American, but that absurdity is dear to my heart. May the God of journeys always turn my path away from the tainted spots where rise those buildings in which the existence you think so enviable is passed. If we are to consecrate our friendship we ought to discuss the value of words: what you call happiness does not tempt me.

The love of nature, the taste for those simple, healthy joys that were so vaunted by the philosophers of our eighteenth century have been the laughing-stock of our contemporary writers. A laughable excess has led, by reaction, to a furious and ignoble excess.

The dramatists and novelists of our time who, by the quality of their opinions or by their political positions are ostensibly laboring for a moral or religious end, have betrayed, in most of their works, a servile and ill-concealed love of luxury. It is useless to give names; let us say only that none of the modern novels of certain of our authors lack those descriptions and professions of faith that reveal the quivering longing of the pauper for the delights and enjoyments on which all his eager desires are fixed.

It is partly to the influence of this literature that our old world owes the headlong rush of all classes of humanity toward those pleasures that are only the phantoms of happiness and will never be anything else.

If genius wishes to consecrate itself to a labor that is truly reconstructive, truly pacific, it must discover other subjects for its works.

VIII

If the future laws governing labor do not allow enough time for the cultivation and the flourishing of the soul, a sacred struggle will become inevitable.

The organizers of the modern world, who have shown themselves powerless to avert war and did not realize the vanity of our old civilization, do not yet seem to foresee the urgency of radical changes in the moral education of the peoples.

They continue to talk to us about the superhuman efforts we must make in order to redeem their faults.

No one shrinks before these efforts. Society is weary of crime but not of peaceful tasks. Everyone prepares with joyous energy to take up his former position and his tools again.

It rests with us all to mitigate the severity of economic conflicts by working to transform the current idea of happiness.

The possessors of material wealth have, in general, for centuries, given to those whom they employ and direct so scandalous and basely immoral an example that they themselves are the principal fomenters of the attacks which they will henceforth have to undergo.

In the machinery of modern industry, work has lost a great many of its attractive virtues: all the methods in force tend to diminish the part played by the soul and the heart, and the workman, imprisoned in an almost mechanical function, no longer expects from work the personal satisfaction he once obtained; as a poet has said: “His empty labor is the fate he fights against.”

Certain American methods have based their theory upon a clever sophism; they exaggerate the automatic under the pretext of thus cutting short the length of the work. That is not a happy solution, to cut short the hours of labor by emptying it of all joy, of all professional interest. It is better to undertake a long piece of work with relish than to hurry through a short task with repugnance.

The specialization that is rendered necessary by the very extent of scientific and industrial activity remains a dangerous thing, especially among an old race of encyclopedists like ourselves.

However that may be, the peoples consent to yield themselves to the discretion of the modern world. May the monster leave them some scraps of a liberty that is still honorable enough for them to think of cultivating their souls. There will not be lacking men of good will who will be glad to devote themselves to directing this liberty, to transforming the meaning and the demands of joy, propagating a culture which, unlike those old errors, will support education more readily than instruction,—men who will more often address themselves to the heart than to the disastrous reason.

IX

France has suffered, suffers and will suffer more deeply than all the other countries of the world. She is at once the altar and the holocaust. She has sacrificed her men, her cities, and her soil. It is in the heart of her beautiful fields that the devastating storm whirls and roars.

In the depths of my soul I hope that, because of this great grief, it will be France that will give the signal for redemption. I hope that the reign of the heart will begin just here where the old civilization will leave imperishable traces of its murderous folly.

The resources of the French people in perseverance, in self-reliance, in goodness, in subtle delicacy are so great that one feels a word would suffice to rally all hearts and give them their bearings. One feels that at the mere phrase “moral civilization” thousands and thousands of noble heads will nod approval, thousands of hands will reach out to find each other.

People who have obstinate views on the political meaning of wars, on the eminently economic nature of the peril that has been run by humanity, and on the efficacy of the industrial and scientific civilization, will not fail to proclaim that France ought first of all to return to its furious task and apply itself to surpassing the peoples that have outstripped it along this path.

But France has always been the country of initiation and revelation. It is the chosen land of spiritual revolutions. May the bloody baptism it has received give it precedence in the discussion of the future!

Do you wish it to lose the glorious rank it holds in the moral order, at the head of the nations, that it may fall in line behind the peoples who are enslaved by automatism and swear allegiance to a worn-out, condemned, bankrupt social and economic religion?

If the destiny of our country is to make a humanity that is plunged in affliction give ear to the words of peace, consolation and love, let it accomplish this beautiful mission, let it teach the other peoples the generous laws of the true possession of the world.

X

My work is finished, and now the time has come for me to part with it.

It is going off into this misty autumn night. My heart is both glad and sorrowful.

It is going away from me, henceforth to follow a destiny of its own that will no longer depend only upon my love.

I shall turn to other duties, I shall assume other cares. A voice tells me that they will always be the same duties, the same cares, and that there is no longer but one great task for men, one single task with a hundred radiant aspects.

It is late. The night is drawing to a close; it is calm and yet penetrated with a vast, subdued murmur of joy. They say it is one of the last nights of the war.

I hear about me the panting breath of the wounded. There are several hundred of them; they are sleeping or longing for sleep and rest. Their burning breath is like a lamentation. Many of them will never see the peace they have so dearly bought. They are perhaps the wounded of the last battle, the last victims, the last martyrs.

Over the whole face of the world souls are suffering with them, for them, souls which the angel of death laboring here this night will not deliver.

My work is finished. It begins to withdraw from me. If it can bring any consolation to a single one of these suffering souls, let me believe that it has fulfilled its destiny.

THE END

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