# AS THEY SEEMED TO ME

UGO OJETTI

920.04 Oj2a

Ojetti

As they seemed to me.

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# AS THEY SEEMED TO ME

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Al traduttore.

Singolarmente mi piace che
alcune tra le più sciolte e fre-
sche pagine italiane d'oggi
sieno tradotte nella prosa del-
l'investigatore Thomas Brow-
ne e dell'imaginatore Walter
Pater da uno de' miei legio-
narii stranieri: da voi, mio

FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST PAGE OF GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO'S LETTER TO THE TRANSLATOR.

# AL TRADUTTORE

SINGOLARMENTE mi piace che alcune tra le più sciolte e fresche pagine italiane d'oggi sieno tradotte nella prosa dell'investigatore Thomas Browne e dell'immaginatore Walter Pater da uno de' miei legionarii stranieri: da voi, mio caro Henry Furst, che servendo la Causa bella apprendevate il linguaggio d'Italia nel più inconsueto dei modi. Ogni giorno l'azione era creata e condotta dalla parola. L'azione era costretta dalla parola in un disegno determinato e certo, contro ogni influsso o impulso o cecità di interni ed esterni eventi Ogni giorno il medesimo uomo sapeva parlare di quel che aveva saputo operare, imprimendo all'azione lo stile; che non è se non la necessità divenuta luminosa e inviolabile Il linguaggio non era la vanagloria dell'istoria ma la sostanza stessa dei fatti, la forza meditata ordinata e musicata della volontà.

Ve ne ricordate, o mio legionario da me educato ogni giorno a quella costanza nell'attenzione che un mio vecchio Toscano chiamava appunto 'assiduità degli occhi'? Spesso l'atto si ritorce contro chi lo compie, più spesso anche si distorce dal proposto fine. Spesso lo sforzo abbuia la volontà che vi si tende. A me inafferrabile non occorreva e non occorre l'ammonimento che tuttavia mi piacque in quel tempo rappresentare ai forzatori di sorti nella disavventura del crotoniate Milone. Se costui a

contrasto di polsi volle scindere il tronco già intaccato dal ferro ma si riserrarono le fibre dell'albero e gli imprigionarono le pugna, io sempre serbai libera e pronta la mia mano di scrittore; e quel che avevo operato sopra gli uomini, e quel che con la mia parola avevo suscitato negli uomini e strappato all'ignoto, io scrivevo ogni notte, io riduceva ogni notte a figure, da non potersi disfigurare. Sì che dalla vigilante azione lo scrittore notturno derivava due benefizii, inestimabili: una certa durezza propria alla incisione della materia dura, e la giustezza dei movimenti metrici nella prosa ferma esperimentati già con la voce 'vana ne' lievi venti.'

Voi dunque, mio caro Henry Furst, novissimo traduttore, siete stato condotto, quasi direi da un istinto fiumano verso uno scrittore che appunto la 'assiduità degli occhi' arricchisce della più varia evidenza e del più diverso ritmo. Questo acuto veditore non cessa di stare in orecchi, come direbbe la concisione del Davanzati. Tutt'occhi e tutt'-orecchi: la medesima concisione direbbe che é 'tutto scettro' nello studio della vita. E lo scettro, se in man del re allontana i sudditi, avvicina sempre più il sincero artista agli uomini e alle cose. Ben di rado—mi sembra—un osservatore sagace ebbe tale arte di approssimarsi a ciò che vive e a ciò che non vive, a ciò che si esprime e a ciò che non sa esprimersi, a ciò che si muove si cangia si dissimula e a ciò ch'ě immoto immutato leale. Molte di queste 'cose viste' non soltanto sono rispecchiate ma interpretate. Il veditore é comprensore, il novellatore é intenditore. E chiaro come abbia di recente saputo con sì schietto calore celebrare il Tintoretto chi da questi appreso ha il modo pronto di distinguere l'essenziale nel lineamento, e di serrar nello scorcio il movimento. In quali altri maestri

lo studioso può conoscere e noverare con tanta abbondanza gli ardiri e le certezze della maestria?

Dalla familiarità co' pittori Ugo Ojetti è indotto ad avvivar sempre la franchezza del suo tòcco. Luigi Lanzi direbbe di lui che lavora 'non tanto d'impasto quanto colpeggiando o di tòcco.' E il tòcco è certo il più singolar modo di espressione in chi adopera il pennello o il burino o la penna. La franchezza e prestezza del tòcco appunto gli consentono di trattare tanto numerose e dissimiglianti figure, di campeggiar per ciascuna tanto diversi campi. L'asperrimo scarpellatore invitto alle schegge, e l'aligero sogno del Vinci sopra il magno Cèceri ansioso di trasfigurazione; lo zazzerino polverulento di Teodoro Mommsen, e l'occhio glauco di Pierre Louys con le nudità di Tanagra nella pupilla dilatata dal farmaco; la cruda scrollata dell'armatura di Luigi Cadorna contro la zoppa ingiustizia, e la profonda agonia musicale di Giacomo Boni all'ombra della Niké pentelica; la parlatura iscolpita di Antonio Bourdelle ritto con salde calcagna con gomita tremanti dinnanzi al sasso di Paolo di Giovanni, e la scrittura lapidaria del vecchio Michelagnolo 'che non volle obbrigarsi a legge o antica o moderna. . . .'

Così, tutt'occhi tutt'orecchi, il cronachista sa cogliere gli aspetti e gli accenti del suo tempo innumerevoli. E nel chiamarlo cronachista, vorrei anche chiamarlo 'ymagier' a simiglianza di quel messer Gianni Froissart che, come lui, fa opera di pittore nel rappresentare il suo secolo: quel decimo quarto secolo dove, come nel nostro, si travagliano le decomposizioni e le natività, egualmente difficili, imputridiscono radici troppo vecchie e spuntano a fatica germi troppo nuovi, quel che fu annunciato s'indugia o dilegua e apparisce quel che èin atteso e intempestivo,

Rimane l'alta volontà scritta, rimane il gran disegno inciso, rimane l'ignuda testimonianza dell'arte massima.

Non trascurate dunque di mandarmi o di recarmi la vostra traslazione, testo senza miniature alla mia solitudine senza regalità.

La vostra maniera di apprendere la più nobile delle lingue classiche difendendo con me la città del consumato Amore, è tanto insolita che certo io ne troverò qualche straordinario segno nel vostro sforzo di voltare una prosa viva senza perderne una stilla di vita.

Or mentre attendo, con la mano nella mia opera novella e forse estrema, perché ripenso io al poeta dell'Urna greca e di Endimione, che giovine morì di tristezza là dove io giovine vissi di gioia? Non so perché io ripensi il pensiero e risoffra l'angoscia di John Keats nel giorno portentoso, or è cento dieci anni, quando la bruma di Londra fu a miracolo irradiata dai marmi di Elgin tra il Barco e il Tamigi, annitrendo i cavalli di Elio e di Selene

Il Vittoriale: 27 *ottobre* 1927

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

30

...nni, quando la bruma di
Londra fu a miracolo irra-
diata dai marmi di Elgin,
tra il Barco e il Vamigi
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Elio e di Selene.

Il Vittoriale: 27 ottobre 1927.

Gabriele d'Annunzio

FACSIMILE OF THE LAST PAGE OF GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO'S LETTER TO THE TRANSLATOR.

# A LETTER TO THE TRANSLATOR

## FROM GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

IT is singularly pleasing to me that some of the most flowing and spontaneous Italian writing of to-day should be translated by one of my foreign legionaries into the tongue of the investigator Thomas Browne and the image-maker Walter Pater: by you, my dear Henry Furst, who when serving the noble Cause learnt the idiom of Italy in the most unusual fashion. Every day action was created and conducted by speech ; action was constrained by speech to a determined and certain design, against every influence or impulse or the blindness of internal and external events. Every day the same man was able to say what he had been able to do, impressing style upon action; style which is nothing but necessity grown luminous and inviolable. Language was not the vainglory of history but the very substance of the facts; force of will predetermined, co-ordinated and turned to music.

Do you remember, O my legionary, how you were educated every day by me to that endurance in attention which one of my old Tuscans used to call 'assiduity of the eyes'? Often the act turns against its doer; even more often it turns away from the purposed end; often effort darkens the will that strains towards it. As for me, such is my adroitness that I did not need and do not

need the warning which none the less in the mishap of Crotoniate Milo it pleased me at that time to recall to the violators of destiny. Milo by the power of his hands wished to rend the trunk already split by the iron, and had his fists imprisoned by the springing back of the fibres of the tree, whereas I ever preserved free and ready the hand with which I write; and what I had achieved upon men, and what with my words I had awakened in men and wrested from the unknown, I wrote down every night. Every night I turned it into figures untransfigurable. So that the writer by night obtained from his vigilant activity two benefits, inestimable benefits: a certain hardness inherent in the engraving of hard materials, and, in the solidity of prose, the exactitude of metrical movements already tested by the voice, 'vain in the airy breezes.'

You, then, my dear Henry Furst, the latest of translators, have been led, I might almost say, by the spirit of Fiume towards a writer who to the 'assiduity of the eyes' brings enrichingly the most varied evidence and the most diverse rhythm. This acute see-er is yet all ears, as the terse Davanzati would say: all eyes and all ears. With identical terseness one might also say that he is 'all sceptre' in the study of life. And the sceptre, if in the hands of a King it wards off the subjects, brings the honest artist always nearer to men and things. Rarely indeed —it seems to me—did a sagacious observer possess such art in coming close to what is alive and to what is not alive; to what is expressed and to what cannot be expressed; to what moves and changes and dissembles and to what is immovable, unchangeable and loyal. Many of the 'Things Seen' in this book are not only mirrored

but interpreted. The see-er understands, the narrator divines. It is clear that if lately he was able to celebrate Tintoretto with such nice fervour, it was because he had learnt from him the quick way to distinguish the essential in the mass of lines and to imprison the movement in the fore-shortening. From what other masters can the student learn to know and to measure with such fullness the audacity and the certainty of mastery?

His familiarity with painters has induced Ugo Ojetti constantly to enliven the freshness of his touch. Luigi Lanzi would say of him that he works 'not so much by careful laying on of colour as by dabs and touches.' And touch is certainly the most singular mode of expression in whosoever employs brush or burin or pen. It is this very freshness and readiness of touch which permit him to handle such numerous and dissimilar figures, to frame for each one such diverse fields: the rough hewer heedless of splinters and Vinci's winged dream on great Ceceri avid of transfiguration; the frowzy mane of Theodor Mommsen and the grey eyes of Pierre Louys, the nudity of Tanagra in his drug-dilated pupils; the brusque indifference of Luigi Cadorna, shrugging his arm-clad shoulders at lame injustice, and the profound musical agony of Giacomo Boni under the shadow of the Pentelic Niké; the chiselled speech of Antoine Bourdelle erect on his sturdy heels, with trembling elbows, before the monument of Paolo di Giovanni, and the hammered writing of old Michelagnolo 'who would not bow before any law, ancient or modern. . . .'

So, all eyes and all ears, the wise chronicler picks the

innumerable aspects and accents of his time. And, when I call him chronicler, I should like to call him 'ymagier' after the likeness of that Sieur Jean de Froissart who, like him, does the work of a painter in representing his century: his fourteenth century, which, like ours, knew equally difficult decomposition and rebirth, with the decay of ageing roots and the painful bourgeoning of immature shoots; when that which was announced delays or vanishes and there appears that which was unexpected or inopportune.

The clerk of Valenciennes, too, proceeded by touches now ample and now minute, reminding us of the robust, substantial painting of his Flemings, the mingled wools and silks of tapestries, or of the very miniaturists who afterwards illuminated his manuscripts. He, too, all eyes and all ears, strained and strengthened his sense of colour and his sense of accent in the assiduity of attention. He too strove only to feel acutely and to transmit acutely 'la verité de la matière.' He too was a master of portraiture, and a master of vocalisation. Just as in some prose writings of our living author, so in some of the Sieur Jean we seem to discern a certain stress 'by which the voice distinguishes one syllable from the others in the word.' And in both we not seldom enjoy that 'verdure' of the language which we Italians might exactly call 'verdore' if Catherine of Siena did not use another ending in a turn of phrase not foreign to the one or to the other of these profane see-ers: 'So long does his verdour keep and avail as the eye of discernment remains in it.'

Sieur Jean de Froissart, like our author, carried the 'eye of discernment' ever open and vigilant, to the most various places and in all directions, riding not only through

France of the Seine, of the Garonne, of the Meuse, but through Scotland and Holland, following the Black Prince to Bordeaux, following the Duke of Clarence to Milan, visiting Bologna, Ferrara, Roma: Roma where all roads and all eyes meet, so that she conserves the actual manuscript of the first book of the 'Chroniques' with the celebrated emendations, additions, deletions.

Master of parallels as I am, my dear Henry Furst, I can point out to you another very singular instance pertinent to our own case. You render into the language of England the book of a writer whom I delight in comparing with that very man who brought his first volume of prose to London and offered it to the wife of the third Edward, to that Queen Philippa of Hainault whom one with my mania for italianising might call Filippa della Nalda, justifying himself by reference to an antique style of dress that found its way from Flanders to Tuscany. And in England the Sieur Jean spent his best years, so that it seemed his favourite country and even, during his pilgrimages, his second home, until his last visit, when, once more at Eltham, he bowed before Richard to offer him a beautiful book, illuminated 'par la grâce de Dieu et d'Amour.'

But by that time, after an absence of twenty-seven years, his heart was changed, his judgment grown severer and harsher. So many things seen were disappearing, so many things heard were being forgotten. History was turning to dust and ashes. 'All was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly,' was written by that Thomas Browne who in the beginning was in my mind. 'The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise;

Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams . . .'

But what matter? O my good legionary Henry Furst, there, in sight of the prone Carnaro, it was your lot to hear the weeping, as of a thousand and a thousand and a thousand men, of the transcendent beauty of my dream. It seemed that the bitter sea of Veglia, of Arbe, of Pago, of Uglian likened itself to the eyes of the people in making plaint for the shores lost once more. And, in the cruel noonday, the tears did not shine. And all was vain.

What does it matter? You saw, Henry Furst, how the most ardent torch can be extinguished in blood and tears, with the gasp of an expiring lamp, with a wreath of dingy smoke.

There remains the lofty will which has been written, there remains the great design which has been engraved, there remains the naked testimony of the highest art.

Do not then neglect to send or to bring your translation to me: a text without miniatures for my solitude without regality.

The way you learned the noblest of the classical languages, joining me in the defence of the city of consumed love, is so unusual that I am sure to find some extraordinary indications of it in your efforts to render a living prose without the loss of a single spark of life.

Now while I am waiting, with my hand on my latest and perhaps my last work, why do I recall the poet of the Grecian Urn and of Endymion, who in youth died of sadness on the spot where I in youth drew life from joy? I do not know why I recall the thought and why I re-suffer the anguish of John Keats on that momentous day,

a hundred and ten years ago, when the London fog was miraculously illumined by the Elgin marbles, the horses of Helios and Selene neighing, between the Park and the Thames.

IL VITTORIALE: *October* 27, 1927.

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

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# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

UGO OJETTI is one of the most distinguished of living Italian writers and art-critics. He was born in Rome on July 15, 1871, of an old Roman and clerical family; was educated at the Collegio Romano, and later took a degree in law at the University of Rome. In spite of this his later development was entirely literary and artistic. For many years he has been the chief ornament of the great Milanese newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, of which he became Editor in 1926 at the express desire of Benito Mussolini. His travels led him twice to America, to Asia (Asiatic Russia, Turkestan, Caucasus: see 'Two Cats'), Africa, and all Europe. From 1901–5 he lived in Paris, where he formed lasting friendships with the leading poets and artists of France, such as Anatole France, Barrès, Bourdelle. He is the greatest defender of Italy's art treasures as well as the most modern of critics; in his beautiful Renaissance villa 'Il Salviatino' near Florence he has formed a remarkable art-collection. He has been president and organizer of the biggest exhibitions that have been held in Italy, that of Italian portraits at Florence in 1911 and that of Italian painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at the Pitti in 1922. In 1920 he founded the art-review *Dedalo*, of which he is also Editor. During the War he took charge of the protection of Italian works of art in the

war-zone and under fire. For this he was three times promoted for special merit and received two medals for courage. For all these various services to the State Mussolini in 1925 nominated Signor Ojetti to the Upper House; but out of loyalty to the Neapolitan poet Salvatore di Giacomo, whose nomination was not, from motives of political pique, passed by the Senatorial committee, Ojetti declined the honour.

Among his published works are: *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, 1894; *Il Vecchio*, a novel, 1895; three volumes of short stories, 1900–1914; *Mio figlio ferroviere*, a novel, 1922; *Confidenze di pazzi e savi sui tempi che corrono*, 1921; *Cose Viste*, 1923, 1924, 1926—a fourth volume is to appear in 1928; *Ritratti d'artisti italiani*, 2 vols., 1911 and 1923.

The present volume is chosen from the three volumes *Cose Viste*, the title of which—*Things Seen*—being already the property of an English writer, it was not possible to retain in the translation, although it far more adequately renders the author's spirit than the somewhat Pirandellian title chosen.

H. F.

# AS THEY SEEMED TO ME

## MUSSOLINI MAKES A SPEECH

ROME,
*November* 8, 1921.

AT the Augusteo,[1] on the Press benches.

I had never heard Mussolini make a speech. He is outlined for me against the red velvet curtain that hangs on the stage. He has two faces in one: the upper one, from the nose upwards; the lower one, mouth, chin and jaw. Between the two there is not the slightest logical connexion: every now and then, by compressing his mandibles, pushing his chin forwards, frowning, Mussolini succeeds in imposing that connexion on his two half-faces—in reconciling them, by a great effort of will-power, for an instant. The eyes, round and close together, the forehead bare and open, the nose short and keen, form his mobile and romantic face; the other, with its straight lips, prominent jaw, square chin, is his set face, his voluntary, one might say his classic, face. When he raises his eyebrows, they form an acute angle over his nose, as in some Japanese mask, sarcastic and tragic. When he frowns, on the other hand, his eyebrows form

[1] The huge tomb of Augustus in Rome, now used for symphony concerts and public meetings.

a straight horizontal line, and the eyes disappear under the two dark arches, and what with that semi-baldness and that chin there appears a firm and gloomy mask which one might truly call Napoleonic. Which is the true face of Benito Mussolini?

An expert public speaker, completely master of himself, always conscious of the audience, he accompanies every period, every phrase, with its appropriate expression. He is stinting in gestures. Often he will gesticulate with the right hand only, keeping his left hand in his pocket and his left arm pressed close to his side. Sometimes he will put both his hands in his pockets: this is the statuesque moment of the final *résumé*. In the rare moments when this severe speaker lets himself go openly, his two arms revolve high above his head: his ten fingers strive as though they were seeking cords to vibrate in the air; his words swarm in cascades. One instant: and Mussolini becomes once more motionless and severe, and with two fingers feels for the knot of his tie in order to assure himself that it has kept its position. These moments of gesticulation are not the moving moments: they are for the most part the *finale* of his logical proofs, a way of showing the public the multitude of another thousand proofs which he enumerates, hints at, omits for brevity's sake, a sort of extremely effective mimic 'etcetera'.

But beside this mimicry of the best kind of oratory, Mussolini has three other qualities apt to conquer an audience. The first is a finished formation of periods, which never nips a phrase in the bud. The second, a frequency of moral definitions, picturesque and incisive, which easily stick in the memory; as, against the regionalists: 'It would seem as though the Italians were already

tired of being Italians'; as, in praise of the fascist precursors: 'Without the Fascists of 1919 and 1920 the Unknown Warrior would not to-day be sleeping on the Capitol'; or against the violent: 'You must cure yourself of my failing.' The third quality is a continual, peremptory, restful affirmation, in which the greater part can repose trustfully: no fogs, no greys, the whole world reduced to black and white. His doubts he keeps to himself.

The speech is nearing its end. The effort has made his face grow more meagre, bonier and rigider. As soon as he has finished and moves towards the stairs in order to descend, the deputy Capanni takes hold of him by the waist, and lifts him well above the crowd with the air of a priest raising, within the monstrance, the sacred species.

Beside me two young lads in black shirts have tears in their eyes. If Mussolini could see these tears, he would be prouder of them than of the acclamations.

## D'ANNUNZIO BEFORE THE 'NOTTURNO'[1]

*December* 1, 1921.

AS an aid to the biographies, studies, medical and literary doctors' theses, research-work and polemics of the future, it might be useful, to establish the data, as they say, or even to publish the diagnoses concerning Gabriele d'Annunzio's ailment, for from that ailment there issued, a few days since, the *Notturno.* It suffices to remember how much has been written about Foscolo's bayonet-wound in the thigh during the siege of Cento, and about his taking refuge in the monastery of Monteveglio under the name of Lorenzo—actually!—Alighieri, in order to grasp at once how much aid we could give to posterity, with the hope of being perhaps rewarded by the quotation of our obscure names in a foot-note.

A beginning was made by Professor Albertotti, who, with Professor Orlandini, attended d'Annunzio at that time, but he has spoken solely of what did *not* happen: of the left eye which by a prodigy unknown in the annals of science remained intact, and of the futility of the treatment to which they had to submit the right eye, the one that

[1] The 'Nightpiece', an impression of his blindness, written in total darkness on long numbered strips of paper, thousands of them, which he afterwards was able to publish with very little change.

was hurt. Futility? And the *Notturno*? 'The doctor with a needle gives me an injection, in the sclerotic, of chloruret of sodium, introduces salt water into my eye! . . . Just now the doctor ,after unbandaging me, whirled a flame about in front of me, in all directions. . . .' With that flame the doctor meant to measure the wounded man's field of vision, and he kindled instead the fire of poetry. From those words, in fact, there go forth, lofty and winged, the loveliest pages, perhaps, of this book of convulsion and resignation, of pride and humility, until those sublimest ones of all in which the poet sees his country again, his mother, and his own face at the age of sixteen. (D'Annunzio at this time had a reproduction made of a photograph taken at that age, which he presented to his friends; and on the copy given to General Cadorna, playing at prophecy, he wrote: 'To Captain Luigi Cadorna, to the future generalissimo of victorious Italy, Gabriele d'Annunzio, July 1879.')

Here meanwhile, as an aid to posterity, is what I have succeeded in learning and seeing.

The affliction is well-known: a partial separation of the retina, with a hemorrhage due to a violent blow received while 'on service' on January 16, 1916, striking with a water-plane on a sand-bank off Grado. The weather was very bad, the planes mediocre. D'Annunzio and his pilot had been obliged to change three machines on the fifteenth, and had not succeeded in getting off. On the morning of the 16th they again tried to reach Trieste in order to carry out their orders. But the machine, because of a flaw in the motor, did not succeed in rising above the level of 1,200 or 1,300 metres. It was in consequence exposed to rifle- and artillery-fire. Two Austrian planes

rose in pursuit of them. In the waters of Grado, misled by the dazzling refraction, the plane in descending struck so violently that d'Annunzio was flung high up, fell back stiffly on his spinal column, and then struck his temples and his right eyebrow against the forward machine-gun. For a few hours he was almost sightless. He helped himself, groping, as well as he could, dried the drops of blood from the bruise, but said nothing to anyone of what ailed him; he was almost ashamed, at his age, to tell his extremely youthful companions that he was tired or suffering. As soon as he had once more, towards noon, got back a minimum of sight, he insisted on leaving, on returning to Trieste, because those were the orders.

With another plane, with another pilot, from the Gorgo squadron, he left and flew over Trieste. He carried out his orders. In the evening he returned to Venice. For a month he struggled against his ailment, thinking that it was the result of a passing nervous phenomenon; he obstinately abstained from speaking of it to a soul, persisted in living and behaving as he had done before. He hoped to find, in the Laibach raid, 'the remedy for all ills', for such was at that time the hope of all his raids; and we who knew it were afraid, but did not dare to speak of it even with him.[1]

On February 21st, a Monday, he went from Venice to

[1] Cf. in the mêmoire by Prof. Giuseppe Albertotti, 'Endoptic Visions of Gabriele d'Annunzio' (*Acts of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts in Padua*, 1923, Vol. XXXIX), the letter which d'Annunzio wrote to him on March 25, 1917, when he had returned from Pescara, where he had gone for the burial of his mother. 'In short, my eyes do not give me respite. And it takes all my patience and all my curiosity as a spectator to bear this plague. I hope to be freed from it shortly in the fire-line.'

Pordenone in a car, thinking he would arrive in time. He had been allotted the front post in Luigi Bailo's plane: the most dangerous post of all. Unexpectedly, at Pordenone, he learnt of the death of Alfredo Barbieri and Luigi Bailo in the flight over Laibach; he saw the body of Barbieri, he ran to Gonars to see and to touch Bailo's plane, shattered and blood-stained; he returned to Cervignano to closet his mourning in his low little rooms on the ground-floor of Casa Sarcinelli, next to the bridge, by this time despairing of ever receiving what he was wont to call 'the glorious medicine'. His eye tormented him. He looked at himself in a mirror, and could not succeed in seeing any part of his face except the forehead. Thereupon he called in a physician, Dr. B., of the Command of the Third Army, and bade him tell the whole truth. In the lazaretto, the Sardinian medical captain told him: the right eye was lost, they had to attempt to save the other one. He remained in his field-bed alone the whole night. Of that atrocious night the *Notturno* says nothing. On the following morning, the morning of the 22nd, frightened at the idea of remaining immobile, secluded, imprisoned for months at Cervignano, he fled to Venice, to the Casetta Rossa, although he knew that every jolt of the car on its course might have blinded him completely and for good. Here the *Notturno* begins.

## D'ANNUNZIO'S HOUSE

GARDONE,
*February* 24, 1922

CARGNACCO, above Gardone Riviera.

Is this the house of Gabriele d'Annunzio? At the end of a road bordered with trees, it appears to you, old, low and modest as the house of a parish priest: whitewash and green blinds, a narrow bossed doorway between two stone posts, two windows, one on each side of the door, closed with iron bars, on the first floor a little iron balcony from which it would be absolutely impossible to harangue a crowd, if only for the reason that the little space before the house slopes downwards and could hardly, with the best intentions, hold more than fifty people. He himself calls this house the Porziuncola, or even, in jest, the Canonry. Cleaning the façade, he did in fact discover between the balcony and the two windows two lively oval frescoes of the eighteenth century which represent sacred scenes and are full of charm because they are the shadows of themselves. In addition he has fastened to the door two wooden tablets, painted the colour of a Franciscan gown, CLAVSVRA, SILENTIVM, tablets which during the post-Fiuman period must have been rather a desperate desire than a rule to be respected.

Inside, certainly, the house is different, heated like a furnace, perfumed with sandal-wood, quilted with carpets,

protected with hangings and curtains. But, above the luxury, you feel that what the poet is seeking here is defence from noise, cold, sunshine, outsiders, politics; defence of his work, his books, his liberty, his memories. This is the first house that he has bought in his life, with a regular registered contract; and he is busy surrounding it with obstacles, walls, fences and gates, with the experience of a trenchman.

First of all he built himself a poultry-house, with black roosters and white hens from Tuscany, neat and alive like Tuscan words: a model, or, as they say, a rational poultry-house, surrounded by wire netting, well protected and aired, with little wooden houses on a cement ground. Then he provided for his garden and his vineyard, and his gardener is called Virgil. ('Mind you, I found him here', he informs you at once.) The garden, to the right of the house, is immense, still a trifle over-tidy, because it was planted by the German Thodes who owned the house before him, and who, for all the heartiness of their effort, could understand Italian beauty only by glimpses; but with fine cypresses and fir-trees and oaks and laurels and a pleasant grove of magnolias under whose shade there flows a limpid brook. This garden, which descends in terraces towards the lake, reveals, opposite, Monte Baldo of the hundred peaks, blue and white, and on the right the open lake and the Borghese island and the *punta di Manerba* with its Dantesque profile.

Behind the house, the garden turns into a park and a wood and rushes down steeply in a narrow ravine with its little river and its little cascades in a most romantic fashion. This ravine, however charming and picturesque, threatens the old house. On the edge a storm tore down

two tremendous trees a few months ago, and the earth has begun to crumble. If it had gone on gradually, a corner of the house would have been resting on the void. So then d'Annunzio in a great hurry built a high stone wall to support it, and had a hundred holes dug along the steep descent, for planting a hundred young cypresses. And now he also wishes to buy a meadow and a little wood, on the opposite slope, so as to close the way, from that side as well, to his hermitage; and on the meadow, opposite the lake, he will construct a cabin of planks and osiers, in true hermit fashion, to close himself in, in still securer peace. After the canonry, the hermitage. The house has two floors. 'I hope to preserve them', the poet observes. By that he does not mean that he intends to reconstruct it according to his taste. He means that the house is at present not very solid, and that it will be necessary to brace it with iron bars, in order to live there with safety. But d'Annunzio is the first house-owner that I have seen accept the cracks in his building with serenity and cheerfulness. They represent for him the instability of the stable, risk, that is, and the unforeseen, and that necessity for watching, and watching over one's self, which, both for the man and the writer, is the mark and the expression of his restless energy. Therefore I think that he enjoys exaggerating a little this decrepitude of his house; but meanwhile it is great fun listening to him and watching him while he points out the big table on which he writes, prudently set near the balcony so that if the pavement gives way he can with one jump cling to the railing and there await his men who will save him with ladders; a piece of plaster which last night, while he was sleeping, fell from the ceiling on to his pillow, at a hand's breadth

from his head . . . Always standing, agile, slim, dapper, his left shoulder lower than the right, partly pose, partly from the habit of so many hours at the desk, he narrates and laughs, with that limpid voice and that clucking laughter which remain so youthful for all the years that pass, and which bring back his youth to the listener. 'You are the last Italian who really is twenty years old', was said to him by a friend who is no longer twenty but remembers when he was.

To-day, besides, he was happy: during the day they were expecting at Brescia the thirty cases of Italian texts which, before going to live on the *Landes* in France, he had collected at the Capponcina at Settignano, and he was awaiting, from one moment to the other, a telephone-call announcing their arrival. Meanwhile, all radiant, he described them, with his inexorable memory and his clear, chiselled speech, so that I could see the text of every book that he mentioned, the cover, the frontispiece, the printer's emblem, the type. And I recollected the preface to his 'Cola di Rienzo', and that usher of the Crusca portrayed there 'with his screw-like neck and his rheumatic hands' who used to bring him at Settignano the choicest copies of the 'quoted authors' in a big red cloth knotted by the four corners, and would say to him with a pallid smile: '*Ci si bei, ci si bei.*' ('Enjoy them, enjoy them.') . . .

## WITH D'ANNUNZIO AT RHEIMS

FLORENCE,
*February* 28, 1924.

THIS morning's newspapers publish another letter from Gabriele d'Annunzio to the Seamen's Syndicate. At each of these letters and messages I repeat the question, 'Has d'Annunzio really abandoned us for ever?'—the question, no doubt, of a jealous heart, for since ever so many years I have always considered d'Annunzio as the chief of us writers, not of the seamen. Even when he commanded his fleet of air-planes, he was above all else the Poet. Placing himself in all his duties on the same level as his fellow-soldiers, he almost wanted to hide that aureole and that sceptre of his; but all he needed was to utter a word, and they shone forth again. Wages, watches, classes, cards, meetings, committees, secretaries, budgets: is it for this that he has abandoned poetry? 'Must I return to tell fairy-tales and scan verses?' Often his friends have heard him sigh thus during the war; but then the syndicate that he was defending was that of all the Italians. Subjects for melancholy; and as disappointed lovers console themselves re-reading their letters and looking at the photographs of their happy days, to-day I re-read the pages of *Leda* where he speaks of Rheims, and the photographs which I made of him during those days, just nine years ago, when we went together to look

at the mutilated cathedral. Was it not precisely during those months of passion that he began to grow weary of the cold paper and the silent writing?

Behind the Hôtel de Ville in a shady, winding little street, rue Geoffroy l'Asnier, he was then living on the ground-floor of an old seventeenth-century house, built of ash-coloured stone, which flaunted a great escutcheon over its door: no less than the Hotel of the Châlons. From his studio a glass door opened out on to a geometrical garden with a stone sun-dial in the centre, and at the back two niches with statues of dubious divinities. The first time that I entered that studio it was snowing in the garden; but d'Annunzio had placed, at a short distance from the window-panes, near his desk, three lacquered and gilded Japanese cages inside which, cosy and warm, tits, wrens and goldfinches were whistling and chirping. And so I felt as though I were at Settignano in the spring-time.

To get to Rheims an officer of the household of President Poincaré had obtained a pass for me and found a motor-car. How refuse anything to an Italian journalist, in the days of neutrality? Early one morning the car called for me at the hotel, and already contained, seated at the rear, Joseph Reinach, actually dressed as a captain, in blue-grey, with some gleams of silver embroidered on his collar, a red-and-white brassard, embroidered with gold, on his right arm, and a summer covering of blue linen on his cap. Joseph Reinach was built like Emilio Treves, whom not even the most warlike of his authors had ever dreamed of dressing as a captain. We went to call for d'Annunzio. Before he appeared, his servant came out on the threshold, laden with baskets and bags containing

the lunch for all of us. Then he appeared, dapper and elegant as usual: travelling-cap, riding-breeches, grey puttees, buff coat lined with curly yellow fur, which Reinach, an expert of the East, called *renard du désert.* Between those two illustrious companions, and the military mechanic and Lieut. L. covered with other furs 'with the fur side outside', I was so monotonous in my mufti that I created an impression. At every cross-roads, at every bridge, the territorial, still dressed in red and blue, who, to bar our way, lowered his old gun and drawn bayonet, suspected only me, until he had seen my photograph on my pass with the signature of Joffre: the reward of my modesty.

Out in the country, still winterly, flat and bare, but all cultivated, with the sown fields already traversed by a promise of green, with the vines pruned and trimmed, with the shores of the ditches beaten down by the plate of the hoe, there was the great peace of expectation, because the sparrows were hopping on the telegraph-lines to announce that from up there they could see the approach of spring. The war, now that we were going towards it, seemed farther off than it had in the silence of Paris, where life barely stirred. Meaux, with the holy water of the Marne, had begun once more to move the wheels of its old mills. Beyond Meaux, near a bridge, I saw the first house damaged by the war: four walls pierced by a projectile, and, above, the black carcass of the burnt roof. In September the Germans had arrived there. I have seen a plenty since, of houses dead and turned thus to skeletons, hundreds of thousands; but that one remained in my memory, because Italy—Italy was then intact.

At Château Thierry, in the square, the statue of La

Fontaine, with a big nose, a big wig, a big cravat, looked down on us. We were entering Champagne. Indeed, that sparkling Epicurean, with a whiff of morality at the last sip, where else could he have been born if not in that vineyard-land? At Jonchéry was the command of the army of General Franchet d'Espérey, a little, unsmiling, hurried and great-coated man: '*Ces messieurs désirent aller à Reims? Ces messieurs peuvent aller certainement, sur leur responsabilité. Messieurs, mon automobile m'attend . . . je suis obligé. . . .*' Somewhat rushed. . . . As soon as he had gone, someone whispered in my ear that the general had thought of inviting the great Italian poet to his table; but when he had known that Joseph Reinach was travelling with d'Annunzio, he had remembered that the former had been a fierce Dreyfusard, and had precipitated the hour of his lunch. In a neighbouring tavern d'Annunzio consoled us with the titbits hidden in his baskets. And we flew towards Rheims.

A brief climb, and we come to the valley of the Aisne. The two towers of the Cathedral are there at the bottom of the basin, black as though they had been carbonized. Hills, river, plain, roads: from that bare height everything seemed void of life; a supine, dead body. A pale low sky curved down to watch it. Not even a breath of smoke over a cottage. The whole village is under the observation and the range of the enemy, and our car rushing on at a hundred kilometres seems a flying projectile, as in a novel by Verne, in a lunar landscape. At last we enter Rheims, from the rue de Vesle. On the canal, a few abandoned black barges. In the side-streets, in front of every house that had been struck, its mass of débris; they seem so many barricades, at set distances, ready to retard

the invasion if the enemy were to fling himself once more on the sacred city. But the streets are deserted. Only an old postman, with his leather case half-empty, and his glasses on his nose, goes on his way attempting to decipher the numbers of such houses as are still standing. Two sides of the Place Royale are razed to the ground. The statue of Louis XV is still standing, but the bronze is white with dust, and there is no longer any proportion between his statue and that vast empty space. As soon as the car stops before the entrance of a house, we hear the roar of the cannon.

We reach the Cathedral from the apse. From the great windows the lead nets that used to support the stained glass windows are hanging down like rags; the glass windows which burst when the beams caught fire and the covering of lead on the roof melted and from the spaces between the stones of the arches tears of boiling lead began to fall on the altars. So, step by step, we reach the façade. D'Annunzio has left us. Since he has caught sight of the Cathedral, he has not uttered a word. He bends down to pick up a fragment of coloured glass, a scrap of lead, a flower of stone fallen from the pinnacles: he dusts them, he caresses them, he blows on them, almost as though to give them back a breath of life from his heart. The Cathedral is truly a corpse, here red as though wounded, there pierced like a skeleton, the ribs of the vaults and the buttresses broken off, the teeth of the subtle arching at the top broken, the fingers of the tabernacles and the pinnacles blunted. Of a Parthenon struck and shattered, a few columns and a piece of the architrave and the corner of a tympanum suffice to make it still present and potent, so simple is its greatness, so stable is its structure, so cadenced

and solemn its rhythm. But a Gothic cathedral is all one flight of wings, a choir of a thousand fragile voices; let one shot scatter the flight, let one voice change to a cry, and the magic vanishes and the order turns to tumult. The former was born horizontal, to dominate the earth and to teach us to live among men; the latter rose vertical, to lose itself in the sky and to teach us to die, who knows, among the angels.

D'Annunzio is parleying with a guardian. He succeeds in slipping between the sand-bags and the beams which defend, a little late, the statues on the three front portals, to find again in that disfigured ruin at least the little face of a statue and the softness of a gesture. I follow him. The space is so narrow under there that we stand as though clinging to the stone. I know what he is looking for in the shadow, in the span of the great portal, to the left: the two statues of the Visitation, Mary and Elizabeth, who among all their slim, smiling and even malicious French companions, stand austerely apart, with oval face and ample forms, wrapt after the Roman fashion in stole and tunic. In the same years, with the same spirit and the same forms, classical sculpture was revived in Pisa. And he to me, *sotto voce*: 'They are safe, both of them.' With agility, from one beam to another, he climbs up until he can touch them.

But our companions are looking for their kings: on the façade, the baptism of Clovis in the space under the last arch; on the shattered panes of the central nave, what remains of the twenty kings of France, each one with the bishop by whom he was consecrated. Only a few panes remain; their vivid colours make them seem, against the sky, like flowers thrown down from on high on that great

sarcophagus. Reinach, too clever not to smile at himself sometimes, consoles himself: 'In the rose-window of the façade there still remains a bit of my King David consecrated by Samuel, a fragment of King Solomon consecrated by Nathan.' But he asks d'Annunzio's opinion, wants a motto from the poet, to repeat to his friends, to his *Figaro*, where he is Polybe. D'Annunzio knows it. He too has returned to the footlights, before his audience of men of letters, æsthetes and poetesses. One instant, and he enunciates : '*La cathédrale n'a jamais été aussi belle. La cathédrale s'achève. . . .*' I look at him horrified, Reinach looks at him in ecstasy; he has obtained what he wanted.

But he wants to have something else to tell about: '*D'Annunzio, nous devons aller présenter nos hommages au cardinal Luçon.*' No means of stopping him; Joseph Reinach thinks of nothing but the meeting of the cardinal with d'Annunzio. And we have to follow him to the seminary. He does it all; he opens the doors, speaks to the secretary of the prelate, points at the arm-chairs of red velvet or the others on which we should sit, according to etiquette. Enter Cardinal Luçon. He is a quiet, shining and shivering little old man, his head resting on his right shoulder, his face round and rosy under the scarlet skull-cap, under the wavy white hair: '*Mais oui, mais oui. . . . Ils continuent à nous bombarder tout le temps, tout le temps,*' and he raises his purple hands towards heaven. Between the cardinal and d'Annunzio there is a regular competition; the cardinal showers paternal smiles on him as though to absolve him of all sin; d'Annunzio speaks devoutly of madonnas, angels, and altars: '*La cathédrale s'achève dans les flammes . . . on a envie de tomber*

*à genoux devant ce miracle. . . .*' The cardinal opens his eyes wide: is this the pagan d'Annunzio? Then d'Annunzio frankly expresses his fears; for Heaven's sake, let them not touch the sculptures, let no restorations be attempted. The cardinal approves. He accompanies us as far as the courtyard. Reinach presses his hand, bends his head, a little, hardly at all, just enough to make him understand that he is ready to kiss it.

By this time the news of Gabriele d'Annunzio's presence has spread through the city. The mayor and the aldermen are waiting for him in the town-hall. The mayor is a robust old man, with a snowy beard like a Tiepolesque doge. He leads us into a great hall on the ground-floor. D'Annunzio alternates his unwearying affability, like a timid person who is ever letting himself be won over, with the frankness of an artist: 'I hope that you will take this tragic and unique opportunity to deliver the cathedral from the frightful pictures which disgrace it.' Silence, amazement.

We once more enter our car. We reach Paris after nightfall. Peppino Garibaldi is waiting for d'Annunzio at Poccardi's. By this time it is certain that on the Fifth of May d'Annunzio will go to Quarto to inaugurate the monument to the Thousand. Garibaldi confides to me: 'Five hundred young Garibaldini will forgather there, with red silk shirts hidden under their coats. Madame Paquin is preparing them.'

# THE MOTHER OF ELEONORA DUSE

FLORENCE,
*January* 26, 1922.

DURING the second act of Niccodemi's *La Porta Chiusa.*

Bianca, la Duse, hides her face from her son, hides it at first wildly with her two arms, then in the palms of her hands, then on the very breast of Giulio. The audience does not breathe. So far it has followed the scenic play of the actress with a mixture of admiration, snobbishness and curiosity which was not utter surrender. Now it surrenders; now, the great joy of make-believe suffering which is, in the spectator, the prime reason for theatrical art, possesses them entirely.

When Bianca terminates her confession with the statement that she has already confessed to her mother and that her mother has forgiven her, a lady whose hair, like signora Duse's, is white, narrates in the shadow of a box: 'When Eleonora Duse lost her mother, she was performing at Verona. I think she was sixteen. A small troupe, much hardship. The telegram was shown her by the leading man at the end of the second act. She had to force herself with an effort to reach the end, without letting the audience discover her suffering. Besides, she would not cry before her fellow-actors. She succeeded, by holding her chin forwards, clenching her teeth, raising

her eyebrows half-way up her forehead, as she knows how to do when she wishes to become stone. She ran away as soon as she could, to get home, lock herself into her little room and cry, flung down on her bed with her face in the cushions.

'It was winter, and it was snowing. The little actress ran along the walls, bravely, repeating *sotto voce* the appeal: "Mamma, mamma!"—and no more. At last she was within a hundred yards of her lodgings. All at once, pushing her two bare and frozen hands into the pockets of her old woollen coat, she felt that one pocket was shorter than the other. It had been sewn up thus for her by her mother, a few months before, when it had come undone. And all at once, only through that contact and that memory, she lost all her strength, at a hundred yards from her lodgings; and alone, in the deserted street, leaning against a wall, she began to sob and moan in the dark, holding her little hand close to the lining of her pocket, where she seemed to feel her mother's hand.'

'But you, dear lady, how did you come to know this?'

'It was told to me by Eleonora Duse many years ago, at Venice. I think that she also wrote it down, with other memories of her childhood, simple like this one, for herself.'

## RUGGERI

MILAN,
*June* 20, 1925.

RUGGERI [1] is returning to the stage. We shall not see him any more appearing late every evening in the most resplendent and elegant restaurant of the Galleria, pallid and alone, sitting down always at the same little table as 'reserved' as himself, framing his emaciated face in a mirror of red mahogany, ordering his dinner with tired indifference, opening a newspaper, folding it up again at once, waiting patiently, looking at the room absently with empty, short-sighted eyes, so much so that even his friends, if they wished to announce their presence, had to send a card through the waiter. Then he would shake himself, would salute wearily with his hand as though he were at the window of a carriage and was impatiently awaiting the moment, after the departure of the train, when he would be left alone with his dreams and his memories on his way to the unknown. We shall no longer find him in his silent, tidy rooms of Piazza Castello, covered with books from the floor to the ceiling, the works of every author, or of every group of similar authors, bound in a different leather, the pathetics vio let-coloured, the lyrics laurel-coloured, flame colour for the

[1] The most famous of the younger actors of Italy.

tragic poets, monastic brown for the writers of memoirs in mourning for their vanished youth.

'But in short what do you lack in this solitude?'—'A dog, the company of a dog. And it is impossible to keep a dog in town without making him suffer for lack of exercise.' To make up for this, in the vestibule, two cages are full of rare birds, green and blue, black and puce, white and gold, which, when he enters, greet him with their singing.

From the gigantic and thundering Salvini to this exemplary, subtle, cultured, polished actor, aloof from the crowd and its noises, the distance is the same as from Alfieri's *Saul* to Pirandello's *Enrico IV*; both are tragedies, if we are to listen to the dictionary. Poets and actors for construction, poets and actors for demolition. But it is necessary to demolish noiselessly, with the circular saw of syllogism and the jemmies of paradox and the rubber gloves that deafen the blows and leave no finger-prints. You come out of the theatre, alone in the dark streets. Life? An illusion, the brief name for eternal change. Truth? An invention of logic, useful for practical men. Is it night? Even in the day it is night and the sun is simply a bigger lantern. A star? It has been out for ten thousand years, nothing remains of it but this streak of light in the empty ether. Alone? No, for you yourself are five, ten, twenty persons all at once. It is true that Saul too was a fine romantic:

*. . . Empia Filiste,*
*Me troverai, ma almen da re, qui morto.*

[Impious Philistine, me you shall find as king, dead here.]

But if I had to give a face to this last anæmic

romanticism of ours, I would give it this sharp, long and haughty face of Ruggero Ruggeri's, modelled with scant wax on the visible framework of the bones, with the eyes absent and half-closed under the white light of the skull, the thin lips, the poised voice, and the abrupt gesture with which he starts up from his heels to his shoulders. But he at once relapses into the intent immobility of his experienced weariness.

I have him here in front of me sitting on the other side of the desk, in his black-and-blue striped working-coat which forms a fine nocturnal background to his pallor. Behind him the multicoloured rows of his books. A number of little marble busts of ancient poets, as high as the books themselves, inserted in the bookcases, serve the purpose of classifying these by subject and language, separating the poems from the novels, us from the French. Flung down among the papers lying on his desk, two long-stemmed red roses. As he speaks he seizes them, sniffs at them, drops them, capriciously.

He tells me of his childhood. At Florence his father, who used to teach literature in the Institute of the Holy Trinity, led him one evening to hear Cesare Rossi, because Cesare Rossi came from Fano and Professor Ruggeri had taught at Fano for several years and Ruggero was born there. From that evening Ruggero could find no peace: he had either to go to the theatre or else to read tragedies and comedies. He bought them, he borrowed them, he stole them. At that time for ten *soldi* you could even buy a play by Paolo Ferrari or Dumas *fils*. He lost his father. He continued obediently the curriculum of his school: the whole *ginnasio*, two years of the *liceo*. One fine day he could stand it no longer, went to Bologna, intro-

duced himself to Cesare Rossi with the old excuse that they both came from Fano, and at his house, while Rossi was dining, he recited him some old story about the count of Rysoor from Sardou's *Patrie.* I can imagine the waves of that declamation breaking across a plate of stew under the huge impassible nose of Cesare Rossi. He dispatched the eager boy from Bologna to Monte Cassino, to an actor-manager who was a friend of his.

'Suppose you were to return to Monte Cassino after thirty years, but up to the Abbey, as a monk?'

'Who knows?' the voluntary out-of-work answers quietly. He closes his eyes an instant, passes one hand over his eyelids and forehead and begins to praise the actors of his youth, Novelli, Talli, Leigheb, Duse 'When Duse acted, you did not notice the words she was uttering. What reached you was an essence of words. It enfolded you and inebriated you like a perfume. Novelli, Novelli, unique, stupendous, facile. He acted, he was always acting, in the theatre, in his dressing-room, at home, in the street. To change his part, to pass from *Ma femme n'a pas de chic* to *Shylock*, was a rest, an amusement, a joy, like changing the subject of a conversation, like changing from one city to another, like changing his guests at his hospitable table.'

Ruggeri's beautiful voice reaches up to those long piercing notes of desire which are his charm. He drops the rose. Now he snatches up a paper-cutter and passes and repasses it over the palm of his other hand as though he were sharpening a knife. He sits down sideways. His voice falls, breaks, murmurs as though muffled: 'Now, you see, the actors, the young men, always strike you as though they might perhaps have succeeded better

in another profession. And then they don't observe, they don't see, they don't know anything of life. Reflections of reflections.'

He breaks off. On a table among reviews and books on art, I open one which reproduces the reconstruction of imperial Rome facing the photographs of the modern city. Ruggeri knows everything: dates, styles, buildings, customs. His precise questions would perplex a Lanciani or a Boni: 'For the last two nights it has been my pastime.'

All at once I seem to discover the secret of his sleepless curiosity. This solitary is insatiable, he is in love, to-day of all times, with perfection. He sees what the theatres, the companies, the actors, the authors should be. He knows too much, wants too much, imagines too much. He is dreaming of a sea, and can no longer bring himself to swim in the torpid waters of the public baths.

One door of his study opens on to a dark room. As I go away I turn to look at it. 'It is my mother's room, left untouched since her death.'

## THE GUITAR OF MAZZINI

PISA,
*November* 17, 1921

I WENT back to the house where Mazzini died, in the via Sant'Antonio, to see the papers and the books that the children of Janet Rosselli Nathan gave the day before yesterday to this little museum of Mazzinian relics. It has been said that with the war Mazzini and his hopes once more came down to earth amongst us. In political geography indeed, for us at least; but for the rest, beginning with political morals, I think that next year, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, an examination of conscience will not be very consoling for any of us. 'I often think that, when at last I shall leave you, you will all work with greater faith, with greater ardour, so that I may not have lived in vain.' These words are carved on a stone tablet, on the stairs before Giuseppe Mazzini's doorway. That may well make us blush, my brothers, all of us: red, white and black, tri-coloured and, if you will, green.

Among the relics that have now joined the collection, I find a photograph of Adelaide Cairoli, and Benedetto Cairoli has written on it: 'To Giuseppe Mazzini, to the first great apostle of our country, in the sacred memory of my dear mother.' The same frame, I regret to say, encloses a little portrait of Louise Colet,[1] a friend of Italy, and that is good, but also a friend of a great many other people. The books are all presented by Mazzini to his

[1] The notorious Madame X of Flaubert's correspondence, and the authoress of *Lui*.

beloved Janet, with the concise dedication, in English: 'To J., J.'; to Janet, Joseph. They range from the Divine Comedy annotated by Foscolo to a volume which could not be more charmingly Second Empire: Octave Feuillet's *Scènes et Proverbes.* There is also the *Création* by Quinet, with three resounding words: '*Au libérateur*, *Quinet*'. It dates from 1870. Exactly the year before, if I am not mistaken, Mazzini had written to Quinet the tragic words: 'I no longer esteem the generation with which I am working.'

Yes, a great thing indeed, history and glory. But what after all strikes us little men as prodigious in these prophets and forerunners, is the resistance of their faith to disillusions. Who has been more disillusioned than this man? I do not speak of women, for his zealous friends have made almost all his love-letters disappear. I run through at haphazard the pages of this collection, which his biographers certainly know already. There is a letter of 1863 from Garibaldi to Giovanni Grillanzoni: 'You may be certain I am as much a friend of Mazzini's as you are; and I foster an ever greater reverence for that great apostle of the sacred cause of our country. I shall always be ready to come to an understanding with him on any subject whatsoever.' But before dying Mazzini knew that this was not so, that it was no longer so. Where is the last letter from Garibaldi to him?

There is another of Aurelio Saffi, from London, to Agostino Bertani, to introduce to him, in 1863, with enthusiastic phrases, the fat Bakunin,[1] 'the friend of humanity rather than of a false nationalism', who was going to pass the winter in Florence and was already on

[1] The father of Russian anarchy.

his way, gasping with asthma, from socialism to anarchy, and accused Mazzini of preaching a detestable middle-class patriotism. How did Saffi's ingenuous letter ever get here? You almost seem to hear the first peal of the death-knell, over the desert, to-day, of Russia; its first echo in Italy, softened by the distance.

But of these relics the most distant is Mazzini's guitar. A letter from Filippo Bettini, dated November 7, 1866, accompanies this gift to Janet Nathan: 'Giuseppe Mazzini, my old friend, wrote to me asking me to send you a guitar which once belonged to his mother and which he kept as a memory.' It is intact, only three strings are snapped. He took it even to prison with him, and on the throne, on his ephemeral throne as triumvir of the Roman Republic, when, because of the siege, he lived on bread and grapes, and in the depths of the night, after a day of work and fever, he abandoned himself, in his little room at the Quirinal, to singing under his breath. Is not this the secret of his soul, which, through the gates of music, flew away into the infinite? Is there not buried here, in this sounding box of golden yellow wood, the profound soul of the apostle, that is of the poet? I can see the smile of my readers: a statesman, a philosopher, an apostle, playing the guitar and singing. Indeed, it is no longer the fashion. And in truth there are no Mazzinis.

I lean out over the little iron balcony which looks on to the garden, clipped now, raked and gravelled, a perfect little garden. Here, during his last winter, he used to come out to enjoy a little sunshine, wrapped in his great plaid. There is the orange-tree he planted. It is fine, polished, vigorous. After fifty years, it has been truer to him than men have been.

## THE FACE OF EINSTEIN

BOLOGNA,
*October* 26, 1921.

PROFESSOR EINSTEIN, with his theory of relativity, wishes to touch the brains of physicists and mathematicians only. But if, as sometimes happens to inventors, he had been smitten with the desire of a digression out of his own field, here in the hall of the Archiginnasio he might have found the finest relativity a little above his own head. On the wall behind him, we listeners, as attentive as we might be, beheld, painted high up, near the ceiling, a real, regal Madonna with the Child; and under the Madonna, a bust, perhaps of marble, of King Victor Emanuel II; and under the bust, last of all, himself, Einstein, living, round and smiling, who, Jew though he was, spoke to us more or less of Paradise, at least of the place where Dante situated Paradise, in heaven amidst the stars. Of these peaceful combinations of several relatives, our history abounds; and for this reason it is so charming. Certainly, this must have been the first time that Einstein found himself speaking under the protection of the Madonna.

A fine head, pale and Semitic, of a yellow pallor which, at least at a distance, against the leaden background of the scholastic blackboard, made it seem rather expanded than fat. His hair is shiny, curly and black, with a few threads

of silver; under his black moustaches, his lips are red and swollen; his eyes are round; the eyebrows are short, high, far from one another, so that when he raises his eyes heavenwards in search of a word, his whole face takes on an expression of stupor and almost of ecstasy which touches the souls of his spectators. But what conquers them entirely is his boyish look: a big, quiet and well-bred child, happy to play thus with ideas and worlds and infinity. His fat, shiny, soft hands peering out of the sleeves which are too tight and too short, his limited and timid gestures, his slow and hesitating manner of speech, his ready, sincere and jovial smile, increase this pleasant impression of boyishness. And does he not narrate his theory with the charm with which one tells fairy tales, and with the faith of children in their tales? 'There were seven stars, so . . .'—and on the black of the board he marks the seven white stars, and then a circle, the sun. 'The world is infinite, but it is limited . . .'—and he laughs as though in his play he had flung the ball so high into the air that he himself cannot see it any more.

This serenity, this childish freshness, is the magic with which he holds spellbound and, it seems, fascinated, this huge audience. By its means we feel the relation between this inexorable mathematician with the stony name, and a poet. He has the same wings, the same thirst for the infinite, the same faith in the reality of dreams, I mean of hypotheses: the same faith in the absolute even of the relative. The Christian Madonna on her throne which is eternal, I know, but which here is painted, that is, unstable and relative, seemed to me to look at him with kindness.

## ANATOLE FRANCE IN ITALY

Florence,
*April* 16, 1924.

TO-DAY the French are celebrating Anatole France's eightieth birthday. It is a holiday for us too. Anatole France has loved and loves Italy more and better than all those who say, write or telegraph it at every hour because they are afraid that we might believe the contrary; but they are the only ones whom we thank. This morning, reading in the papers the description of the honours which, in spite of his protests, are being prepared for him, he reappeared to my memory in an hotel room at Assisi, twenty and more years ago. I accompanied him to visit Umbria from Perugia to Spoleto. He was travelling with a mature lady of great culture, fat and kind, who, as long as she lived, watched over his peace and glory with motherly diligence. Anatole France in his prudent sobriety did not want the bother of luggage. As soon as they reached an hotel, she would take a package out of a valise and send it to him. The package would contain, in a newspaper, the little linen and the few toilet articles that France needed during those few hours. It was I, that afternoon, who was entrusted with the mission. I found him seated at a little table before a wide-open window looking out on the valley. He had not heard me knock at the door

or come in. He had taken from one of his pockets a round flat little cap of crimson satin, had stuck it on his thick white hair, slightly towards the back, according to his wont, so as to leave free his wide forehead, then without a wrinkle; from the other pocket he had drawn *Cicéron et ses amis* by Gaston Boissier, and was holding it open on the table, but both his hands were leaning on it. Instead of the book, he was looking through the frame of the window at the great bluish plain, like a weary sea, and the blue of the sky which was slowly fading so that every soul might rediscover its star up there, and the distant hills which were already, after the sun's decline, turning to purple. He shook himself as from a dream, and taking the pipe from his mouth, and raising towards me those black, shining eyes, finer than any that I know, he murmured rather to himself than to me: '*Je suis heureux.*'

The morning after, I climbed up, beside him, the steep road leading from the Piazza dei Pellegrini to the upper church of St. Francis, which, encrusted with gravel from the Subasio, is rose-coloured with dust. He said: 'France, Italy. Try, my friend, to translate word for word, even syllable for syllable the oldest, that is the youngest, Italian prose, the prose of the Novellino or of the Vita Nuova. The result is the purest French prose that you could possibly imagine. That is relationship, that is nobility.' The evening before I had introduced Paul Sabatier to him, and they had remained together until late, talking of Jacopone and Franciscan poetry. Sabatier, with those soft, easy ways of his, with which he seemed to want to obtain pardon for being (he a Protestant) the only sure biographer of our great Saint, he, so rosy and chubby, the devotee of the Poverello, all bones and nerves,

was astounded at hearing Anatole France speak of *laudesi* and sacred *giullari* as though he had never read and loved other poets.

> Povertà, gran monarchìa,
> Tutto 'l mondo ha in sua balìa.
>
> [Poverty, the great monarch, has the whole world in thrall.]

'*Madame*', France had said, turning to Madame de Caillavet, '*vous devriez transcrire ces deux lignes pour notre ami Jaurès. Il saura s'en servir.*'

So Paul Sabatier joined us on the field in front of the church. Leaning on the low wall, France received him thus: 'Tell me, you who know everything about St. Francis and St. Clare, whether this little story is true. It was winter, and all these mountains were covered with snow. St. Francis, followed by a little friar, left Assisi on a long journey. St. Clare was walking beside him, with lowered head, and her heart was beating hard, because Francis had sweetly told her to return to her convent. "When can I see you again?" she asked him anxiously. Francis pointed at the snow that they were treading: "When from this snow a rose shall grow." And she: "The months are long until the spring." He stopped resolutely and gazed at her. St. Clare, lowering her eyes so as not to see him any more, and to obey him, knelt down in the snow, kissing the hem of his habit, and St. Francis went on his way without turning. He had not gone twenty steps when he heard the clear voice of his devotee: "Brother Francis, Brother Francis!" and the saint turned. Before the kneeling woman, out of the snow, a rose had blossomed, a big red rose at the top of a long stem.—The story is true, I trust. Do not tell me it is not.'

From Assisi to Spello and Foligno, and then from Foligno a carriage took us up to Montefalco. Inside the church of St. Francis there came towards us a little old man with long hair and beard, dressed in a brown coat with ample folds, too long for him. He was the guardian of the monument, indeed of all the monuments of the city. I knew him for years, always dressed in that solemn coat, always with a huge bunch of keys in his hands. If I recollect exactly, his name was Plini. Now he is dead. He had read in the papers that Anatole France was on a pilgrimage through Umbria, and when he saw him, he went towards him with arms raised so that he seemed to have been waiting in that great deserted church since time immemorial for him alone. He explained to him the frescoes of Benozzo about the life of St. Francis, one by one, and as he spoke he looked at him and not at the pictures, to see which he liked the most.

In half an hour, France had grown so fond of him that when Plini had finished enumerating to him the glories of his Montefalco, announcing that in that little city, on that windy hill-top, eight saints had been born, he turned to me: 'You who are Roman and know monsignori, bishops and cardinals, one day you must remember to have this exemplary man beatified. He has faith and enthusiasm, abnegation and purity. He deserves it.' I humbly pointed out to him that in truth the dream of the worthy Plini was to be made a cavaliere, in his lifetime. France could not reconcile himself to that: '*C'est bien triste*', he kept on repeating seriously: 'If I lived at Montefalco I should persuade him to prefer celestial glory. Perhaps I should not succeed. But in any case, I should try.' Madame de Caillavet told me *sotto voce*

how Monsignor Duchesne had confided to her that Anatole already possessed two of the three theological virtues, hope and charity; and that was a great deal, in these sad times of ours. But when we had returned to our carriage, the Master must have become convinced, for from aloft in the landau, with a great gesture of benediction, he saluted poor Plini, in Italian, thus: '*Addio, cavaliere*', I can still see the stupefied face of the little man on the white street with head bared, his eyes popping out of his head, his mouth wide open, his faded beard, his arms hanging at his sides, as the carriage drew off in a cloud of dust and France said to us: '*Pendant une heure ou deux il sera heureux.*'

In Rome, the first times, he lodged at the Hôtel de Rome, in the Corso at the Piazza San Carlo. One evening he was in the public drawing-room, sipping his coffee, when a friend showed him Matilda Serao in a cardinalesque arm-chair between two palms. The celebrated authoress, surrounded by colleagues and friends, was talking and gesticulating with the noisy fervour which is so characteristic of her. France thought it his duty to go and salute her. Timidly and cautiously, with little steps, he made his way towards her sideways, as one approaches a hunter who is carrying his gun loaded and lowered, and he was already within two yards of her when Signora Serao, at some anecdote or joke, burst into such a thundering laugh that Anatole France jumped and returned quietly as he had come to his place without saying a word to her. The king of smiles felt that his throne had been shaken by that uproarious Vesuvian laugh, which must have seemed as prodigious to him as thunder does to children. When, later on, in a calmer

hour, he made her acquaintance, he himself told her of that first meeting and of his fright, and concluded: '*Madame, je vous admire. Je n'ai jamais, hélas, entendu rire Balzac; mais il devait rire comme vous riez. C'est déjà beaucoup.*'

In the following years, he preferred a quieter hotel on the Foro Traiano. There he prepared the entirely Roman book *Sur la Pierre blanche* in which Giacomo Boni and his blue eyes are drawn to the life. Boni was then in the midst of his labour and torment over the excavations of the Roman Forum, and France would go on foot early every morning to see him, I may say, with the pick in his hand. In the evening, in society, he heard praises and criticisms; and he repeated some of them in his book: '*La comtesse Pasolini ne sait plus où vous vous arrêterez; et l'on vous représente, dans un petit journal satirique, sortant par les antipodes et soupirant: Adesso va bene!*' In truth, the drawing is by France's own hand, and as I write it lies under my eyes.

Another faithful friend of France's at that time was Giovanni Cena, a merry spirit in a mournful body. He followed France everywhere, armed with a little kodak. And when I see, as is now the fashion, France accused of icy scepticism and destructive irony, I always ask myself how these spirits, all faith and passion, should have bound themselves to him with such reverent love. France is a socialist. 'Irony (he has said) implies an ideal, because it makes fun of our impotence to reach it.' But to-day the times have grown weightier; times of action, we cry, as when the war was being fought. The contradictions that lie in man are all denied, because man, according to the fashion-plate of 1924, must be all of a piece; and if he does not succeed in being so, it is enough for him

to declare that he is all of a piece, for the others to believe it. In times of action, in fact, every one is in a hurry, and must of necessity be credulous, busier in running than in listening and meditating. So Socialism is Anatole France's ideal, and I should dare to say that he likes it accordingly as he considers it unrealizable. This he does not confess. Perhaps he takes care not even to confess it to himself.

Once I asked him how Monsignor Duchesne, a man of so much learning, could also be a sincere and devout believer. France answered: 'Monsignor Duchesne is a prudent man, and he avoids comparing his learning with his faith. Our brain, if it is a solid brain, is divided into so many rooms, which are, fortunately, separated; and it is we who must regulate the entrance to each. I do not understand how a Roman can ask me a question of that kind. An ideal brain must also be like Rome. And Rome has seven hills, and has given one of them to the Pope, and one to the King. Do they not live together happily, without ever meeting? A time will come when your Rome may give another hill to the president of a *bourgeois* republic; and another, if need be, to the president of a social republic, and so forth, according to the caprices of the future.'

God save me from the temptation of calling Anatole France a prophet. I can imagine his smile, under his beard now quite white, to-day, in the face of the congratulations, the compliments, the flowers, the bows. '*Papa, je t'admire. Je suis fière de toi. Tu es un grand homme*', Professor Bergeret's little daughter says to her father when he is nominated professor at the Sorbonne. And Bergeret answers her with a smile: '*C'est aussi l'avis de Riquet, le petit chien.*'

## PROUST

SASSARI,
*February* 5, 1923.

IN the train I have been reading the volume that the *Nouvelle Revue Française* has consecrated to Marcel Proust, recently dead. It contains memories and encomiums by about sixty writers, and not only French ones. There is even a page by an Italian, well chosen this time: Emilio Cecchi. Not even in France, where literature is a queen, whereas among us it is still an elementary schoolma'am, has any writer, I think, ever received so prompt and solemn a tribute. Marcel Proust deserved it. This anchorite, with his Parisian hermitage, was the most stupefying reader of souls known to Europe since Dostoievski; deep if not lofty, but so deep that his slow phlegmatic excavating has always reminded me of the work of those hollow drills with which engineers sound mining-land. The drill turns, turns, turns so slowly that it seems to be motionless, and you decide to leave it there at its eternal task, but one fine day that shining tube is at last extracted, opened in the sunlight, and inside it you behold all the strata of the earth over which you so distractedly walk, and the direction of the fusions, and the gleam of the quartz and a sample of all the riches and the beauties buried two or three hundred yards under your feet. And it strikes you as a miracle. The greater part of Italian

writers play instead on the surface, amidst grass and flowers: words and antics. But they don't ruin their health.

Now of these sixty commemorators some, it seems to me, knew Marcel Proust personally even less than I did who saw him only once. For this reason I venture to write down my memory of that single meeting.

It was an evening, in Paris, twenty years ago, at Madame de Caillavet's, of whose house, among many writers, politicians, actors and actresses, the most admired ornament was Anatole France. Next to the *salon* there was a smaller room more or less 'séparée', into which France and two other men were accustomed to withdraw: Clemenceau and Hébrard, the wittiest man whom I have met so far (and I am beginning to despair of meeting anyone who surpasses him, so heavy has the air grown). France remained standing in front of the fireplace, and those other two spry old men were facing him. That evening they were discussing the existence of Jesus Christ, because at that time some article or other had just been published to prove that a Jesus of flesh and blood had never existed. France was displaying all his biting dialectic *à la Renan*, except for the yearning for the peace of the cloister. Hébrard observed that the discovery, in any case, had come twenty centuries too late: 'If those poor martyrs had only known. . . .' At my side, respectfully silent, was standing a pale, dark young man, with bulging eyes, long and shining lashes, a thin neck, a dress-coat too wide in the shoulders and too long in the sleeves, which did not seem to belong to him; a somewhat crushed white tie put on awry, a billowing shirt-front. Anatole France was addressing him more than

the others. And he remained silent and motionless in that drooping attitude of his. He changed only the position of his head, resting it now on his right shoulder and now on the left, after the fashion of birds. All at once France asked him abruptly: '*Proust, qu'est-ce que vous en pensez? Voyons, parlez.*' And he answered quietly: '*Mon maître, dans cette discussion ce n'est pas Jésus Christ qui m'intéresse, c'est Anatole France.*'

In two words he had revealed the mind of all of us. The discussion digressed. France introduced me to him with one of those charming and encomiastic periphrases that sound like the dedication of a book. I do not know why in that introduction he named Venice. Marcel Proust asked me affably but distantly: '*Vous êtes Vénitien?*'—'*Non, je ne suis pas Vénitien.*'—'*Mais d'où êtes vous?*' and he put into the question a dash of impatience towards this unknown foreigner. I replied modestly: '*Je suis Romain.*' And he: '*Oh, c'est trop grand!*'

He was right this time again: there has never been a Roman writer in all Italian literature.

# RODIN

FLORENCE,
*July* 9, 1923.

I HAVE just read a very melancholy book *Rodin intime, ou l'envers d'une gloire*, written by a Madame Marcelle Tirel, who says that she was secretary to Rodin. It shows you an old, grumpy Rodin, the lover of a vain American termagant, a French duchess by marriage; a Rodin seized with a mania for writing volumes of eternal maxims which his friends had to correct, indeed re-write, before entrusting them to the publisher and the public; certain that he was an immortal genius and ready to cry it out to his valet; furious against an ungrateful Republic which had, none the less, by a vote of Parliament, given him as residence the Hôtel Biron, the most graceful of the buildings erected by the great Gabriel (*Si j'avais vécu sous François premier, le roi m'aurait pensionné et j'aurais été de sa table*); sluggish at his work, at this late day, and enraged because insipid puppets like the bust of Pope Benedict or that of the Comtesse de Noailles were not proclaimed worthy of Phidias, or, at least, of Donatello; in the end alone, chilly and sick, beside his aged companion, between his bed and his couch, without even, in those war-time winters, a little coal, for the ministers no longer answered his letters (*Nous mourons de froid à Meudon et ma pauvre femme est*

*malade*). A very melancholy book, but rapid and lively, as, it would seem, all the French, including the women, know how to write when they have something to say, and marred only by the unction of its author's ostentatious affection and respect for that man swollen by his pride, his snobbishness and his years, to whom his secretary would, in my opinion, have shown greater honour by preserving a modest silence.

In face of this squalid portrait, there has returned to my memory the Rodin of many years ago, energetic, merry and plebeian, in the fullness of his efforts and his creative powers, as I knew him in the year when, after much work, a subscription raised among a few friends had at last enabled him to exhibit at Cours-la-Reine a hundred or two hundred of his works, for the most part casts, so that after the diatribes about the statue of Balzac the public might come to know him and judge him by facts. This was, if I am not mistaken, in 1900.

I went up with Domenico Trentacoste one August morning to lunch with him at Issy-les-Moulineaux in his little villa called 'of the Diamonds'; but this time the bombastic name had not been invented by him. The grey and red villa, of stone and brick, with its pointed attic-roofs, rose above that village of brewers, over a little hill of clay from which the view was cut off by a lofty viaduct resounding and smoking every few minutes with every train that passed by. On the other side lay the peaceful extent of the Seine between its green banks, dust-covered, as it were, by the heat; and in the far distance the emerald islet of St. Germain. Dog-heat and silence. At last, a cluster of elms, a hedge of may, a little green gate of twisted wood, and, followed by a yellow dog,

Auguste Rodin, low, strongly-built, in red slippers and shirt-sleeves. Then he was not dandified and spruce; his hair was closely-cropped, and his beard short and rough. His forehead was still smooth and serene; to his cheek-bones the little flesh adhered closely; the wide nostrils of his blunt nose were mobile and nervous; under the arches of the orbits, two grey-blue eyes, which were piercing and malicious over the oblique lenses, but placid and cordial as soon as he spoke of art and summoned up his hopes before you, and, with a pause, and, with that look of his, asked for your approval.

'*L'Italie, l'Italie. Savez-vous que mon Saint-Jean-Baptiste est Italien?* As a fact, an Abruzzese, Pignatelli, was my model for it. You, Trentacoste, when you worked in Paris, you must have known him. *Pignatelì, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, tel quel, même les cheveux et la barbe.*'

He made us sit down at a little iron table under a tree, before a panorama. '*Nous allons déjeuner ici. C'est très beau, n'est-ce pas*?' and he let himself drop into a chair, happy, letting his eye-glasses drop too, as though he had created that great landscape himself for his enjoyment and repose and it were enough for him to feel that it was there, without looking at it. He had travelled through Italy, several times. But that summer he adored the Etruscans and their terra-cotta statues in Florence and Rome. Bending towards us, he spoke with the smile of capricious boys when they tell you of their first love. 'I must tell you the truth, Michelangelo won me and Phidias seduced me. For years I have suffered, I assure you, suffered, from this double love. And now the Etruscans have shown me that it can be reconciled. In them you still see the Greeks,

and Michelangelo already peeps out.' But his dog got up and went off quietly towards the house. '*Mon chien est mieux élevé que moi.* He remembers that it is the hour for lunch.' And he too set off, dragging his feet, and when he was near the outer stairs, began to clap his hands and to call out: '*Rose, Rose, tu as oublié notre déjeûner.*'

At the top of the stairs there appeared a spare, unkempt, perspiring old woman, all nose. She too was in slippers, and had the sleeves of her blouse turned up. She held up two bottles of wine to defend herself from the reproof. Under one arm she was carrying the folded tablecloth. She came down and set the table. '*Vite, vite*', Rodin repeated harshly. The lunch, washed down with iced claret, was savoury and abundant: an omelet like the sun, a beefsteak large as a flag. That good little old woman, standing up, her hands on her hips, watched us eat, pleased by our appetite, if not by our talk which left the food cooling on our plates; but she watched over us, and often with a corner of her napkin which she held in her right hand she chased away a fly, with an air of admonishing us that we should pay heed to serious things and let the Egyptians, Athenians and Etruscans lie in their old tombs and turn to dust. After the coffee, Rodin poured out another glass of wine and with a regal gesture, without looking at her, said to the woman: '*Rose, assieds-toi là. Tu vas boire un verre avec nous.*' Rose sat down timidly, and at every swallow carefully wiped her lips. But Rodin had another idea: '*Sur ma table de nuit il doit y avoir deux cigares enveloppés dans un numéro de journal.* Go and fetch them. They were given me the other evening by Mirbeau, who is a *grand seigneur.*'

And as Rose went off: '*Ma femme était préoccupée ce matin. Les Italiens sont bien gourmands, elle se disait.*' He laughs, but we felt frozen. The good woman who had served us, was *she* Madame Rodin? Seized by remorse, when she returned, we overwhelmed her with 'Madames' and compliments and bows, perhaps more than Marie-Antoinette ever had in the Trianon.

Meanwhile Rodin, who had started to discourse of Egyptian sculpture, came back from his studio with a dove of sycamore-wood, placed it on one of the pilasters of the stairs and began to go into raptures: '*Arriver à une telle puissance d'expression avec une telle simplicité de moyens. . . . Voilà le point. Voilà le tourment.*' And he turned it towards the right and he turned it towards the left and passed his hands over its flat back, over the outstretched neck, so that it seemed as though he must end by kissing it. When at last he led us into his studio, he carried it delicately in the hollow of both hands as in a nest.

The studio was a white pavilion in our Italian fashion, with three arches and four columns on the façade, all full of light from the ample windows. Madame Rodin, after a few steps, stopped. 'You, madame, are not coming in?' She scarcely smiled, shrugged her shoulders with resignation and sighed: '*Oh, moi . . .*' Those two monosyllables, I have now seen, reading Madame Tirel's bitter book, were the story of her life under the shadow of genius, which is often as frigid as the shadow of a cathedral. In 1866 Rose Beuret was a little dressmaker whom Rodin met every day on the street as he went to model the two caryatides outside the Théâtre des Gobelins. They had a son who was born at the Maternité. But

Rodin's mother and his father, who was a police functionary, received her and the child in their house while Rodin was touring France and Belgium throwing off decorative statues of plaster and stone. He married Rose only a few months before his death in 1916. And she died a short time before him. In a handbag of hers they found a purse of gold coins for her Auguste if he were to fall sick. '*Oh, moi . . .*'

That day Rodin was so kind as to show us the casts of his works one by one: nudes of lovers embracing, with a shudder rising from the tips of their toes to the mouth; nudes of shameful old women, with their bent faces hidden in their hands; convulsive nudes, supine or face downwards, contracted like the corpses of Pompeii modelled from the ashes. And as we, freshly returned from a visit to his exhibition, whispered the titles, Despair, the Race to the Abyss, Genius, the Wave, the Voice, Rodin burst out laughing, raising his hands to the sky and then striking them on his knees: 'But that is literature. Those are the inventions of Mirbeau, of Geffroy, of my literary friends, for the exhibition. I model human bodies as well as I can. The rest does not concern me. Sculpture is not done by words. The poets are there for that.' And he gleefully repeated with a hollow voice: '*L'Entraînement à l'abime. L'Homme rentre dans la nature . . .*' He went and drew out from under a table two baskets full of plaster hands and feet modelled by himself, as studies. He raised them and turned them so that the light could play on them from every side. Hands resting, hands dead, clawing, furious hands, puffy hands of children, slim hands of pallid poets, stubby, knotty hands of peasants, feet tense and open as of legs swimming,

feet with the toes contracted to grasp the ground: all the labour of years and years undergone by that man to learn the human form by heart, to prepare himself to fix the flow of life in lasting art, seemed to be contained in those two country baskets. And he was proud of it all. At the end he placed a hand upright on its wrist, on top of a trestle. 'With this I made the Hand of God.' In a larger size, in fact, that hand had been exhibited at Paris under that title. I do not know what Trentacoste murmured as he touched a marble back. 'Indeed, my dear friend,' the other answered him frankly, 'I model even at night, by candle-light. That is the best time for modelling.'

He hid nothing from us. He spoke of his craft with the simplicity, the precision, the pride and the modesty with which a mason speaks of his building and a farmer of his hoeing and pruning. During the years that ensued I saw him again in the seventeenth-century drawing-rooms of his Hôtel Biron, among the glass-cases of his museum; a servant in a white tie ready to receive tips; two or three perfumed ladies bent on finding the rare adjective to insert with an exclamation-point; and he himself with a cap of black velvet, *à la Raphael.* But why remember that any longer? The Rodin who will live is the one of the square shoulders, in shirt-sleeves.

'With this I made the Hand of God'—and he was right, and God must certainly have recognized it.

## TWO CATS

FLORENCE,
*December* 17, 1923.

THIS morning, walking down from Settignano, I noticed, on the garden wall of a villa, a black cat, squatting in the sunshine. It stared down on me with round sapphire eyes, immobile and benevolent. The shiny green foliage of a laurel-tree behind it served as a flabellum to his majesty. It was not a European cat. If it did not have the long fur of the cats of Angora, still, from its ears and its cheeks there issued those fine tufts and side-whiskers that make these Asiatic cats, even when they are sleeping in your lap, seem as terrible as lions, but that are as soft to the touch as silk: a contrast which, in this flabby and fierce epoch, has made them the fashion even amongst us. We looked at one another, the cat and I, for a few seconds; then it pretended not to see me any more, and stared over my head at the plain of Arno and the turquoise hills and the pale sky.

And there came back to my mind the memory of two cats of the same kind, but smaller, one black and one a dull grey, one the colour of night and one the colour of the clouds, which I loved, caressed and nourished so many years ago, between Bokhara and Tiflis. They were called Mozaffàr and Shirbudùn, and it was my fault they died. I buried them with my own hands on

the Casbek pass, which is said to be no less than the mountain, between Europe and Asia, on whose summit Prometheus was enchained, at a height of over 16,000 feet, so high that we might all see him and learn the risks that we run by giving fire to the heart of men. Mozaffàr, harsh name fit for an Emir, was a tom; Shirbudùn, which in the Sarthian dialect means 'meat of milk', was a female kitten, thus baptized in jest, because she was black. They had been presented to me by a merchant of Bokhara, in a basket of rushes into which every morning I put fresh shavings and cotton-wool, and he had recommended me to feed them, for two more weeks, on milk and boiled water only: which is not very easy when you are travelling.

And yet they were happy. They crossed the desert by railway; they crossed the Caspian without even awaking, by night, in a storm by means of which that great lake, in an attack of sea-sickness, seemed desirous to yield all its waters to its Creator; at Tiflis, the only danger was the exaggerated petting of the hotel clerk, an Armenian blonde, who, having discovered that my travelling-companion was a Milanese architect, wished at all costs to leave for Milan with him, to study singing or dancing, we were to choose which, and meanwhile suffocated my cats with honeyed words. At Tiflis we decided to return to Europe, not by the Black Sea, but by the land-route, across the mountains of the Caucasus, which are supposed actually to be the mountains of Gog and Magog and which cut Asia off from Europe.

One morning, then, at dawn, in a carriage drawn by four horses, all with belled head-stalls, we departed to the sound of a trumpet blown by a driver in an astrakhan

cap and a Circassian tunic, black with silver threads. I have set the basket with the kittens down at my feet and I open it often, so that Mozaffàr and Shirbudùn may also enjoy the sun and the view, and so that the wind of our course may play in their chicken-like fluff. At every post-change I get down, and outside the inn offer them a little bowlful of watered milk. The travellers crowd around to admire the beauty of my cats and my skill as a nurse. Buxom and smooth-skinned Georgian women, between two volutes of white veils raised over their oval faces and their languid eyes, like curtains over an alcove; students in white caps with patent-leather visors, with *bashliks* lowered on to their shoulders, with their white or red or black cotton blouses held in at the waist by belts with many holes for measuring both Pantagruelic orgies and anchoretic hunger,—one of whom, fatter and more learned than the rest, with a pimpled face like a huge strawberry, hearing that I am Italian, offers me outright a Latin motto, '*Felis catus, felix dominus*', and insists on my writing it down, so fine does it appear to him; beggars all rags, beards, and holy scapulars, whose toothless mouths reek of brandy; foot-soldiers with such wide, long greatcoats that each one seems to have been cut, by higher orders, large enough to hold a little French soldier besides, in case the then so flourishing alliance might lead the Parisians up there to fight in the cold.

Shirbudùn, as often happens in well-assorted marriages, is gayer than her husband. The latter, as soon as he has eaten, curls up again in the cotton-wool and sleeps, or pretends to sleep. She, on the other hand, tries to stand up at least on her forefeet, even when the carriage

moves fast, and bending her little head towards the right and the left with the grace of a turtle-dove, looks at me, my companions, the carriages that we meet, the yellow and white cottages of the villages. She is like a young lady at the hour of the drive, as was once the fashion, in her mother's landau up and down the Riviera di Chiaia, or along the avenues of Villa Borghese; and from those airs of hers, at once both attentive and negligent, I draw the most favourable auspices for her future flirtations.

But by this time we have begun to climb rapidly, the sun hides behind mountains and crags, and the air is biting. Shirbudùn makes up her mind for herself that it is now time to rest in the warmth, beside Mozaffàr; and I cover up the precious basket again. An eagle wheels in the roseate sky.

The earth, before rising with its hills towards the sky, divests itself of its riches; here it leaves the golden tunic of a stubble-field, there the green mantle of a meadow, higher up a plume of fir-trees. Then you behold its glorious body all bare, and perceive the framework of the bones peering forth from under a little mossy earth. Beyond the voluptuous safety of the valleys and the hills, the soul prostrates itself, half stunned, half frightened; and your body, which down there was the measure of all things, returns once more, in these gloomy gorges, on these bare peaks, under this icy wind which has grazed the stars, to its insignificant fragility. Add to this, that there in the heart of those sublime heights is the boundary between two worlds, Asia and Europe, West and East, legend and reality, dreaming and living, yesterday and to-day.

Every now and then, as though to encourage us,

the bearded driver blows his horn, awakens resounding echoes among the cliffs ever nearer and blacker, gleaming with ferruginous cascades that cut them and tinge them the colour of blood. All the golden memories of my journey flash before me in the chill shadow; in the midst of a sun-bathed desert, barren, craggy Merv, in the square shadow of every hovel, a red and turquoise carpet of felt; Bokhara, shady, opulent and voluptuous; Samarcand, impudent and resplendent with blue, white and violet tiles; Kokan, spare and small, rustling with silks; and at the back of my memory, at the boundary of China and India, the ramparts of divine Pamir, roof of the sky. . . . Gone, gone for ever; I shall never see them again. To-morrow evening, Vladikavkas and the railway to Odessa and Vienna. And the driver keeps on blowing his horn like an archangel; never again, never again. The Koran tells how Alexander the Great, returning from the place where the sun rises to the place where the sun sets, in order to protect his peoples from the inroads of the hordes led by Gog and Magog, filled this narrow Caucasian pass with iron, between one cliff and the other, and heating that iron red-hot with thousands of bellows and entire forests of wood, poured enough bronze over it to close it for ever. He was the first to bar us Europeans from the contagion of the infinite and the faint ecstasy of Nirvana. Then came Jesus.

But when at Mleti we stop for the night and, in the dining-room of the little inn, by the light of an oil-lamp, I draw out, from under the covers, the basket with the two cats, neither of them moves. They barely turn their heads towards the light, and begin to moan. All

night they do nothing but mew from the bottom of their bed. Mozaffàr sometimes is silent, as though he were resigned to die. Shirbudùn, on the contrary, rebels, stretches out her neck, as slim, under the tousled fur, as the stem of a lily, and whines and pules. Sometimes she has not the strength to modulate her lamentation, and there issues from her throat a long, feeble and even moan, which, as soon as I close my tired eyes, seems to me the echo of a far-distant lament. Her little velvet paws are drawn up now and show the claws. When you touch her you feel more pity for her than when you listen to her; she quivers under the caress, almost as though to remind me how she writhed with joy when she was well and showed me her little teeth, hardly developed, to warn me that some day she would indeed be able to bite me. Now her throat is parched, and if I moisten her lips with a few drops of milk, she can no longer lick them.

My fault. It is I who am killing her, through not having realized that at this height her little lungs would burst, like those little balloons that escape from the hands of a child to come to grief in the sky. What am I to do? Perhaps if I turn back at once, descend precipitately into the valley, I may save her. But what would they say of this European who rushes back in dismay to save two cats, two nothings? And now it is night, now all is silent in this icy solitude so near the heavens; and no one can leave before to-morrow morning. To-morrow morning we shall not have more than a dash of two or three hours uphill as far as the Krestovaia Gora; from there the descent begins again, very rapidly. Perhaps I shall save them. But Shirbudùn's moans grow con-

tinually weaker, a stifled rattle, a suppressed sigh which takes my breath away.

As soon as I see the stars grow pale, I go down to wake the driver. Away, away, away, perhaps I shall save them. I shut the basket, we are off.

The Kasbèk is two hundred and thirty metres higher than Mont Blanc, and at the Krestovaia pass you can see its gleaming snowy peak at close range, you can distinguish every crevice in the rocks, every fissure in the ice. It is the mountain of Prometheus: but Aeschylus, Shelley, nothing matters to me now. Away, away, the descent is beginning. I do not want to open the basket, I do not want to know if they are dead. I will open it at the first change of horses. I tell my travelling-companions that the air is too freezing, that in the warmth under the cover they are perhaps by this time reviving; but the truth is that by now I am trying only to keep my hope alive.

We reach the posting-station of Kasbèk. Now the sun has become tepid once more, the meadows are studded with daisies, a herd is grazing. I take heart, I open the basket, I take Mozaffàr, I stroke his poor dull tousled fur, I open his eyes; they are glazed, and bloody foam oozes from his mouth, from his shattered little lungs. Shirbudùn no longer moans, but her little body still gives a few starts when it feels the sunshine. I hold her in my hands, under its rays. A few travellers form a circle around me. A plump lady, bare-headed, dressed in the European fashion, with her eyes painted, a gold chain around her neck and her fat hands in their cotton gloves folded on her black satin dress, touches her wiry neighbour, who is dressed like a Cossack, with her elbow,

and smiles. They are right to smile, these gentlefolk; they think that it is only a kitten of Bokhara that is passing away at this moment in my hands.

Shirbudùn makes a great effort to open her mouth and eyelids once more, she clings to my hands with her claws outstretched; then all of a sudden I feel that she stiffens, that she too is dead. So I take her far off to bury her, together with her Mozaffàr, a hundred yards from the inn, behind a low wall, in the sunshine. And the driver digs her grave with a few shovelsfull, and to re-set the soil he stamps on it with his boots, so that he seems to be dancing. As I come back to the carriage I notice that with her last movement Shirbudùn has drawn blood from the palm of my hand.

# VORONOFF

FLORENCE,
*April* 11, 1924.

YESTERDAY a huge throng of doctors and surgeons invaded, between Rifredi and Carreggi, the hall of the new Institute for General Pathology, to hear, from the lips of Doctor Serge Voronoff, the logical history of his wonders. Which amongst them, before entering, vouchsafed a glance at Lorenzo the Magnifico's dark villa with its towers, a bow's-shot away there on the height, within the coronet of its great cypresses? I know it right well, because Carlo Segrè, who now owns it, is a great man of letters, and exceedingly hospitable; and yesterday evening in the dark, while Doctor Voronoff was showing us, on the screen, within a circle of pincers, amidst the snow of gauze and cotton-wool, his rapid cuts and charming inoculations and re-stitchings by machine, I was not able to take my mind off the Magnifico with that great crushed nose of his, with his thick, sensual lips and negro's eyes staring at you, whether to frighten and dominate you or to examine and mock you affectionately, you cannot tell. Right under his house, this long and wiry Northerner, dressed in black, has come to promise us a plentitude of youth.

> Quant'è bella giovinezza
> Che si fugge tuttavia. . . .

Questa soma che vien dreto
Sopra l'asino, è Sileno:
Così vecchio e ebbro e lieto,
Già di carne e d'anni è pieno:
Se non può star ritto, almeno
Ride e gode tuttavia.
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia:
Di doman non c'è certezza.

[How beautiful is youth, which is always fleeing. . . . This load that follows, on an ass, is Silenus; so old and drunk and merry, he is already heavy with flesh and age; if he cannot stand upright, yet he laughs and enjoys himself. Let who will be merry, for of to-morrow there is no certainty.]

Would they not be in place, printed on the screen, these tetrameters of our great Lorenzo, between the photograph of the swarthy rejuvenated ram and that of the restored white-haired Englishman? But to whom should I entrust them?

I see before me Professor Lustig, the master of the house and a great pathologist, acute profile of a highly civilized faun, each hair of his chin-beard cut, like his words, at the tip of the scissors; Professor Garbasso, great physicist, rosy and fair, mayor of Florence, indeed the happiest of mayors, so happy that in the half-light I can see him pay the tribute of a gratuitous smile even to the photographs of the martyred chimpanzee; Professor Burci, great surgeon, bull's neck, crow's hair, shining eye, with a sparkle of Tuscan malice which strikes me as though it ought to make the bistoury tremble on the screen in those immense rubber-gloved hands; Professor Tanzi, great psychologist, who phlegmatically stares at the faces of all those regenerated beings as though he were attempting to find there, at last, some trace of

their relative the monkey. Really I cannot whisper verses to any of these.

Doctor Voronoff speaks a rapid and elegant French, with a few hints, in his pronunciation, of beyond the Rhine or beyond the Vistula: *preufs* for *preuves*, *vifent* for *vivent*. Even the world is a ball in his hand: America, Europe, Africa, as we would say Prato or Pontassieve, and he got the first idea of his operation in the harems of Egypt, and in the United States watched the transplanting done by Carrel. The boundaries of humanity, in these comparisons between men and goats, in these brotherly exchanges between men, mandrills and chimpanzees, extend back until they are lost in the mist which encircled the earth before Adam. The speaker plays most skilfully with time and space, with life and death.

For a brief while, in the pale glow that comes down from the white square of the slides, he himself seems a spectre. Then suddenly the light comes back, he resumes his long sharp slim form in the black morning-coat, and I can once more see his emaciated face, short in front, long in profile, his square chin, his retreating forehead, his distended nostrils. Whom does Serge Voronoff resemble? If he happens to raise the antennae of his arms, he at once brings them back close to his slender body, and with his hands he makes a gesture of repentance, joins them at the tips of his fingers, bends his head like a priest saying mass. Whom does he resemble? Now, to point out something or other on the screen, he takes hold of a wand, and this instrument reveals him to me. Voronoff is a wizard, in fact he is Mephistopheles in person, only the forked chin-beard is missing to complete the resemblance. In truth he is

well disguised behind his formulas, his studies, his learning, his diplomat's garb and his ecclesiastical gestures. But even his professorial modesty, which does not dare to affirm anything without due proof, every minute sends out diabolical sparks. The horns of his swarthy he-goats which he causes to live beyond the limits imposed by Nature, the Faust-like pride which you see gleaming in the eyes of his rejuvenated patients, those hands, that forehead, that honeyed smile: how is it possible that by these attributes everybody does not recognize him, all these great savants who are acclaiming him?

All at once he tells us how, somewhere in France, a hundred priests attended a lecture of his, with the permission of their bishop. Here his voice trembles with pride. 'That was a very great source of satisfaction for me——' I should think so.

The light has come back. The lecture is over. The hall is empty, and I succeed in remaining alone with him for a few minutes. He looks me in the eyes, he smiles affably, a bit tired and wistful. What will he say to me? Slipping on a pair of white gloves, he remarks: 'Yesterday I was at Assisi, I visited the church and tomb of St. Francis——'

I push both hands into my pockets lest instinctively I cross myself.

# PIRANDELLO AS AN ANCIENT CHINAMAN

FLORENCE,
*December* 17, 1922.

I HAVE discovered an extraordinary resemblance in Luigi Pirandello to Laotsé. Laotsé was a Chinese philosopher, who lived about twenty-five centuries ago. I do not know how Adriano Tilgher,[1] who is himself a philosopher and very often Chinese, will take this comparison of his favourite Pirandello. But there you are: Pirandello looks like Laotsé and therefore Laotsé looks like Pirandello.

I confess that when I hit upon this discovery, the light was very dim. Pirandello and I were sitting side by side, in the stalls of the Politeama Nazionale at Florence, during the dress rehearsal of *Vestire gli ignudi*. The auditorium of that theatre is the barest in Italy: the roof is visible, all beams and tiles; chairs instead of fauteuils, but white chairs, with seats of a coarse weave like those in a church. Only the chair on which Pirandello was sitting had a rose-coloured cushion, but that too was grown hard and faded, as is fitting for an author who is sceptical and cruel. The bare auditorium: *Bare Living*, *Bare Masks*, books by Pirandello. We were alone in the auditorium. Pirandello was leaning with both hands on the knob of his stick, his head held forward,

[1] One of the first theatrical critics of Italy.

towards the illuminated stage and towards his characters, and smiling. He was smiling and pleased because the actors were suiting him; because the vain play of his heroine, to make a garment, a nice little garment of fibs, for herself, for her death, at least became quite clear in the excellent acting, and also because his play (and he was right) was to his taste. And so, as he smiled, he puckered his eyelids, raised his eyebrows and stroked that snowy pointed beard of his. The Chinaman Laotsé, his very self. The same smile, the same eyes, the same features, the same mouth, the same beard, the same baldness, the same resigned goodness, or at least the same cunning resignation.

Laotsé, it is true, I have known only in bronze, in the many numerous effigies (big and small) that represent him seated on a buffalo, in the act, even there, of writing and smiling. But apart from the buffalo, which can always be explained with an allegory (spontaneity of life, or criticism, or the Author's Society, etc.), the resemblance was marvellous. Laotsé, so wise was he, was born with white hair and eyelashes; and Pirandello equally so, at least as a playwright, for his first appearance on the stage was just before his fiftieth birthday. Laotsé was exceedingly learned, librarian to a prince of the Cheu dynasty; and Pirandello is a professor. 'Professor . . . Professor . . .' everybody, from the first actress to the secretary, addresses him by that title, unheard of on the stage before his advent.

But this is nothing, this is the façade. Let us enter into Laotsé's brains, and the resemblance grows even closer. What is to Laotsé this adorable earth of ours? The earth is the madhouse of the universe. All the

fashions of madness fall from all sides on to the earth as to their centre of gravity. A man of the kingdom of Tsin had a perfectly healthy son, who when he reached the age of manhood, began to feel and think the contrary of what the rest thought: white for him was black; sweetness was bitterness; perfume, stench; honesty, dishonesty; gaiety, extreme sadness. His father, greatly upset, narrated his case to Laotsé, and Laotsé answered him seriously: 'And is this why you think he is mad? All are a prey to the same folly and your son's is a common infirmity. And a good thing it would be if there were only one madman in a family, or only one family of madmen in every village, or only a village of madmen to every city. But the whole world is a cage of madmen. And even I am not sure that I am not a bit queer.'

Here, it is evident, Laotsé exaggerated for the love of logic. But just think what a good subject for a comedy. . . . Laotsé after twenty-five centuries assumes the form of Pirandello. Pirandello discovers that he is Laotsé and wishes to become Pirandello once more. Laotsé is perfectly satisfied as Pirandello and does not wish to change. Pirandello and Laotsé consent to separate during one act only, but as they are dividing their ideas (which would be so many characters) they do not know which belong to Pirandello and which to Laotsé. And so their ideas, irritated, enter into a third character which is Pirandello-cum-Laotsé, but which is no longer either Pirandello or Laotsé. . . .

Excuse me, Tilgher, will you go on?

# LOTI

*June* 11, 1923.

PIERRE LOTI is dead. In August 1917 I accompanied him, 'by higher orders', to see Aquileia and Grado. It was hot, and Pierre Loti did not care about either Aquileia or Grado. I should venture to say that he did not care very much even about the Italian war. He too had come 'by higher orders'. After Kipling had come from England to visit our front, France promptly sent us her Kipling. Had Loti been a friend of the Turks and an enemy of ours during the Libyan War? His visit to our Supreme Command and to its healthier and more picturesque neighbourhood meant that Pierre Loti forgot the offence and offered us his hand. Could anyone be more generous?

When I went to propose the programme of the excursion to him, his first words were: *Je suis fatigué*. That was evident. He was yellow, all wrinkles and bones, the good little old man who thirty years before had been married to Madame Chrysanthème; and his voice was a mere whisper. Languid and timid, his little beard dyed blond, bloodless skin sticking to the bones of his temples, eyebrows signed by two dashes of charcoal, the earthy colour of his cheek-bones enlivened by a little pink powder, his hands one great knot of veins and tendons, fleshless as the hands of a centenarian: when in

his naval officer's khaki he raised himself on his extremely high heels (*sur Pi. Loti*, they used to say in Paris) and set forth, one instinctively got closer to him, to help him if he should fall. He must already have been ill, and after a few steps in the sun he perspired and gasped: '*Danonziò, qu'est-ce qu'il fait Danonziò? Il est admirable de jeunesse, de bravoure et de génie. Quel âge a-t-il maintenant? Je lui ai envoyé un petit livre que je viens de publier. Tâchez de savoir s'il l'a reçu. Quel âge a-t-il maintenant?*'

The melancholy of old age troubled and gnawed him. He had always been melancholy and full of yearning; but as a young man, when he had cradled his sadness on the fraternal monotony of the ocean, when, a sigh for every breath, he had distracted it with marvellous visions of sky and earth, with the loves of women of every shape and colour, that subtle torment of his had in the end become both his happiness and ours, or at least his glory and the happiness of us his readers. Now, enchained by his old age, he no longer knew how to escape from it. The world grew smaller before him, mirrored in a span where he beheld his own wizened face. 'A time will come' (he had said to Aziadé) 'when everything will be swallowed up by deepest night, together with ourselves; when all that was ourselves will have disappeared; everything, even our names carved in the rock.' Then he was twenty-seven. Now he is sixty-seven. And the shadow grew denser around him, every hour, in waves, like the sea over the head of a shipwreck.

We stop before the walls of Palmanova: a fortress constructed by the Venetians against the Turks. I tell him so, he answers: '*Il y a un soleil effrayant aujourd'hui.*

*Ne restons pas au soleil.*' A closed motor-car, a closed motor-boat. We have selected the handsomest and most comfortable motor-boat of Grado: the boat known as the Emperor William's, because it comes from the Arsenal of Venice and used to take the Emperor up and down the lagoons on one of those pompous and romantic visits of his.

Before entering the motor-boat we go into the basilica of Aquileia. He raises his eyes, he measures its vastness, he listens to me patiently; and he announces to me that he prefers the Cathedral of Milan. He saw it for the first time coming to Udine. Until that time all that he had known of Italy was Venice. I lead him down to the crypt of the basilica. On the threshold he stops; the crypt strikes him as being too cold and damp. '*Faites-moi voir les choses essentielles.*' The museum? No; museums tire him.

We leave for Grado. In the soft and well-ventilated motor-boat Pierre Loti grows more animated. He speaks to me of his house at Hendaye, on the Bidassoa, on the frontier between France and Spain; of the sea and the sky that are visible from there; of a book that he is writing about his memories of childhood; of a letter of his father's that he has found, in which he speaks of Carlo Alberto. I describe to him my excursion with Anatole France from Foligno up to Montefalco, in a carriage. Then too we spoke of literature. The more the road rose and the finer the air became, the more did France grow lively and biting. At the gates of Montefalco, he concluded: '*Il n'y a qu'un écrivain vraiment original en France, Pierre Loti.*' A faithful friend of his was seated next to him; she interposed: '*Au moins, monsieur France, dites*

*qu'il y en a deux.'* Loti is happy, he laughs to the lagoon, to the sun, to the heat, to me. He sighs: '*Hélas, maintenant il a des amis blocards. De la guerre, il n'en veut pas.*'

But we have arrived and the fatigue recommences. Naval officers, cordial, vibrating with admiration for their immortal colleague; peals of trumpets; snap-shots; the mess-table decorated with flowers. Does he wish to go up to the terrace to see Trieste? He looks at it with a glass for an instant. He says nothing. He turns to the opposite side: '*Est-ce qu'on voit Venise d'ici?*' At breakfast he finds two officers who have been in China; for a moment he grows livelier. But soon he grows inert once more. We lead him on to the 'monitors' embowered in branches, camouflaged into islands for whoever looks at them from the sky. We lead him to Isola Morosini, to the observatory on the tree near the big calibres squatting in the brushwood. Nothing. He smiles affably and discreetly, with a mechanical little smile which ends under his nose. He leans on the trunks, the cannons, the parapets. After a few steps he looks around anxiously seeking for some support.

The day after they made him traverse the Vallone in a motor-car. In the evening he met Eleonora Duse at Udine, pale and white-haired, she, with not a grain of powder. He left immediately afterwards. And on August 12th the Stefani Agency, which is to say History, announced: 'The illustrious writer Pierre Loti, who has been passing several days at our front, has accomplished numerous excursions to the most advanced positions, manifesting on various occasions his admiration for the great efficiency of the Italian army.'

## THE BATHS OF CARACALLA

ROME,
*June* 24, 1923.

SUNDAY, between the Caelian and the Aventine. Great things indeed, civilization, order, garden rakes, great thoroughfares, the municipal police, the wire netting, Guido Baccelli and the Archaeological Promenade. Are not we Romans of to-day the masters of the glorious ruins around us here? And is it not right that we should use them as ornaments for our new gardens, as a background for our smooth avenues raced through by our automobiles? The imitation ruins in Villa Borghese must surely have cost Prince Marcantonio a fortune when he had to have them built brand new, by rule of art, so that they might seem antique. Here, in this park planted yesterday, the baths of Caracalla did not cost us anything; and they yield the same effect. Anyone who complains ought to blush. The old Carducci,[1] rhetorician, heaving those great romantic sighs of his which seem snarls, writes:

> Febbre, m'ascolta. Gli uomini novelli quinci respingi e lor picciole cose: religioso è questo orror. . . .
>
> [Fever, hearken to me, now reject the new men, and their petty things; this horror is religious.]

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[1] Giosuè Carducci, the great poet, author of 'Odi Barbare'—barbarian verses, because in them he employs Latin metres.

Religious? horror? He shouldn't have died. If Giosuè were to return now to the baths of Caracalla, he would have seen what great things the men of to-day can do: a pasteboard theatre on the Palatine, a dustless drive in front of the baths, benches for nurses, bare symmetrical meadows, and such an entrance between two sentry-boxes that no race-course can boast of anything nearly so monumental. Everything is measured, numbered, levelled, swept, combed, so as to leave open-mouthed a Prussian worshipper of the God *Verboten*. This is progress. It makes one angry to think that a professor and senator such as Carducci should have abandoned himself to such retrograde sadness. Barbarous verses; worthy of a barbarian. And we who in our childhood learned them by heart, and perchance came here to recite them and to fling stones at the sparrows on the elm-trees which are gone and to hunt for violets or blackberries among the bushes in the ditch of San Giovanni, we are more barbarous and old-fashioned than he, and, progress be praised, rather than alive, we should say we are survivals.

Under Santa Balbina, two paces from the exedra of the Thermae, there lived at that time a buxom, ruddy vegetable-woman, who, in the spring-time, for two *soldi*, allowed us to eat as many beans off the stalk as we would and could swallow; and for an additional *soldo* she also gave us a pinch of salt. Only she begged us: '*Nun fate li scemi, nun me rompete le piante; sinnò er padrone se n'accorge.*' [Don't be fools, don't break the plants, or else the master will find out.] That huge and jovial Juno also offered us one morning a few classical books, stained with ink, selling them at the same price as the beans. They had been left with her in deposit by a boy who had played truant one

day and then had not come back for a week. She showed them to us, taking hold of them by a corner of the covers and shaking the pages; those volumes of Caesar and Quintilian seemed so many chickens seized by one wing and fluttering. From the Caelian there slipped down close to the earth a cool musical zephyr which, as it passed over the villa Mattei and the municipal seed-ground, became redolent of acacias and flowering lime-trees; and the jackdaws, cra, cra, cra, settled down like arrows from the red walls, lofty and precipitous as Alpine crags. Of a surety they came down to look at us: 'You look like so many corpses'—and went back to roost up there, so black and so shiny that against the red of the bricks they became violet-coloured.

Now, walking along the avenue, I cast a timid glance towards the little house of long ago. Between a freshly-planted cypress and a pine, of the approximate stature of myself at that time, I see only two municipal policemen dressed in black, straight and stiff, and behind them the ideal wall of the wire netting, which is as much as to say, the regulations. And inside me too, how many policemen, how many regulations, how many prohibitions, since those days! I feel them in all my joints.

But as soon as I enter the Baths, I am consoled. First of all, because to these vast walls, all of us, boys or giants, scholars or popes, are, at most, but a span high. One year, thirty years, a century; they no longer speak with anyone but the stars. I sit down on the column of porphyry, still in its old place, so shiny that, if I bring my hand near to it, it is faithfully reflected. And, behold, there suddenly comes forth to greet me a breath of the gay wind of those days, and caresses me, searches me, whispers

to me, as though it would recognize me and make much of me. At moments, almost as though to insinuate itself up there in those crevices and gaps in the arches and the walls, this breeze rebounds and soars up into the void: grows swifter and more audacious, agitates all the plants around, curves the blades of oats to the ground, and on the top of that mutilated wall, which is higher than a belfry, causes a few poppies and a clump of briers to wave madly. Of two girls who have climbed to the top of a block of the cupola fallen into the midst of the central hall, it makes, pouncing merrily on them, two Victories of Samothrace, meagre as becomes the humility of the times. Then it calms down at once and becomes meek once more, shamefaced and familiar: the yawn of the eternal which is bored at never growing old.

Even ruins are an idea. If by looking hard at them you convince yourself that they are not ruins, but the first skeleton of an immense factory in course of construction, still lacking arches, ceilings, cornices and marble facings (whose first essays and models you can see aligned along the wall); that to-day is Sunday, and, naturally, the masons and stone-carvers are not working; that one day or another they will come back to continue with alacrity the colossal task which is already, obviously, outlined in all its details, then everything suffers a change underneath your eyes, even death turns to life. And upon finding himself to be the contemporary of so much imperial majesty, power and certitude, even a threepenny, ephemeral and scribbling journalist can get together some conceit and swell himself out as much as an athlete. One, two, three. What are brains for if they do not aid us in these games? We ourselves will choose the men for the statues to be

erected inside those still bare and empty niches; we ourselves will propose in a page of perfect logic the subjects for the mosaics, for the pleasure, as is our custom, of afterwards walking over them.

Cra, cra, cra. One cannot enjoy oneself dreaming of a bit of glory without at once ten or twenty intruding jackdaws beginning to wheel over one's head croaking. Old jackdaws dressed in mourning. But are they really the same old jackdaws of long ago? Am I mistaken, or does it strike me as though they had now taken to imitating aeroplanes; and one glides on its wing and the other makes a *vol plané*, and another drops like a dead leaf. Perhaps with all this croaking they want to give themselves the illusion of the buzz of a motor? Or even of a machine-gun, gone to rust after five years? Once they were not so insolent and provocative. But it is only fair. In which century, since they were created, did crows ever see on the globe of the earth a feast of so many corpses?

There is a great capital here of composite style, which shows on one side against the acanthus-leaves among the Ionic volutes a Hercules with his club, and on the other an Aphrodite pressing her native shell against her body. I must have looked at it a hundred times, and there is no handbook of archaeology which does not reproduce it in full-page size, so magnificent is it, so famous. And yet before to-day I never noticed the sadness and fatigue of that Hercules who, bearded and strong-limbed as he is, would fall to earth if he did not lean wholly, with his chin lowered, on his great stave. And in that silent lament Venus is his companion, so sad is her lovely face contracted towards the wrinkles that mark her marble forehead. If the crows did not disturb me, I should end

by believing that even blocks of marble can model themselves on the thoughts of men.

'*Ma nun ve vergognate de giocà a carachè proprio qui drento? Fòri subito, fòri. Qui s'ha de sta' serii, chè nun è un'osteria.*' [But aren't you ashamed to play *carachè* in here? Away at once, away. Here you must behave seriously. This is no *osteria.*] A guardian wearing the royal arms in silver on his cap thus pursues three street-arabs who, running and leaping, turn to call to him: '*Ma va a fa' er sacrestano a San Lorenzo*' [Go and be a sacristan at San Lorenzo], which, as is well known, is the local cemetery. The guardian, as soon as he has seen them go out, comes back in dignified silence. I find him again talking to a pompous and robust superintendent, in a linen jacket; and they begin to walk up and down along the wire netting which encloses the ruins. On the other side of the netting there is a stretch of fine garden-land covered with vines and flowers, roses and jonquils. But we who belong to the public are not allowed to cross over there. The superintendent walks around with his chest swelled out, keeping both hands crossed behind his back, and he holds in them a little bunch of his roses. Every now and then he stops and makes the roses circulate entirely around his body so as to raise them to his nostrils and smell them. Then he brings them back behind him once more, and recommences his promenade. Authority. Suddenly the two guardians stop, full of trouble. The sound of a guitar and a mandolin reaches their ears. '*Mo' se metteno puro a sonà.*' [Now they're even starting to play.] The guardian looks out into the hall of the tepidarium, into that of the calidarium. He returns to the superintendent: '*No, stanno de fòri a sonà.*

*Nun glie se po' dì niente.*' [No, they're playing outside. We can't say anything to them.] The superintendent sniffs his roses, satisfied, and resumes his perambulation.

I hearken to the advice: here you must behave seriously. And I go on my way towards the Palatine in search of the higher culture. To-day in fact they are performing in that stadium the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, in Felice Bellotti's venerable translation. I arrive at the moment when the beautiful Hippolytus is cursing women. The audience laughs, laughs as though they were listening to Gandusio at the Valle. Nor is there any guardian here who can order them to be serious. And besides, what would you? On the stage they have built pasteboard temples and dwarf palaces, of a sunflower yellow, of indigo blue, against the purple rocks; and the supernumeraries, when they pass before the statue of the goddess, salute it in the Fascist fashion, as though it were a young general of the Militia; and in a box, next to me, empty but full of promise, are three cardinalesque arm-chairs, red and gold. That is not all. At the tragic moment when the Nurse comes to inform me that Phaedra has hanged herself, or rather, more fittingly, that '*la regal donna a torta fune è appesa*' [the regal woman is suspended by a twisted rope], an aeroplane begins to fly and buzz at low range; and everybody gazes exclusively at it, all eyes are fixed on the sky, as though they were seeking the soul of the blonde Phaedra which is drifting away up there. High up over the wall towards the House of Augustus project the remains of Villa Mills with its Gothic windows. Were we perhaps wrong for so many years in cursing that romantic jaundice-coloured villa among its funereal cypresses? Now we have all become classics once more: actors, wigs, pasteboard and merry-

making on the hospitable Palatine. And let that old grumbler of a Carducci rest in peace.

On the meadow in front of San Gregorio I find still another sign of literature. A woman without a hat, ragged and faded, is sitting on the grass, in front of a little cart which offers to the passers-by a dozen bottles of iced lemonade. Nobody is thirsty to-day, with this brisk cool wind. And she is leaning with one shoulder on her companion in shirt-sleeves, who, stretched out beside her, is holding a book on his knees and is reading it aloud to her, and in the pauses scratches his dusty shock of hair with all five fingers. I approach with an absent air, pretending to look at the staircase and the façade of St. Gregory's. 'There appeared Brancaleone completely armed except for his head, accompanied by Masuccio who was wearing the armour of Fieramosca.' The woman has reclined her head on the man's shoulder, with one hand on his hand. In the road the noisy Sunday crowd is passing: flocks of schoolboys, crowded '*botticelle*' [small open cabs], the rustling of motor-cars, the brisk explosions of motor-bicycles. Those two on the roadside display with indifference their four worn-out shoes. 'The bell of St. Dominic's rang to the mass at which the combatants were to assist before setting out for the field.' A cloud of dust enfolds them. They continue, enthralled, their reading of *Ettore Fieramosca*.

## PAPINI CONVERTED

*December* 10, 1921.

NAPOLEON III, when, almost at Papini's age, he was head over heels in love with Eugenia Montijo, and she was still holding back, took refuge, during a ball, in a window-recess, pricked up his courage and put the question to her: 'Tell me, then, by what road can I reach your heart?' 'Sire, the only way is through the church', the blonde calmly answered. I do not say that Giovanni Papini, in order at last to wed the big public and the adored big editions, had no other way; but after all the smoothest, surest and straightest way was that recommended by the Montijo to the frantic Emperor. And Papini too has taken it, boldly, wondering, like all lovers who are young no longer, that others should be at first a bit taken aback and murmur at him.

Papini is unable to doubt. He knows every kind of fever, but not the fever of doubt, which after all may sometimes not be a fever, but a sort of well-aired peace cradled between 'yes' and 'no'. This peremptory certitude of his has perhaps in the course of years become for him a defence even against himself: a wall erected in haste, with all the stones that come to hand, if only to find a shelter from opposed gusts and unpleasant vistas. Perhaps it is also the easiest way, if not to convince one's neighbours, at least to proselytize and to dazzle them.

Papini's dialectic was formed during many years at the café, which is in a way a public meeting and where every opinion is a kind of wager. The pace of his Pegasus, in short, is never an amble: either a gallop, or even a charge, or else a grazing in the clear sunshine of Heliconian meadows. (Rare moments; but few as Papini's bucolic pages are, I enjoy them, and savour them, more than any other pages of his.) Did he have to enter the Church? He crossed it all at a run with his head lowered, whether to gather momentum or from piety is not known, from the door to the apse, even into the sacristy; and then upstairs as far as the priest's little room with a chromo of the Sacred Heart, and into the parlour of His Grace the Bishop, with the portrait of Pope Benedict himself.

'*C'est une barre de fer*', said Renan of Catholicism, when he too was on the edge of a conversion, but in the other direction. '*On ne raisonne pas avec une barre de fer.*' Papini at once gave up reasoning, happy in having at last found something on which to lean and rest after so much journeying, in which to enjoy the illusion of resting and breathing in front of a great horizon. The iron bar is for him to a certain extent the bar of a railing.

He has accepted from the Church all the loves and hates, and the very dislikes which the sternest of the orthodox would have allowed him to forget. He was not satisfied with forgetting, or rather demolishing, Zeus and Apollo, Caesar and Augustus; he finished off also Socrates and Horace, Seneca and Renan. A century after Christ there were Fathers of the Church like Justin who considered Heraclitus and Socrates to be Christians. In this apocalyptic year of grace of 1921 the apologist Giovanni does not pardon even them; he is just willing partly to

forgive himself because it seems to him right to attribute the blame of his long error to this convulsive and voluble era. A putrid epoch, an abject epoch, like none other that has ever been, if you hearken to Papini, who, by one of the numerous unexpected tricks of the evil one, does, after all, feel a certain satisfaction and pride in having chanced upon the earth precisely in this superlative epoch.

Something similar to this he experiences when he boasts of the supreme ugliness, under his dishevelled hair, of his pallid face, and of his bulging forehead and emaciated cheeks and bloodshot short-sighted eyes; and that straight deep furrow between the eyes which looks like the scar of an arrow. He will not admit polite attenuations, Lavateresque interpretations. He wants to be ugly, and especially to be called ugly; even in this he is faithful to his *Carducci the Man* who so enjoyed playing the ogre: 'I know, and in my heart it amuses me, that I am so ugly as to be frightening. . . .' The pride of humility, which forces you to note the evident beauty of the contrast between face and spirit. *Carducci the Man.* Has anyone observed that the *Storia di Cristo* is after the same pattern? In the *Carducci*, it was obvious that Papini was trying to find himself; here, in the *Life of Jesus*, this search is less manifest and less permissible. But read one chapter, the *Overturner*: 'The greatest overturner is Jesus, the supreme paradoxist, the radical fearless Overturner——' He too.

I think that we should bring ourselves gracefully to forgive Giovanni Papini, even now that he is all Christian from head to foot, for this minimum of pride, and, if you will, touchy and fierce pride. It is, after all, a churchman's quality, the quality of all the chosen of the people or

of God. '*Non tibi sed Petro.*' '*Et mihi et Petro.*' He who will humble himself shall be exalted. Perhaps that is why he humbles himself. And as a writer I am all the more willing to grant Papini this right to be proud, because he is a master in the art that I serve. 'We are condemned to perpetual literature, to the harsh prison of the dictionary', he once wrote; but it is a dear prison, after all, in which, with the diminution of the crew imposed by democracy, he still has a just claim to one of the few posts as boatswain. And besides, as a Roman, I like these rare Catholics, survivors or neophytes, still convinced that the love of man to man must be imposed by authority, even with a few thoroughly dry faggots and well-greased ropes; that authority in short precedes and controls love and prevents it becoming stupid and drunk. 'I like them better than all the stuffy sacristans of affected Christianity', who are in fashion to-day, to borrow a phrase from Domenico Giuliotti, another ruthless Catholic who, if I am not mistaken, divides humanity into three sections: the good ones; the ones that we can still hope to convert or enchain; and those without any hope, whom one must quickly send into the other world, nearer to God, so that He who is omnipotent may attend to them in person. But I have never dared to ask Giuliotti how many men the good section consists of nowadays. Were I to ask him to count them for me on his fingers, I fear he would at once stick one of his hands in his pocket.

In short, if there is one thing that I admire in Giovanni Papini's conversion, it is precisely what others do not admire: that is, the sudden and complete way in which he was converted, not only because thus he has been true to himself and to that constant risky and even generous habit

of his, of surrendering all himself in order to receive all in an embrace or a swallow, but also because in so doing he revealed, without formulating it in so many words, his own inner tragedy: the tragedy of his weariness. In every phrase of his new book I feel the strain of a man who was at the end of his tether. He could no longer endure his solitude, his failure, in so many years of intellectual and moral hunger and thirst, to find a substantial and nourishing food—in so many years of vagabondage from one idea to the other, and from one book to the other, to find an abode for his soul. Of course, here too, a share of the effect must be attributed to the war, to this war which every one swore would not change anything in men's heads and in their hearts. Just as in their bodies it caused all their hidden afflictions to break out and hastened all forms of decay, so in their souls as well. Without the war, without the earthquake and the convulsion and the bloody terror of the war, Giovanni Papini would have gone on with his rope-dancing gambols on the shining steel cord of his strained intelligence. Instead of that, here you see him taking refuge in the Church, in a mad rush, like a man who has hurried in to seek asylum and shelter from pressing mortal danger, and now touches the walls, the pillars, the altars, the gates, and cries out, to comfort himself most of all: 'They are of granite, they are of iron, they have endured for centuries, they will endure always, they will defend me for ever.'

But for him the difficulties are now beginning. The gate is of iron, I allow; but it has closed behind him.

## PETROLINI

FLORENCE,
*March* 20, 1922.

PETROLINI,[1] in evening dress, has turned his last pirouette, has flung his last quip. The orchestra has suddenly ceased. Stiff and serious, pressing his top-hat against his stomach, Petrolini raises his hooked nose, opens wide his great black eyes, and utters his last phrase: '*Più stupido di così si muore.*' [You couldn't be any stupider than that, if you tried.] The audience applauds, applauds, applauds. Petrolini has already turned his back on them and returns behind the scenes, with little steps, arrogantly.

Giovio says in the Life of Leo X: '*Erat enim Bibiena mirus artifex hominibus aetate vel professione gravibus ad insaniam impellendis.*' [Cardinal Bibiena was a marvellous artist in urging on to folly men on whom either their age or their profession imposed gravity.] And in thus masking reason as folly and folly as reason, he was gleefully assisted by the Florentine pontiff. To enjoy him properly, one must give Petrolini his place in tradition between Messer Dolcibene and Gonnella, between the *pievano* [parish-priest] Arlotto and Cardinal

[1] Ettore Petrolini, renowned music-hall artist and comedian, is a great force in Italian theatrical art for the vehemence of his satire and his biting parodies of 'legitimate' drama.

Bibiena, and all those other 'piacevoli', as they used to say in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. 'Pleasing' but bitter, fun-making but malicious, with a tinge of the cynic, who did not so much give himself over to 'chastise with laughter' as to amuse himself in pricking the most mawkish sentiments and the most shining and rotund ideals to see what wind comes out of them. And they pretended to be simpletons, not so much to defend themselves from the anger of those whom they mocked, as to increase the contrast between the littleness of the dart-thrower and the greatness of the target. That contrast is, in the end, laughter. The sign Messer Dolcibene, on his pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre itself, chose to leave in the Valley of Jehosaphat so as to find it again on the day of the Last Judgment and not lose himself in the crowd: read it for yourself in Sacchetti, because not even Petrolini on the stage would dare to tell it you.

I do not want to crush Petrolini under the weight of comparisons. Once, when he was still a boy and was appearing at the Concerto Gambrinus in Piazza Termini at four lire a performance, the impresario printed on the programme: 'Petrolini the clown.' I do not know if Petrolini was offended. If so, he was wrong. That impresario was giving back to him in a word the nobility of his ancient origin. Meanwhile it is certain that as a Roman he belongs, after his fashion, to the progeny of the Roman humorists which extend from Belli to Pascarella, from Trilussa to Gigi Lucatelli. Under a portrait of himself Lucatelli wrote this somewhat precious but just inscription: 'Dear Petrolini, I am so fond of you because you have made me suffer a lot of pleasure.'

This actor lacks a written, definite, catalogable form of expression; often there is nothing but the prime materials which evening by evening he remoulds, refines and revives. But for this reason also one gets much enjoyment from watching him, for one beholds the very birth of bi-fronted humourism, merry in its sadness, sad in its merriment.

Of course, four or five centuries back, jesting, quips and parodies were more facile, because the audience of a 'piacevole' and of a jester was restricted, consisted, that is, of a court gathered around its overlord, whose tastes, likes and dislikes were known and respected. To-day, with a packed house, Petrolini sees himself faced by a thousand or two thousand masters, each with his own mind, his own troubles, his own party. his own hopes. He is a perfect man of his time, and proceeds warily, step by step; one might say, a blow to Don Sturzo, a blow to Lenin.[1] 'I shall write to Russia', he threatens in the *Accordatore* when the *nouveau-riche* sends him away from his table, but at the second repulse he announces tragically: 'I shall call the Fascists.' This is still farce. But when he suddenly stretches his neck and draws himself up in front of the audience and asks, in the *Otto-brata*, 'Do you think it's a nice thing to laugh in my face? Do I laugh in *your* face?' the audience hesitates, and for a moment sees peering from behind the mask a face (or another mask?) that troubles it. Which is the true face of flesh and blood? One instant; Petrolini once more closes the peep-hole, laughs foolishly, orders: 'If anyone wants to laugh, let them go outside.' And everybody laughs, reassured after a thrill of doubt.

[1] A paraphrase of the Italian proverb, 'to give a tap on the barrel and a tap on the hoop'.

He does not really love his audience. I might say that he loves it but does not like it, just as certain marriages are all full of outbursts of love, without affection and without esteem. First, poverty and solitude 'because I was not born, like all these swells, in a muff'; later, the laughter of the public, at his gross jests only (and he has given them plenty of amusement, this generous Roman lad, in twenty-two years of work) and the neglect by all, public and critics, of this play of his suspended between the desperate and the comic, between the sorrowful and the idiotic, between laughter at his audience and laughter at himself. But this awkward poison, which, the more years pass, the more he swallows and enjoys as though it were sugar, is to-day his strength, a strength still to be sharpened and pointed, but already hard and cutting.

In order to win recognition from the public Petrolini gave himself frankly over to tragedy, violent popular tragedy, in dialect, in a few one-act plays, after which he knew that his audience would perceive more clearly the two aspects of a type or a 'sketch' such as *Sor Capanna* or *Gigetto er bullo* or the fashionable *chanteuse*, of a parody such as 'Hamlet' or 'Othello', 'Faust' or 'Ferdinand the Page'.

Even in these parodies he belongs, without knowing it, to our ancient Italian tradition, hitting, behind the character that is parodied, at the sentiments themselves which that character symbolizes for all of us and arouses in all of us. The short parody of 'My love never dies', with its fountains of tears, its grimaces and sighs and contortions and groans, with his collapse and the sob at the end, with his face hidden in his hands, is worth

three acts of a melodrama, because it annuls them with a sole blow and creates them anew with a single cry.

Has Pirandello ever seen Petrolini? And if he has, why does he not write something for him?[1]

[1] My wish has been answered. While these pages are being reprinted the audiences of Rome are applauding Petrolini in *Agro di Limone* by Luigi Pirandello.—*Author's note.*

## FORTUNY

VENICE,
*April* 15, 1922.

IN the Fortunys' house at Venice on the Gran Canale, amidst a treasury of pictures, prints, stuffs and carpets, you can admire a sword with hilt chased after the Moorish fashion, of ivory and iron damascened with silver. It seems the sword of a King of Granada, of five centuries ago. Whereas it is work done about 1870, by the hand of the great Fortuny—Mariano Fortuny the elder. Every time that I look at it, I seem to look into the son's heart, at the first seed of his art. Born in the romantic and regal pomp of the artists' studios of the last century, in a confusion of brocades and damasks, of Japanese lacquer-work and rococo furniture, of Flemish tapestries and Persian carpets, of cuirasses and guitars, of Venetian fans and Roman marbles, of dwarf palms and pouting roses, he bore in his blood, with the longing of that pomp, the industrious curiosity of the most genial and brilliant amongst the artists of those days. The others collected all these rarities more for the astonishment of others than for their own delight. Wandering Spaniard as he was between Papal Rome and Imperial Paris, Mariano Fortuny alone loved those beauties for themselves and, analysing them in every form, light, reflection, with prodigious eye, and portraying them

with his rapid and minute brush (Gautier had called his 'Marriage at the Vicaria' 'a sketch by Goya finished by Meissonier') he had not stopped at the surface; he had wished to understand from inside; he had found them to be old and wished to see them reborn. And just as he had set to work at Granada painting and baking tiles, so he had taken to forge and damascene swords and daggers. He died at Rome in 1874, at thirty-six, leaving to his son the burning passion for those curios.

Chemistry, Physics, Optics, the technique of all varieties of painting, the dyeing of stuffs and the amalgamation of metals, glass-furnaces and velvet-looms: from year to year, from month to month, Fortuny the son varied his attention and his activity, coursed through Italy and Europe, rediscovered some secret, discovered some art, flew off to another, ever with that native gift which is found anew in the hearts of poets and inventors,—the gift of seeing all the things of this world for the first time, even if they have been looking at them for years. His studio was that of an artist and a wizard; canvases just begun, huge cloths sketched in tempera, copper-plates for etchings veiled with paraffin, bottles of acids and dyes, retorts, alembics and copper vessels. And on the top floor, in a garret under the rafters, he would project from a magic-lantern, in the middle of the night, on to a huge screen, the gigantic head of a Sibyl by Michelangelo, or a landscape by Leonardo convulsed by the storm, so that seeing it become, from the miniature drawing that it had been, so vast and tremendous, you wanted Wagner's orchestra to lend a voice to the terror of it. By day, down on the first floor in the saloon with the balcony on the *Canalazzo*,

the bust of his father, modelled by Gemito, lorded it over his canvases and aquarelles hung from the damask of the walls, but protected from the light by pieces of velvet and satin, sacred relics. And the green waves of the canal, moving lazily in the sunlight, gave with its reflections a rhythmic mobility to those silks and velvets and carpets and glasses and bronzes and pictures, as though the light were cradling them, maternally.

But living in Italy, and at Venice, once his youth was passed, Mariano Fortuny developed two passions: the theatre, scene-painting, illumination; and printed stuffs. In other countries, investigations and experiments were being carried on for the renovation of scenic apparatus; but at Venice it sufficed to raise one's eyes to a sky painted by God or by Titian, and at once the transformation of the entire reality, from the clouds to the men, with a stroke of light, appeared as the sovereign art. The 'Fortuny cupola' has now been shown on the stage of the Scala. I have not been to see it. I think that if I had seen it on that huge stage I should not have felt again the same emotion as that I experienced so many years ago when, for the first time, in a miniature portable theatre constructed by Fortuny, I saw, projected on that white hood, all the colours of the dawn, of noon, of evening, and the clouds sailing along dissolving in the azure, and the rose of dawn spreading and taking fire, the purple of evening coming down from the heights, oppressing the horizon and sinking among the cirri and strati which changed colour like faces. The whole eternal, daily prodigy which between the humid sky and the mirror of the lagoons enchants mortal men and empties our souls in a sigh, was repeated in there by the magic

of that slow, bearded and strong-limbed wizard, playing with a mirror and an electric button.

Now he has gone to live at San Benedetto in the Palazzo Orfei (where once before there was a theatre, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the theatre of the Company of the Stocking, belonging to the Society of the Orfei), a very labyrinth of courtyards, porticos, balconies, stairs, vestibules, and deep mysterious saloons, shrouded and divided by curtains and hangings with long, slow folds, as in the canopies of kings in fairy tales, coloured purple, and seaweed-green, all the colours of the sea and even of the world to come.[1] And over every chair and couch are thrown silks and velvets printed with great masses of silk and gold, with magnificent designs ranging from the ivy-leaves and berries of the Minoan vases to the thistles and pomegranates of the Venetian *soprarizzi*. But at certain hours a lively chirping and trilling of feminine voices and laughter in the *campiello* or in the lane explains all that opulence: it is the working-girls coming out of the Fortuny work-rooms, and those stuffs for the cloaks and hangings are designed and stained by Mariano Fortuny.

So in this very 1922, amidst universal debts, poverty and famine, this Spaniard of Venice or Venetian of Catalonia, lives, for the actual needs of his work, in the very luxury of the *Arabian Nights*. And he is as simple and as sober as an anchorite. Dressed in summer-clothes even in the icy *bora*, always of the same colour and same material, a cloak of black cloth, a light suit of dark blue serge, a white silk tie, soft black hat, low patent-leather

[1] Impossible to translate the play on the words 'oltremare' = ultramarine, and 'oltretomba' = beyond the tomb.

shoes or red braided-leather sandals, he has not changed during the thirty years that I have known him; except for the silver in his black, bristly round beard. And the strangest thing about it is that if I try to remember him I can succeed only in seeing him face to face, set up opposite his interlocutor, his hands in his pockets, his head held high, and a little smile, half cordial, half mocking. His inner self is just the same: frank heart and clear head, used to facing difficulties quietly and resolutely; a problem of optics and mechanics like a German bombardment.

During the war, this many-souled artist, curious only of things appertaining to his art, never stirred from Venice. Better still: one fine day he became the Spanish Consul in Venice. In the centre of Palazzo Orfei he set up his office: an escutcheon over the door, a portrait of King Alfonso on his desk, stamps and seals. And when after Caporetto a certain kind of person who now asks us to talk about something else, used to discuss whether Venice ought to be defended or ought not to be defended, Mariano Fortuny drew himself up facing the member of Parliament, it may be, who had come to consult the consul of a neutral Power, and answered smilingly: '*Mi no me movo*' [I shan't budge].

# GIORGIO FRANCHETTI

FLORENCE,
*December* 22, 1922

GIORGIO FRANCHETTI, Venetian, Baron Giorgio Franchetti, son of a Rothschild, brother of the musician Alberto, brother-in-law of the painter Lenbach, killed himself four days ago, and yesterday, in accordance with his orders, his body was burnt. *Cupio dissolvi.* This high-born Israelite delighted even in his lifetime in appearing and disappearing without a sound, shabbily dressed, delicate, bent, dragging his steps, with his suppressed voice and timid smile.

He lived in Venice, and you went to see him in the low mezzanine of the great palazzo which his father had rebuilt with much marble over the old palazzo Cavalli. You rang the bell: silence. The doorkeeper could not tell you anything. A friend informed you that Franchetti must be in Paris; another, at Vienna. The next day you saw him timidly crossing Piazza San Marco, and he invited you to take tea at his place, and he would play the first act of Gluck's *Alceste* for you on a spinet of 1767, and the last act of *Cosi Fan Tutte* on a clavichord of 1790, for those were the exact years when the operas had been composed. 'Their own voices, you understand? They will once more have their own voices. There will be nobody: the Duse, Bourget, Hofmannsthal,

Fortuny, Contessa Morosini, and, I think, d'Annunzio.'

And he played like an angel, even in the sense that angels are invisible, so great was his desire to confound himself, humbly, with the spirit of the composer, his care not to add anything that might have seemed his caprice to the sacred text. He played with head bent forward, his long chin almost resting on the music-stand, cradling himself a little when the music unfolded its wings. You returned two days later to thank him; doors closed, the silence of the tomb; he had vanished. In Rome he lived in the Via Gregoriana, with his children. You all lunched together: music, books, rare pictures. 'To-morrow there will be so-and-so at the concert.' You went to the concert, and one of his sons informed you: 'Papa has left for Venice.' He wanted you to visit his Ca' d'Oro with him, alone with him, he took you around everywhere, from the battlements to the portico, got on to his knees so as to show you with his own hands how to inlay the mosaics of the vestibule, with the irregular cubes 'just as in St. Mark's, observe, just as in St. Mark's'; explained the technique of mosaics from Rome to Ravenna, from Salonica to Palermo, asked you to come back on a moonlight night, unfolded to you all the vexations of the Government and of his neighbours against his dream of restoring its splendour to that jewel; seemed then to be bound to his task for years, like a lover to his heartless lady. You returned, and the guardian, warily, half-opened the door: 'I have not seen the Baron any more. He must be at Munich.' Six months after, let us say, from Berlin, in that delicate, feminine little handwriting of his, he announced to you that he had discovered two Venices by Francesco Guardi,

that he was bringing them home, and that he begged you to hasten to admire them.

He was a misanthrope; and yet he adored art, which is the pleasantest and surest means given to men of communicating with one another, of uniting even the dead and the living. He was suspicious; and yet with a friend he would give himself over to such entire confidences that all at once, repenting, he would run away from his friend, even from the city. He was ever ready for quarrelling and even for anger, and a few minutes' music would quiet and enrapture him. He was clever and very quick in judging and buying a work of art, and ingenuous and astonished in judging his own kind. He dressed like a beggar, was as simple in his needs as a monk, but did not find peace if he were not living next to some beautiful object which was all his own. He hated the period in which it was his lot to live; and in the midst of the war he had made a gift to the community of the most beautiful palace of Venice, with sculptures, furniture, carpets, Tuscan, Emilian, Venetian, Flemish pictures, which make a museum of it. At heart, he always remained on the threshold of life, now accusing life of being too hard for him, now accusing himself of being too weak to enter and seize hold of it. And the other night, desperately, he screwed up his courage and turned his back upon it for ever.

But when I compare the humility with which Giorgio Franchetti contemplated his treasures and annihilated himself before them, with the conceit of some that I know who collect by numbers and weight, who, with absent-minded gesture, present to you, on the walls of their saloons, new Tintorettos or Rembrandts like so many slaves enchained for the service of their magnificent

master, then I regret never when he was alive having stated what an example he was in this false and rapacious age. And I write it now, to lessen my displeasure.

When for the first time, raising a red hanging, he showed me the St. Sebastian that Mantegna painted for Vincenzo Gonzaga and in honour of which he built a tabernacle, I should say an entire room of rare marbles, at the Ca' d'Oro, I was with Domenico Trentacoste. Franchetti grabbed us by the arms and set us at the best distance and in the most favourable light for enjoying that masterpiece of will-power, beauty and sorrow. He was resolute, even imperative, for he was speaking in Andrea Mantegna's name. Then suddenly his adoration of art softened him. Low down, at the saint's feet, Mantegna has painted a little lighted torch which, under that spasm confined in so little a space, smokes as though in the storm of a hurricane. Franchetti pointed it out to us, with a sad smile: 'Do you see this little taper? That is I. And I flatter myself that I give a little light.'

When he bought the great Van Dyck of Casa Brignole and brought it to Venice (the only Van Dyck that there is in Venice), showing it to me he recommenced that play of 'To see it, stand here—to see it, stand there', which is as it were the sacred dance of the collector before his God. In the picture, the Genoese gentleman, tall, fair, elegant, all silks, batistes and velvets, was leaning on two fluted columns and scornfully gazing over our heads. Franchetti laughed: 'It is useless; he won't look at me. He seems to be asking: "And who is this little man who is trying to get himself noticed by me?" But I will take him to the Ca' d'Oro and you shall see that there he will be satisfied, more so than in his own home.'

## GORKI TWENTY YEARS AGO

FLORENCE,
*June* 22, 1921.

TO-DAY Maxime Gorki swears that in Russia the real enemy of the Revolution is the Russian peasant. He has said to the *Daily News*: 'Our peasants are ignorant, brutal, cowardly, inhuman. I hate them.' And to Luciano Magrini: 'In Russia the country will devour the city, and with the city all that remains of Russian civilization.' I have just stumbled upon some notes written on December 1, 1907, at Florence, after dining with Gorki and Enrico Corradini at Trentacoste the sculptor's, whose 'Ciccajolo' sent Gorki into raptures. I copy out literally what Gorki said on that occasion: 'The Russian peasant is willing, skilful, intelligent. He reads, ponders, works. The Revolution will be his, the liberation will come from him.'

The trouble is not in the contradiction, but in this little fact: that in almost all his novels and tales Gorki has studied and described the Russian peasant from the life. A specialist, as they say.

Gorki, as is well known, speaks only Russian. As soon as he reached Florence he went to the Savoy Hotel with his beautiful, pallid and simple companion Maria Andreievna, who is now at the head of all the theatres of Russia, and then, in a white flannel blouse and woman's collar,

had given up the stage so as to dedicate herself to him with devotion and fidelity, and to follow him on his voyages and to translate, unwearyingly, all that he said, from Russian into French. His Florentine 'comrades' pointed out to him that the hotel was too high-class, and so Gorki obediently went to live in a boarding-house in the Viale Regina Elena. He had been to Capri, for his health, under the care of Professor Castellino. Gorki drank a good deal (*Bordeaux vieux*, from Doney's) and smoked a great many Russian cigarettes. At the dinner-table he sat down sideways, with his legs crossed, and at every instant got up humming to go and fetch a book or a cigarette. Maria Andreievna laboured to keep him quiet, to prevent his drinking wine and smoking, speaking to him with gentleness, as to a child. 'Castellino doesn't want—Castellino doesn't want——' If was the refrain of their conversations, and all of us who at that time frequented his society had learnt that refrain, and used to say Castellino instead of saying No. 'To-morrow I want to see d'Annunzio.' 'Castellino!' 'To-morrow I want to leave for Rome.' 'Castellino!' Gorki laughed; but sometimes he would rebel, surlily, shaking his great mane. 'Why are you smoking?' his companion asked him one day, seeing how he was coughing and coughing. 'And you, why are you living?' he answered her sternly. It will be observed that he took all problems at the root, which is not, by the way, always the best way to tackle a full glass or a serious problem.

A child of the people, or at least of the lower middle-classes, and a socialist and revolutionary to boot, he detested the intellectuals. He used to say: 'The Russian intellectuals have cried for years: "People, arise, and come

to us!" The people did arise, and held up its terrible face before the face of the intellectuals. And they fled.' If it had only been like this: so I think on re-reading these words now. The disaster came from the very fact that the intellectuals, when the people did arise, did not leave them alone. But the image was a fine one.

On the whole, when he was not talking of his cigarettes or of his politics, he was docile and affectionate, and eager to know everything, to see everything, quickly, with a spasmodic and touching ingenuousness; and he cross-questioned all of us interminably about Dante Alighieri; about Roberto Bracco, who for him was 'the merriest man of Italy'; about Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, which was just then appearing; about Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was living at the Capponcina. They had told him that the poet was, at that moment, not indeed in need but in temporarily embarrassed circumstances. Gorki was delighted at this; he saw him as a proletarian, he wanted him to be a proletarian, and kept on repeating, with his arms raised as though to help him: 'Pooor, pooor d'Annonzio.' But besides those two o's he had no opportunity for giving him anything else, if only because d'Annunzio was, indeed, very kind to the 'bold writer', as he dubbed him in a letter, but kept him at a distance; perhaps because he was irritated by his outbursts and that great shock of hair.

Gorki adored Italy and the Italians, who for him were all artists to their finger-tips; and especially, of course, the people. He was then reading Benvenuto Cellini, in a Russian translation, and naturally was carried away by him. Clement VII, Angelica, Felice, Ascanio, Paul III, Bandinello, Francis I, kept on recurring in his

excited conversation like living people met an hour before. And he wanted to know, about this one and that one, whether Cellini always told the gospel truth about them. If you expressed any doubt to him, he became down-hearted, and moaned. One evening he rebelled: 'Well, if they are lies, I like them all the same. They are Cellini's lies, the lies that he alone knows how to tell, that they knew how to tell in his time alone. Casanova too tells lies; but they are Casanova's lies, the lies of the eighteenth century. And for that reason I like them too.' And that was a very sound judgment.

One evening he asked me for exact news about the assassination of King Humbert. I told him all that I knew about the awful night of Monza; and how Queen Marguerite, who was waiting for the King's return in the drawing-room which looks on to the park, with her ladies, embroidering, had the first glimpse of the tragedy when Marchese Achille Majnoni came back to that drawing-room before the appointed time with two top-hats in his hands, the King's and his own, which, in his dismay, he had forgotten to leave in the ante-room. 'Majnoni, why these two hats? What has happened?' And then the dead King, on his bed, and that blood which would not stop flowing, and his son far away at sea—Gorki listened in silence, with his head bent forward, clenching a steel paper-cutter with both hands, as though he wished to break it. Suddenly I saw two tears quivering between his red eyelids. He got up, recovered himself, and exclaimed: 'I should never have thought that I could be so moved for a King.' To-day I wonder: will they ever have told him of another regicide, equally infamous, nearer to him? And I should like to see

again, so far from his flat nose, those round eyes, shining, and set amidst the premature wrinkles.

Gorki's presence soon became popular in Florence. Maria Andreievna used to say: 'In Naples the people who recognize him smile and bow to him. In Florence they point at him: nothing but that.'

At his house one used to meet Russians and Poles—extremely original people, at least for us Italians and our pedestrian habits. A Pole, whose name I do not recall, was always dining with Gorki: black hair, black nails, black morning-coat, without a shirt, with only a starched shirt-front which escaped from the opening of his waist-coat at every moment, revealing his bare chest. He was a poet, and I deeply regret that I have forgotten his glorious name. One evening I was sitting next to him at table. The soup passed, the fish passed, and the waiter always forgot me, and with me he forgot my neighbour as well. Smilingly, I called Maria Andreievna's attention, and she calmly answered: 'Excuse us, but your neighbour never eats, he only drinks, and the waiter must have thought that you have the same habits.' In fact I saw that poet again at the Gorkis' several times, and never did I see him eat so much as a biscuit, so steadfastly did he adhere to his tenets: I did, indeed, see him drink, but red wine only, a whole glass at a time. I still desire to read his poetry, and I wonder if he is still alive?

There was also Anatole Lunacharsky, a man of great learning and of an astounding memory for all that concerns European literature. He had, a short time before, published essays in critical philosophy; he was then writing a book on religion, and was preparing with Gorki a history of Russian literature. He spoke excellent French

and also a passable Italian. But, during those days, according to what the Gorkis told us, he was worrying because his wife, after the completion of the ninth month, had been confined to bed for four weeks in the vain expectation of a baby. They would both of them have been extremely happy had their baby been born in Florence; and this was certainly a compliment for us all. At last one day, after endless waiting, I met Lunacharsky with his excellent wife, a nice round rosy little woman, with a little red felt hat crossed by a white pigeon's feather, in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, and I approached to congratulate them. 'Not at all', Lunacharsky said with a sigh: '*Elle s'est levée en désespoir de cause.*'

I often think of Madame Lunacharsky when I read the news of the Russian Revolution.

## ZOLA

FLORENCE,
*October* 28, 1922.

ÉMILE ZOLA died of asphyxia on September 28th, 1902. I have waited a month to see if after twenty years anyone in Italy still remembers him, at least on the anniversary of his death. Nobody. For the last six years history has taken a road which poor Zola thought was barred for ever, and now no one finds time to turn back and search for the remains of those wrecks, the Experimental Novel, Science the Mistress of Art, Democratic Progress, and Universal Peace.

When he went to Rome in 1895, to gather material, as he used to say, for the construction of his *Rome*, and was triumphantly received there, Emile Zola, in spite of his exclusion from the *Académie*, seemed immortal. We Romans love triumphs, particularly if we may see the triumphant at close range. . . . After three weeks of unrelaxing labour, when Zola recrossed the Alps with a load of books and notes, he struck us, as a writer, as being on his last legs. And the judgment of foreigners, it is well known, represents the judgment of posterity.

As soon as he arrived at the Grand Hotel, I presented the letter in which a Parisian friend had kindly invited me to place myself at his disposal. In the ante-room I found Luigi Capuana, round- and rosy-faced, a most

innocent and timid man, who, until the day of his death, preserved the slow, ingenuous, enchanting goodness of the provinces. Emile Zola was his leader, his king, his God, and it was to Zola that he had dedicated 'Giacinta'. But, unlike the usual divinities, Zola understood no language but French, and French was Greek to Luigi Capuana. He had put on his morning-coat; he asked me to interpret for him, and we went in together. Zola received him with open arms, with very cordial and therefore very clear phrases, all the while persisting in holding his glasses on his snub nose, so that for a few minutes I had nothing to translate. '*Capuanà, Capuanà, mais vous êtes le chef de l'école réaliste en Italie.*' This I had to translate, partly because Zola's lisping pronunciation made his speech less comprehensible as soon as he ceased his exclamatory gesticulations and polite commonplaces, partly because the good Capuana could not believe his ears; in fact, that unforeseen investiture as sub-pope *in partibus infidelium*, however merited, gave him at once both joy and terror. In the end he smiled rapturously, and began uttering a series of 'vuvù vuvù' with finger outstretched, which were intended to mean: '*Vous, vous*, you, you, are our leader on the whole earth, and that is enough.' But facing the bloodhound-like face of the Frenchman, Luigi Capuana seemed to be anxiously multiplying that single pronoun, like a trainer trying to teach him to bark.

At last we sat down and talked—let us say, of literature. Zola had his working-programmes, his question-forms and index-cards all ready to fill in, just as any self-respecting explorer, about to penetrate into darkest Africa, has his geodetic and anthropometric instruments, his tables, case

one, case two, at his finger-tips. First he wanted to know Rome, topography and monuments—three days; then the customs of the various classes of the population of Rome—four days; then the Vatican, exhaustively, and Leo XIII personally—three days; then the economic and social conditions of Rome, *surtout des ouvriers, des travailleurs*—only two days, because he knew that in Rome everybody worked very little; and so forth. He counted these days on the tips of his fingers, which were short, but very slim and white, fingers of a body different from his own, so stubby and fat-bellied. His eyes too, under their flabby lids, were fine and burning and extremely mobile, with yellow and black lights; and when he listened, he wrinkled his forehead and eyebrows, all at once, with the rapid gesture of a hand that clutches and crushes. At that stage his golden pince-nez always threatened to drop off, and to straighten it he would suddenly hide his face behind the whole palm of his hand; but it seemed as though that gesture too were meant, like the knitting of his brows, to fix what he had heard and seen firmly in his memory: the cap on the lens.

About which of all these arguments would Capuana be able to help him? Let him choose. Luigi Capuana wavered an instant, then unflinchingly chose women, Roman women, of all people. At that time Capuana was living in the Via in Arcione behind the Quirinal, opposite the house of some relatives of mine, and I knew how parochial and modest his experiences were in that field. Zola too was thunderstruck; but delighted at having placed such a varied and perilous inquiry in a brother's hands, he at once concluded: '*Alors, les femmes. Mais vous savez, des notes en style télégraphique: courts et*

*documentés.*' And he patted him merrily on the knees to congratulate his elderly but lively colleague. Capuana remained serious, candid and pleased, because, according to the canons of *Verista* law, he saw his own work from an objective and scientific point of view. In fact he asked me to inform our illustrious colleague that he could even give him photographs. Capuana was an amateur photographer, but he had good taste. Filled with devotion towards Emile Zola and with the desire to cut a good figure, he harboured no evil thoughts. I translated. Zola, who had by this time catalogued Capuana among experts on women, gaped: '*Cinquante photographies de femmes? Mais c'est très bien. Donnez, donnez, ce sera très utile. Ah, le gaillard*——' and he started laughing once more and giving him little congratulatory taps on his knees. I did not translate the rest.

Fortunately he changed the subject and confessed his fears to us. Of these, two were grave: not to succeed in speaking with the Pope (nor did he), and not to succeed in seeing many Roman princes. '*Connaissez-vous des cardinaux?*' Every real self-respecting Roman always knows a cardinal or two; but I thought of the difficulty, especially at my then tender age, of persuading them to receive the author of *Nana* and *La Terre.* Noting our humiliated silence, Zola lowered his demands: '*Des archevêques? Des évêques?*' He passed on resignedly to Roman princes. And I offered to speak to Prince Baldassarre Odescalchi, who had been a Member of Parliament, and even something approaching a journalist and a socialist: an open mind, curious of every novelty.

So we separated. In the ante-room I met Count Bertolelli, manager of the *Tribuna*, well-groomed,

perfumed and white-haired, but so elegant that his white hair seemed to be the coquettish result of powder. The *Tribuna* had published all Zola's recent novels in serial form, and Attilio Luzzatto, who was then editor-in-chief, had given Bertolelli the fatiguing and delicate task of accompanying the novelist and madame Alexandrine his wife, here and there through the Eternal City, from the Palatine to the Ghetto, in a landau, and to let him see the city in a roseate light, because the *Tribuna* wished to publish *Rome* too as a serial. Bertolelli, already waiting in the ante-room, a top-hat in his left hand, a bunch of white roses for Madame Zola in his right, was radiant with happiness. 'Is that Capuana? Can we trust Capuana? Here it is a question of making the city of Rome cut a good figure. Capuana is a Neapolitan.'—'No, a Sicilian.'—'And where are you taking him to?'—'I shall take him to Odescalchi's.'—'Very good, but this is a case for Cardinals, Cardinals, Cardinals.' Count Bertolelli said 'Cardinals' with the energy with which a doctor at the bedside of a convalescent says: 'Nourishing diet.'

I shrugged my shoulders and hastened to Prince Odescalchi. The visit was fixed for a morning at ten. I went to call for Emile Zola, and had the honour to sit beside him in his landau, which by this time was well known throughout Rome, especially in Trastevere; and we reached Palazzo Odescalchi in the Piazza *Santi Apostoli* at the hour appointed.

Emile Zola photographed, with his eyes, the vast entry, the befrogged doorkeeper, the monumental courtyard, the red carpet on the great stairs, the faces of the two servants at the head of the stairs, the escutcheon in the ante-room under the canopy. Don Baldassarre, fair,

tall, lean, with his spare golden beard parted in two on his chin, his ambling gait and his drawling speech, won Zola's sympathy at once. '*Altesse—Votre Altesse—Oh Altesse——*'. He received us in his study, lolling in a deep arm-chair, his legs crossed, and, continuing to swing one foot, his hands on the arms of the chair, submitted to cross-examination. Zola, opposite him, sitting on the edge of his chair, solemn and frowning, mentally rehearsed the hundred questions that he wished to set; at last he pronounced the first: '*Je voudrais savoir quelles sont les opinions de l'aristocratie romaine sur la question romaine.*' Don Baldassarre's foot stopped. He turned towards his illustrious interlocutor: '*L'aristocratie romaine? Mais elle s'en fout.*'

Prince Odescalchi, who was speaking with such simplicity, was seated between two portraits from the brush of Francesco Paolo Michetti: that of the princess, rosy and exceedingly beautiful, blonde like all the house of Rucellai; and that of Pope Innocent XI, who was an Odescalchi. Emile Zola, alas, did not understand the profound verity of those last two syllables which presented to him in brief synthesis the entire soul of Rome. First he gave a little start and settled his glasses. Then he stared at the portraits of the Princess and the Pope, almost as though asking them to witness the frivolity of a Roman prince before a Parisian thinker. At last he ventured to proffer: '*Pourtant—Pourtant il y en a qui s'imaginent d'avoir des opinions là-dessus. Je voudrais les connaître.*' Thereupon Don Baldassarre began to speak: an opinion, an anecdote, a paradox, a pause to light a cigarette, some statistical figures, more or less approximate. Emile Zola was satisfied. He turned towards me, who

had remained in mournful silence, and begged me to write down what the prince said. I sat down at the desk in front of a pile of sheets of note-paper which bore embossed in the left-hand corner an enclosed coronet of vermilion. And I wrote for an hour. Zola every now and then, without turning round, would stretch out a hand towards me to remind me to number the sheets: '*Paginez, paginez toujours.*' All that I wrote about Socialism, the Papacy, the building crisis, Freemasonry, the Southern problem, with the exception of a few words that were changed and a few accents that were corrected, was printed in *Rome*. But just as then that did not excite my pride, it does not to-day give me any inclination to wade through the 751 pages of the novel again. I remember only one line, because there was a great to-do about it afterwards: '*très ignorantes comme toutes les filles de la noblesse romaine.*' I will swear that Baldassarre Odescalchi never said it and that I never wrote it. Besides, the young ladies of those days have had time to learn to read.

Two evenings later Don Baldassarre invited us to dinner. After having had to talk so much himself, now he wanted to make his guest talk. His questions were malicious: '*Quel est, mon cher maître, le romancier que vous préférez ?* Zola did not hesitate: '*Balzac, Altesse.*' '*Vous le préférez à vous-même?*' '*Oui, car je ne me relis jamais.*'

After dinner five or six guests came in; among the rest Contessa Pecci and Cesare Pascarella, '*poète et peintre*', said the prince introducing him to Zola. And Pascarella bowed, taking care to add: '*Peintre d'ânes, monsieur.*' But no one revealed to Zola the name of Contessa Pecci, wife to the Pope's nephew.

We started talking about the force of heredity, in good and evil. Some mentioned one character of the Rougon-Macquart, some another. Emile Zola constantly hesitated, and turned to his wife. '*Pardon, ma chère, comment s'appelle-t-il le docteur d'*Une Page d'amour?' '*La nièce du Docteur Pascal s'appelle Clotilde, n'est-ce pas?*' To make up for this, he boasted of having a perfect sense of smell, of having inherited it from his father Francesco who was born in Venice, and of being able to recognize, with his eyes closed, a flower merely by its perfume. In a corner of the room the excommunicated author of *L'Assommoir* and *La Terre* ended by submitting to that schoolgirl's game. Taking off his glasses, he sat down with his eyes closed and his hands folded solemnly on his breast, while a lady standing before him held a flower under his nose: '*Oeillet, madame*,' and then another: '*Madame, c'est une rose, rouge, je crois.*' And with his nervous white fingers he tapped on his starched shirt-front.

Now, after all these years, when I think of the oblivion into which he has fallen, I like to remember him thus, in that patrician drawing-room in the heart of Rome, with his eyes closed, before a fair lady who holds out flowers for him to smell: that last of the great romantics who was called Zola.

## CAPRERA

CIVITAVECCHIA,
*January* 29, 1922.

YOU learn many things when, after rounding Cape Ferro, on the small postal steamer, you draw near to Caprera. First of all, that the so often invoked 'rock of Caprera' is a goodly island, very long indeed, more than five kilometres, yellow and grey, one might almost say in uniform, with its batteries, military prisons and magazines distributed with mathematical precision, so that, having set out to look for a hermitage, you find yourself practically face to face with a barracks. And meanwhile at the left of Caprera appears the Maddalena: real barracks, there, and hospitals, and store-houses and offices and magazines without limit, lined up like soldiers for review, the little black squares of the windows cut out formally in the rectangle of the buildings, one-two, one-two, one-two, so that it seems as though they must all open and close together at a certain hour by order of the commandant of the town, who lives in the only house of the Maddalena, which bears on its façade, as emblem, a clock. Between Maddalena and Caprera you see a tongue of earth, the dyke; and half-way down the dyke, the movable bridge which for the greater part is immovable. So the island of Caprera is not even an island any more, and, after obtaining permission,

you can go there comfortably in a carriage or by motor.

Caprices of the volubility of history. When, for the first time, in September, 1849, Garibaldi, quitting Rome, feared and exiled, obtained permission to be left for a short while in peace amongst the fishermen of the Maddalena and their huts, smacks and lateens; when, five years later, with the little that remained to him of the earnings of Montevideo and the inheritance of his brother Felice, he bought a corner of this Thebaid, surely not even in his dreams did he imagine that the Royal Army and the Royal Navy would one day set up, right opposite his hermitage, such an imposing spectacle of their legitimate and escutcheoned puissance. If by a miracle he were still alive, he could hear from his home the trumpet and siren-signals which regulate the life of the fortified island. The same thing as though amongst the oaks and the rocks of the Carceri over Assisi, just opposite the cell of St. Francis, a great episcopal seminary had arisen, or even the Gregorian University, and, in front of the Palace, a gravelled square, and in the square two or three cardinals walking about for recreation. A pleasantry of the Evil One, the Poverello would have thought, crossing himself.

But to see giants well you must get close to them; enough to have to raise your eyes to the sky when you look at them. I turn my back on the barracks, and go on my way. After leaving the fortifications, passing the bridge, ending the dyke, and touching Caprera, the road begins to rise winding around the cliffs; high, yellow cliffs, overhanging jagged rocks, striped with black by the rain, with green by the lichens; great massive blocks, rounded and hollowed by the storms. Pines, agaves and

wild olive-trees are lower than these great rocks, twisted and bare, curved by the sea-wind towards the earth so that they seem to point out to me with outstretched arms the way to the sanctuary. The sky is high but clouded with grey, with a few openings of blue towards the north, so pale that only by staring hard can you observe that it is blue. So the light is even, tired, shadowless, timeless, as in dreams. The white house that I had perceived from the Maddalena half-way along the coast bedded in the woods, is no longer visible as I wind about in this Ariostean road between rock and rock. All at once the road grows level and wider. A cock is heard to crow. To the left you see a hedge, behind the hedge a few olives. Then the hedge becomes a wall, and the wall is broken by a green gate. A non-commissioned naval officer opens the gate for me. I am in the courtyard of Giuseppe Garibaldi's house.

Of course, this place strikes one as extremely familiar. I was a child when I first saw it, in an illustration of the *Emporio Pittoresco*; the two-trunked pine, and the wooden seat at its feet, and the fig-tree opposite; the dwarf house with two windows and a door, the first house that he built for himself at Caprera; and next to it, the other one, scarcely a little higher, of wood. The whole thing, to-day, strikes me, seen in reality, as being both greater and smaller; object for object, the houses, the pine-tree, the doors, strike me as being smaller than I used to imagine them; but the air, the sky, the pale light, and this wind that rises in bursts from the sea, seem to dilate in space as they dilate my heart. I end by resting a hand on the trunk of a pine, on the white wall, almost as though I wished to see whether they

breathe. On the right, where the ground descends towards the olive-grove planted by Garibaldi, a blossoming almond-tree gleams forth.

From the yard between the three houses I go down towards the tomb, along a dark reef of rocks covered with geraniums. A sentinel is on duty, as always, outside his little box; to-day it is a carabineer. Soil, trees, walls, stones, everything is neat, dusted, orderly, cared for. On the mass of granite that closes the tomb is carved in black: 'Garibaldi.' Now, there comes back to my memory how in that picture of my childhood he himself was to be seen next to his house, standing, leaning on two crutches. And all at once, this white sky and the livid sea and the savage village and the steep rocks and the twisted pines and the rough granite under which he was buried by an Italy innocent of style, strike me as an empty and melodramatic stage-setting, now that he has disappeared from it. Garibaldi the anchorite, Garibaldi in the 'presepe', Garibaldi with the little lamb in his arms like the Good Shepherd, no. Garibaldi took refuge here, rested here, died here; but he lived elsewhere, there where he achieved, where there were men against him or behind him, from Villa Pamphili to Bezzecca, where

> 's'udivano passi in cadenza ed i sospiri de' petti' eroici nella notte
> (Cadenced steps were heard, and the sighs of heroic hearts in the night.)

They lead me into the rooms which were his and which are to-day called 'the Museum'. Nothing. The wreaths of bronze, cast-iron, silver, porcelain, faded flowers, the ribbons, the parchments, the proclamations,

the tablets, have hidden, from the rafters to the pavement, the very walls of his dwelling. A little furniture, a few relics can barely be seen under this quilt of dead things; a cupboard, a chair, the bath-chair, the crutches, the bed in which he died, of black iron, with a mosquito-netting, with the pillow on which you can still discover, as in the holy sudarium, the imprint of his head in the death-sweat, and under the pillow his red and blue Scotch shawl, amongst little bags of camphor. At the foot of the bed, from the bar of iron, hangs a fringe of black ribbon interspersed with yellow, the ribbons of the ships whose sailors came up here as pilgrims. It is the most modest and touching homage of all. But who can notice it amidst all this farrago, in this crypt-like shadow, for palms and wreaths have blocked all the windows but one, have taken even the air and the light from the room of this hero, who cannot be thought of away from the sunshine, the open fields, the free sea? And yet there is one living thing, small and humble, faintly whiter than the sheets on which it has been placed; it is a spray of white stocks, fresh and fragrant; and in this stale, close odour of camphor, its sweet perfume, now that I have scented it, leaves me no more. I question the non-commissioned officer on guard. 'Donna Francesca Garibaldi comes here every morning, for the last forty years, and puts her flowers on the pillow.' 'But how old is Donna Francesca?' 'She must be about eighty.' 'And can I pay my respects to her?' 'I will go and ask her.'

Francesca Armosino, Garibaldi's last love, the mother of his last three sons, the mother of Clelia, Rosita, Manlio. It seems to me as though through that flower, through

that name, this swarm of funereal relics is beginning to assume life as at the touch of a magic wand. To get to her, I go around the house, I come out on a little lane that looks on to the sea. An old servant introduces me into a kitchen. On the little furnace is boiling a frugal pot for lunch. Here is Donna Francesca, robust, solid, simple and smiling; an open face, wide cheek-bones, high eyebrows, eyes of steel, a brilliant complexion, white shining hair twisted together on the crown of her head. She is dressed in a jacket of black cloth with a loose belt, following the fashion, and a skirt with grey and black stripes. In her ears she wears two pale little diamonds given her by him, in an old-fashioned setting; around her neck a gold chain with a miniature of her daughter Clelia in her youth, blonde, low-necked and buxom. She leads me into the little parlour which is also her dining-room. She makes me sit down on a red sofa, she arranges a pillow on it herself, cordially and hospitably. And at last she speaks to me of him, in an even, motherly way, without emphasis.

'When did I carry him into the room in which he died? It was in 1880, for his birthday, the fourth of July. In April my husband had had an attack of his rheumatism. Two doctors had said to me: "It will last him for three months, until the warm weather." He used to complain that from our bed he could not see the sea. Without the sea he would suffocate. Then it occurred to me to prepare the room at the end for him, the room where you have been. But I wanted to give him a surprise. It was necessary to level the rock there, and to do it all in three months. I was lucky enough to find three stone-cutters who were working over there beyond the Madda-

lena, at the French creek. I sent for two masons from Livorno: Agostino and Riccardo. I made it very clear: "I will give you whatever you want, if you finish the work for the fourth of July. If you don't, I won't give you anything." And I had the contract set down in black and white.

'I kept it all from my husband. I only said that I should have the door back there enlarged so as to be able to have his bed carried out of doors, if he wished. "It will cost a lot", he said. "No, it won't", I answered. And he: "Do whatever you want, Francesca, and it will be well done." From his bed my husband heard the blows of the hammers on the stones. "They are enlarging the door. But how long it is taking them. Take care, it will cost a lot. . . ." I sent for an iron bed from Livorno, you have seen it, with a mosquito netting, and a fine lamp and new chairs and an arm-chair. I also sent for a few pots of gardenias, his favourite flowers; there weren't any to be found here.

'Meanwhile at the Maddalena the fishermen had started a band. They came here to ask me if they might nominate Manlio their president, and for the gift of a flag. I was able to sew the tricolour for them, but without the Royal arms, for that was too hard for me. In addition to the tricolour for the flag I sewed a great many other little flags to decorate the new room with. And the fourth of July came. "Now you leave it to me", I said to my husband. And I dressed him and tidied him and put him in the bath-chair. All by myself, of course, with my own hands. I was strong then, you know. And ever since we met, no one else ever touched my husband. I alone lifted him, changed him, put him

in his bath, put him to bed, moved him about in the bath-chair.'

She always speaks quietly, stressing her words with certain deep o's, that sound like u's. She speaks without any gestures, folding and unfolding with two fingers the long ribbon of her belt. I examine the strong build of this woman; the few hairs that have remained black amidst her white locks; her wide, straight lips, her strong-willed eyes, greyish-blue like the colour of the sky to-day where it pierces through the clouds. The right mate for a warrior, never tired and never afraid.

'I was walking backwards pulling the bath-chair and watching him, all beside himself for joy. We went through the dining-room, where now the visitors' book is. Then through the other, which is now the parlour. I opened with a blow of my shoulder the new room, which was all full of sunshine, of course, in July, and with the windows wide open, for now they are closed for the wreaths. For a minute he did not utter a word. He looked at the bed, the windows, the door, the chandelier, the little flags, the blossoming gardenias. Then at a signal from Manlio the band of the Maddalena which was down there under the pine-tree, started the anthem, and my husband burst out crying, and kissed my hands and drew me down to kiss my face, and then he kissed the children, and started to cry again. He kept on repeating: "Thank your mamma, thank your mamma." For a quarter of an hour I was unable to calm him.'

She rises suddenly, because she does not wish to be moved, she does not want me to see her emotion: 'Look, from here you can see the door of that room. On the fanlight I had the date of our marriage written in iron.'

The date of their marriage, in iron. I recall from my childhood the confused memories of the struggles over that marriage, the General's impatient letters, the defence by Mancini. On the chest of drawers are a few freshly-plucked violets. 'Would you like them?' I kiss her hand. I go out clutching those violets like a treasure. They were plucked, they were given to me, by the hand of that woman whom Garibaldi adored, kissed, defended as his dearest possession. Outside a great wind has risen. The black and white dog is barking cheerfully. 'Barì . . . Barì . . . I call him Barì because that was the name of poor Manlio's dog.'

I do not wish to see any more. Museum, wreaths, relics, guards of honour; all this is nothing beside this woman's love still warm and vibrating in memory of him, in contact with him.

As I return to the postal steamer, a passenger asks me: 'Did you see Garibaldi's comb and his hairs and his napkin-ring of little green beads?'

## DE FILIPPI AND THE CAPPONCINA

FLORENCE,
*June* 15, 1924.

IF the Creator, for the diversion of journalists, had wished to choose as inhabitant of the Villa Capponcina at Settignano, after d'Annunzio, some one who was the exact opposite in every way, as regards aspect, habits, tastes and studies, of our poet, prince and commandant, we must bow and confess that in choosing the Piedmontese Filippo de Filippi, doctor, chemist, geographer and explorer, the Creator made a perfect choice.

It is enough to enter the villa. D'Annunzio made a refuge of it and hid himself in it. A tablet under the bell, inscribed *Noli me tangere*, gates, dogs and guardians with hedges of laurel and bamboo between road and garden, even between the open space in front of the house and the outlook over the Florentine valley. Painted windows, curtains, heavy hangings at the doors and windows to shut out the sun, noise and indiscreet glances, rooms dim as sanctuaries, and, like them, perfumed with incense, lighted by candles and tapers. I am revealing no secrets. Thirteen years ago, when the poet's belongings were sold at public auction and divided up, everybody from Florence and the neighbourhood made a tour of the house from pigeon-loft to bedroom, touching and valuing everything from ink-pot to pillow. It was a piteous sight.

Now there is air and light everywhere; and in the place of two rooms secluded as cells, shrouded with damask, and filled with missals, albums, reading-desks, saints, cushions, bells, coats of arms, hour-glasses, candlesticks and devices, there is—by the pulling down of walls—one large vaulted room. The walls are plainly whitewashed, smooth furniture from London, green leather arm-chairs, orderly bookcases full of books bound in the English way with polished linen and gold-lettered titles, typewriters, card-indexes and, on the writing-table, maps, scraps of paper covered with figures, compasses, double yard-measures and fountain-pens. Go nearer to the bookcases: books of travel, of exploration, of history; scientific year-books, treatises on Asiatic religions, all that can serve to throw light on to space and time, far and wide, so as to do away with all mystery, or, let us say, with all poetry.

When the master of the house enters, the contrast is complete. Brown and ruddy, short, solidly built and strong, he seems to be built on the lines of a parallelopiped, so that he would stand upright even if, in one of his many ascents, from Alaska to the Himalayas, he had happened to fall down some icy declivity. You feel that even upside-down he would continue to command and be obeyed. His hands are square and knotted like a surgeon's or a blacksmith's which do not loose their hold except in obedience to the brain's commands. His black eyes seem small under the heavy brows, and are most vivacious. He sits down only so that you may do so too, for in speaking he jumps up again at once, and comes towards you, both palms up, as boxers do when they meet at the beginning of the fight. His smile and a cigarette soften his aspect. He smokes cigarettes without pause, as

if for a gold medal from the King, similar to those which he received in the midst of loud applause from both the English and the Italian Geographical Societies. (To the former, King George added, on his own initiative, the knighthood of the Indian Empire by which Dr. de Filippi became Sir Philip de Filippi.)

If you wish to see him smile broadly you must make him stand looking down on the panorama of Florence, the Arno, the little hills whose tops, at this hour, beneath a white sky flecked with rose and violet, are beginning to be touched with gold. He is a Piedmontese, he has travelled over half the world, especially those parts of it where there are no roads, no houses, no men or trees; in April he was in New York, and he is already leaving for London; but after a long and tiring journey it is enough for this Italian to stretch himself out in his own bed, and look down on the Arno valley to feel himself reborn.

Seated on the low wall, looking down on Florence and the blue mist of the river, we speak of Alaska, of the summit of Mount Elias, reached for the first time in 1897 by the Duke of the Abruzzi, Umberto Cagni, Vittorio Sella and himself, the longest climb over glaciers that it would be possible to find in the world.

'We stepped on to the ice from the sea and began to climb. Five thousand five hundred metres up. We were all young then. The Duke, little more than a boy, but audacious, tenacious, even then patient and always gay and serene. But he was too bold. Fortunately Cagni was there with us. The day we reached the snow-region Sella wanted us to be roped together. The Duke shrugged his shoulders and went on climbing gaily

by himself, ahead of all. Cagni rubbed his eyebrow, and asked Sella: "Is it really dangerous?" Sella, in two words, explained how dangerous it was, that under the snow were unseen crevasses! Cagni said nothing; but he began to step out with long strides, as if he wished to measure the world, and a little after, without speaking, he passed the Duke. Then he slowed down quietly. A silent dialogue. The Duke understood, laughed and stopped. "Sella, we must be roped."

'But you ought to know Sella. Yes, I have run over glaciers, and mastered mountains from the time when, seven years old, my father and mother put me on a mule and took me over the glaciers of Mont Blanc. But you should know Vittorio Sella. Nowadays the big ascents and long journeys of exploration are meticulously prepared and assisted by every new thing in science and experience and, where possible, with all comforts. But when Sella, between 1890 and 1900, went to the Caucasus to photograph every year, face to face, a dozen mountain-tops, and to prepare, for example, the panorama of Elburz, which is the *chef d'œuvre* of high-mountain photography, do you know how he started off? He left his native Biella with two of his weavers, in a third-class carriage for Vladikavkas. There he took on a cook, who served also as interpreter. To the cook he added a bag of bread and two guns for shooting the game to be entrusted to the cook. And so on. He was carrying, you must remember, plates 38 × 40 which he had prepared himself in his laboratory.

'One year, between one climb and the next, he had deposited a well-made and sealed package of exposed plates with the mayor of a village in the valley, at Suanezia.

When Sella came down again, this gentleman, feigning sorrow, related that the package had been stolen. "Stolen?" Sella jumped at him, with one blow possessed himself of the knife at the fellow's belt, and locked him up in his room. Outside the peasants grumbled and threatened. Sella, hard-faced, the key in his pocket, announced "No plates, no mayor". One morning, forty-eight hours later, he found his well-made package intact on the threshold. You will understand that for these two days the mayor had had neither food nor drink.'

By way of the Caucasus, we have entered Asia. De Filippi accompanied the Duke of the Abruzzi to Karakorùm in 1909. Then in 1913 and 1914 he himself prepared and commanded an expedition to the Himalayas, Karakorùm and Chinese Turkestan. He described to me the bare uplands of Ladak, the hundred fetid and immense monasteries, the sordid monks, dressed in tunics of brick-coloured wool, the temples painted scarlet, within each a gilded colossus, surrounded by galleries so that from below the head cannot be seen. The practice of religion is the only rule of life. In order to pray more, to be able to repeat *ad infinitum* the magic formulae of the Buddhist world, the Tibetans have invented prayer-wheels. Inside, on a strip of paper attached to the wheel, is written a formula. Turning the wheel, the prayer repeats itself and the faithful can meanwhile think of other things—an arrangement with Heaven which has the air of saying 'Better this than nothing'.

Evening has fallen while de Filippi is talking to me. The whole valley is shining with lights. It is as if with these golden points of light man wants to outline streets,

bridges, houses in the darkness, to do all he can to render it more hospitable and amiable.

'In those regions wood is so scarce that, if you were to gather it all your life so as to be able to be cremated at the end, few would have enough to end in this way. So most of the bodies are left on the hilltops for the vultures, or thrown into the rivers as food for the fishes. For this work there are quick and clever cutters-up, as such an end is for these people a sign of grace: to give one's body to others still living is, in one way, to live again'.

From the foliage of a big lime-tree a nightingale, as soon as we are silent, warbles high and clear; and the whole plain seems to listen, amazed, and in amazement to fade away, imperceptibly. The moon, rising behind Settignano, puts out the stars one by one. The mist above the Arno has become white like the Milky Way. The heavy scent of gardenias is so acute that one seems to taste it. I remain motionless; a single gesture would break the enchantment as I listen to the tales of savage customs in far-off lands with the same interest and wonderment that children listen to fairy-tales.

'You would leave Florence to return to these rocky heights?'

'Immediately.'

'What is in the souls of you explorers? Altruism or egoism? Love of science, the desire to teach us? Or curiosity, love of danger, novelty, fame?'

'Big words! I am more simple. The truth is this: the world is only of value for what one does not know of it'.

There was a pause. It came to my mind that in the August of 1914 de Filippi was five thousand and three

hundred metres up on one of the highlands of Ladak when he heard of the outbreak of the Great War. The Expedition rolled up its tents and began to descend into the high valleys of the River Yarkand, a desert. Only at the beginning of October, when he reached the city of Yarkand, did he learn anything further. He found there a parcel of *The Times*, on which they all threw themselves as if famished. But de Filippi stopped his companions. 'We must read them in order, from the number which announces the assassination of the Archduke.' And quietly, having sent for some tea, he lighted a cigarette and began to open *The Times* of June 28, 1914, four months earlier. If the world is only of value for what is not known of it, when a good mystery comes one must enjoy it in an orderly way, and try to understand as much as one can.

I said: 'Look down, there is Florence. We are lucky enough to know her. Is she therefore worth nothing?'

'First of all how do we know that we know her? Even if you open a book for the hundredth time, it is because you hope to find something new. Only the unknown is beautiful. For years I was shut up in a chemical laboratory, the desire was the same. What is the desire of the explorer? Go on from the map, arrive where topographists and geographers have been forced to leave a blank space. I began with Alpine-climbing. That gives one the real measure of oneself, in a hand-to-hand struggle with the rocks, with the snow, the wind, the ice. Nature, when touched, assaults you, you assault her. But in the end it is a game. After the expedition to Alaska, the passion for discovery was added to that of Alpine-climbing. When you plant your instruments to survey ground that

nobody has yet measured, that has not yet been trodden by anyone but yourself, you are happy, I can assure you. Round you, behind you, are your men, your companions, your caravan, your tents. You are a king. It seems to you that the whole of civilization has only worked till now to give you the means to arrive there, to work on this unknown ground, to be the first to reveal and measure this mystery.'

'The first after God. A mystic could say that the exploration of unknown lands is one way of meeting God, of finding traces of Him which nobody can have destroyed. But you speak of science and civilization. Good. Only in this place, on this deserted peak, your science and your civilization are pleasant to you because you unite them to the primitive. You have a twentieth-century brain and you find yourself in the state of a man of five, perhaps ten, thousand years ago, on virgin soil. This is what makes you happy. Perfect happiness would be to return, if only for a moment, to our naked origins, re-awake in ourselves the simple man, silent and primitive, the child, to satisfy an elementary and eternal desire, sure all the while that it is only a game, that we are always ourselves, civilized, wise and expert.'

The nightingale was singing once more.

## MOMMSEN

Florence,
*January* 30, 1925

IN Monsieur Le Goff's book on Anatole France I read the following note by France on Theodore Mommsen: 'I was in Rome, if I am not mistaken, in 1874, and I was invited to dinner by Giambattista de Rossi together with Mommsen. Next to me was seated Fräulein Mommsen. She spoke to me at length of her illustrious father's fame, and when she changed the subject, she selected this: the inexplicable resistance of the Alsatians, who for four years have been invited to know and enjoy a superior form of civilization, that of Germany, and yet did not show any appreciation of this privilege of theirs. Germans always have a great deal of tact.'

Agreed. I never had the opportunity of meeting the daughter of Mommsen, who was the father of sixteen children; but, twenty years after France, I too had the good fortune to meet and to know Mommsen personally. Young and enamoured of truth, of that kind of stony, sterile truth which was then in fashion, every evening at the Biblioteca Vittorio Emanuele I had immersed myself in the 'Roman History' of the famous German with such passion that I was irritated because the distributor would not give me more than one volume at a time. Not having all three of them around the page that I was

reading made me feel as though I were one of those poor beggars whom you can see outside the ropes of a circus eagerly watching the performance through the cracks of the palings. Is it to be wondered at that when I knew that Mommsen was in Rome, I pulled strings until I succeeded in being received by him?

He lived in the Prussian Archaeological Institute on the Capitol, and there is no denying that he at least deserved to sleep, to study and to behold Rome from that altitude where she had for centuries been protected by Jupiter *optimus et maximus* enthroned in his cell. *Institutum Archaeologicum* was written on the door; letters in white mosaic on an azure ground. It was in November, and that morning from the garden around Palazzo Caffarelli one could see Rome rising lazy and resplendent from out a blue mist, just as divinities appear in heaven in painted apotheoses. '*Suchen sie den Herrn Professor?*' I was asked by a German man-servant at the entrance of a spotless convent-corridor. Mommsen's little room, too, was of a monastic simplicity. At the two windows, curtains of white muslin. Against the alcove, a green hanging. A broad stove, a table, an arm-chair, a chair, a chest of drawers, a book-case with a few books and many pamphlets. Mommsen, in slippers and a great coat, was seated in the arm-chair, which was too ample for him. With one hand he showed me into a chair, and spread out the other on the table; a small table, almost bare, with a packet of printer's proofs, a little twopenny bottle of ink, an unfolded handkerchief and two books: Baedeker's *Mittel-Italien* and the *Secret du Précepteur* by Victor Cherbuliez. Mommsen, Cherbuliez: that man delighted in bridging abysses.

"What is it precisely that you wish me to do for you?"

He spoke in good Italian, without the creaks and gasps that usually accompany the efforts of Germans. But his voice was rusty, had only one tone, was of a colour, you might have said, equal to that of his small, shaven, bilious face, within its Liszt-like frame of long white hair. And as he must just have combed it, after putting on his professorial garb, there was plenty of that hair at my disposal, if I had been a relic-collector; even on his sleeves, his chest and the arm-chair. His forehead was smooth, high and round, superposed like a lid on a little face all wrinkles, with a pointed nose and a lipless mouth bulging out between the parentheses of two deep furrows. The two furrows went upwards, outlining the cheek-bones and the eye-pits so that they designed Mommsen's skull quite clearly. He seemed a mummy revived by the cordial light and healthy air of Rome and speaking once more. All his life was in the shining black eyes, falcon-like, never motionless. He wished to pose as a statue before this curious, unknown Roman boy, but his eyes betrayed him. Immobile, he, spoke to me with cold severity, of the castle of Bracciano, the repairs that my father had directed there; he enumerated to me the other *castelli* and villages of the Campagna; he asked me whether I knew them too, but at every memory and at every word his eyes opened, closed, sparkled, winked—you would have said that they were hopping like two birds in a cage, sharp, malicious and impatient.

'Nepi? You have never been to Nepi? Sutri? You have not even been to Sutri? Sutri, *Claustra Etruriae*? Are you Roman?'

The little black eyes pecked at my face. It was

true; at that time I did not know either Sutri or Nepi; a humiliation. I felt Mommsen's contempt inexorably overwhelming me, as the sands of the desert cover the carrion of an ass. Worse, I felt I was blushing. Suddenly I saw those eyes grow brighter and become, if not mild, at least kind. Why? Mommsen, who five minutes before might have imagined that I was an intelligent and studious youth, now had the proofs in his hands, the document, I do not hesitate to say the inscription with the declaration of my ignorance. Yet he was happy. He moved his jaws as though he were relishing a bon-bon, and repeated his question:

'What do you wish me to do for you?' but in a more affable tone, so that he seemed to be addressing a nice little dog: 'Do you wish to interview me?' I took heart once more, and my blushes ceased. 'Perhaps, Professor, you are not very fond of interviews?' He smiled, he really smiled.

'That depends. Interviews that have a scientific aim, that can promote a discussion between savants, I approve of. But others, intended to show me off to the great public, I have no use for. Whoever has read my works, knows me. As for the others, it is well for them to remain in their *ignorantia*. They merit it.'

He said *ignorantia*, in Latin, not *ignoranza*. And the big word with its hiss at the end filled his mouth. I felt that for him men were divided into two irreconcilable classes: the learned and the ignorant, the whites and the blacks. And of the first class he was deservedly a sovereign. Yes, changing the colour of the Ethiop's skin: some have time to lose in attempting it. Not he, he had other things to do. But even negroes can be useful:

for instance, in carrying on their shoulders through the streets of big cities posters with the names of the most conspicuous white men. All at once he told me about his life in Rome; that he had come to prepare a new edition of the *Collectanea* of Solinus and the *Variae* of Cassiodorus from two Vatican codices; that early every morning he went to the Papal library and remained as long as there was any light; that he usually lunched in a *trattoria* in Piazza San Pietro, and that on the previous day he had actually lunched in the Vatican, the Swiss Guards' mess; that Monsignor Carini, the Prefect of the library, was most courteous towards German scholars; that he liked Italian cooking very much, beginning with macaroni, and that he preferred wine to beer; that the Chianti was no longer up to that which he had drunk in his early youth.

At this he closed his mouth, raised his head, and relapsed into ill-temper. And as I did not budge, he stretched out his legs and gazed at his slippers, one after the other, intently. I, too, looked at them; they were of black cloth, worn and faded, and Mommsen's toes twisted inside them nervously. Even without the aid of the slippers I had grasped that he wanted me to go away, that he wanted to finish dressing and go out. But every good reporter knows that there is always a way to prolong an interview, by contradicting your interlocutor, just as every good hostess knows that to revive a conversation one need only fling out a *No* at the right moment.

'Does Monsignor Carini, learned as he is, not know the letter that you wrote to the *Perseveranza* in 1870? "The Infallible hurled down from the Capitol——"'

I had re-read it on the previous night and knew it almost by heart: 'If our Government holds in check certain Protestant popelets not less sly but more tiresome than yours, do you suppose that therefore the German people will behold with less exultation the Infallible hurled down from the summit of the Capitol?' If some one had said to me that morning that another Infallible One, but without divinity, without humanity, and without Romanity, should twenty-four years later be truly hurled down from the Capitol, I mean German pride (I say pride, and not culture and labour) I should perhaps have been frightened as at the announcement of some cataclysm; frightened or amused, for even cataclysms multiply the laughing ardour of young men. But that morning on the Capitol there was speech of the Pope, not of the Emperor. Mommsen rose, made a movement to arrange the pages of his proofs on the desk. He was seeking for words. When he had found them, he drew a step nearer to me and declared:

'Monsignor Carini knows which are the subjects about which he may speak with me, and those about which he should not speak.' It was not a compliment, but I felt that he was not offended. In fact he added: 'I am glad that young Romans remember what I did for the unity of Italy. Now I am out of politics. Outside, quite outside, out of those of my own country and those of the others. I have other work to do.'

During those days Giosuè Carducci was in Rome. I asked him if he had seen him. He quieted down, so to speak. He had dined with him the evening before at Contessa Lovatelli's. 'Carducci is no longer a poet. Much learning, but no more poetry. Years ago I

translated some poems of his, but not the Sapphics. Italians cannot write Sapphic odes.'

Carducci was not able to write Sapphic odes? What did he mean? He had risen, he had hunted for his golden spectacles on the table, under the unfolded handkerchief, he had set its bars on his ears, under his hair, and walked towards the book-case. He walked with little steps, brushing with his body all the objects he met on his way, the table, the chairs, the stove. He walked like a blind man, with head raised, but without stretching out his hand to touch whatever happened to be near him. He merely brushed it with his elbow, holding his fist clenched and pressed close to his chest, and the other hand behind him. Was that destroyer of myths and legends afraid of empty space? Had, with the years, the mania for certitude descended from the brain, invading the whole body, and did he no longer know how to proceed without touching something solid with his elbow?

All at once I pictured him, tiny, yellow and black, coming out of the Vatican with that young-chicken-step, in the sun-swept immensity of Piazza San Pietro, and I was seized both with pity and reverence for him. Rome, Rome, Rome; and there he is, a trembling maniac, with that crotchet inside his great brain. He had taken a small brochure from the book-case, and handed it to me. On the cover was written only *Carducci 1879*.

'They are my translations from the *Odi Barbare*, and also a few verses of mine in answer.'

I copied them out. Here they are:

'Tentate pur. Saffo non fia mai vostra.
Però de' suoi spondei bei e non scarsi

Superba l'alemanna musa nostra
Vien liber'a ad inchinarsi
Al vinto nella gloriosa giostra.'

[Try as you will: Sappho will never be yours. And yet proud of her fine and not scarce spondees the Germanic muse comes to kneel freely at the feet of the vanquished in the glorious lists.]

Let no one smile. I did not smile. Even those truly barbarous verses struck me as a homage to Rome and to Italy, all the sincerer for being so clumsy and laborious. By this time I had grown attached to that old man. In his very haughtiness I perceived a hint of something sacred and religious, like a vow of fidelity and self-sacrifice lasting throughout a life-time. If he had permitted it, I should have taken him by the arm and led him back without so many meanderings to his arm-chair. I hunted desperately for a subject that would bring me nearer to him, that would bring me into communion with him. I asked him if he knew any of our other poets besides Carducci. He named Ada Negri:

'I like the sentiment of duty and the respect for labour that she communicates with her verses.'

'And d'Annunzio?'

'Who?'

'Gabriele d'Annunzio.'

'I don't know him. He has not been writing long? D'An-nun-zio? In truth, I do not know him. You have no great poets. Italians are lacking in the passion of the heart. The passion of the heart.'

He went away quickly. He reached the door, took a step into the corridor and picked up the black leather shoes that the servant had set down outside. Holding

them in his hand by the strings, he looked at me. I understood, bowed and went out.

And the week after I rushed to visit Nepi, Sutri, the Porta Furia, the Amphitheatre.

# WOMEN 1924

FORTE DEI MARMI,
*July* 25, 1924.

DORO, who is twenty-five, is in love with Loli (Eleonora). This young girl, who lives in Turin, has spent two months, April and May, in Florence as her aunt's guest, has danced with Doro, and walked and talked and even acted with him, for charity, in a pantomime or fairy play, she dressed 'as a ruby' (I only read it in the programme, I wasn't there), he as a negro. One night, at a feast given in the park of a villa at San Domenico di Fiesole, inhabited by magnificent and ingenuous, transient and noisy, Americans, the electric light went out three times, and Doro, in a swallow-tail, and Loli dressed in a very little silk, rose-coloured, exchanged a kiss and a vow under a fir-tree; I say one kiss because I am here repeating the confidences shown by Doro to my indulgent friendship. He confides in me because, he says, he needs my advice, but really because he likes to talk about her with some one who cannot steal her from him; I listen to him with a paternal expression, but really because I like to compare Doro with myself at his age. Against this double background Doro's impassioned words sound more sonorously. I have seen Loli twice, by glimpses. She has a mole at the lower extremity of her left shoulder-blade. She is tall, robust, dark-eyed, clear-complexioned,

with eye-lashes darker than her hair. Her look is determined. When she speaks, she likes to cross her arms on her chest. To my view, her hands and her feet are too long; but that is a constantly increasing flaw in the new women.

For the last ten days Doro has been here at the Fort to revisit Loli, who this time has brought her mother with her. The official proposal, from father to father, was to have been made in the autumn, with the first fogs. Yesterday evening, at the sentimental hour of sunset, Doro paid me a visit on the beach. I was sitting on the sand, looking at a photograph in '*L'Illustrazione Italiana*' of Venice seen from an aeroplane, all campanili and chimney-pots, so that I felt as though I could take hold of her houses by those handles; and I dreamed of rebuilding her in my own fashion.

Doro, who was in a bathing-suit, with a little red- and yellow-striped silk jacket over it, suddenly threw himself down face downwards and said to me:

'I am leaving to-morrow morning without a word. If I stay another day, I shall burst. That girl is off her head. No, nothing wrong; but if I married her I should die of asthma. Just listen. She gets up at six. At seven, tennis, until nine, with me, of course. At nine a swim out at sea, from a *patìno*, with me, of course, but she rows. During the swim, a race, a breathing contest with our heads under the water, a balloon game, jelly-fish-hunting, grabbing them fearlessly by the skin, and turning them over into a basket. At eleven a sun-bath, inside a square of sheets, without me; then, to loosen her limbs, a bare-foot race, on the sands, with me. After lunch, cards; poker, for money. And she plays for high stakes,

with me, of course. At four o'clock a second bathe, leaping head first from the pier: three yards high. At five, an hour's walk. At eight, dinner. At ten, dancing, with me too, until one, until two, until three. And if we don't dance at our hotel, we go to Viareggio, in my car, and dance there. And she insists on driving. At the Fiumetto bridge, she crushed one of my mud-guards This morning I reached the tennis-court at eight, dropping with sleep. Do you know what I saw? Loli boxing with a Milanese gentleman who arrived yesterday In a bathing-suit, with horse-hair gloves, lalalà, she was exchanging fisticuffs. I am leaving to-morrow morning at five. I am going to the Abetone. I shall go to bed, sleep for twenty-four hours, and then I shall write to her that we were not made for one another. I forgot. The other day I found her surrounded by young men in bathing-drawers. She was bending her right arm and swelling the muscles, and they were touching them, at great length, for comparison's sake. Whereupon one of them stretched out his bare leg, and wanted her to feel the mounts of his quadriceps. She felt them, but at once stretched out her leg too, in all tranquillity, and challenged him : "Touch here." Is that enough for you?'

'But the mother?'

'The mother is delighted, she has learnt the names of all the muscles, biceps, poples, deltoid, and she knows where they are.'

# VERDI AND PASCARELLA

ROME,
*November* 12, 1923.

ROME during a *scirocco* [1] is like a beautiful woman in her warm and downy bed, restful and slightly languid, enough to make her forget the passing of time, the great time that is past. The turgid cloud serves as her canopy ; grey silk, violet silk, with a few streaks of pale blue. Everything is possible, nothing is probable. The air is sweet as a breath, soft as a cushion. Scents resemble tastes. Sounds pierce to your ear as though deadened, with the laziness of echoes. The horizon is closed; in all the world there is only Rome.

Milanese, Turinese, Genoese, if they live in Rome and she settles down in her *scirocco*, curse it soundly, and, with their heads throbbing like some one who ventures into too hot or perfumed a room, yawn, stretch themselves, struggle against that torpor as though it were a contagion or a temptation. I am sorry for them; even if they are believers, eternity will always be beyond their powers of understanding. Who can imagine Paradise gripped and shaken by the fury of the *tramontana* [2]? The weather beloved by the gods, and pleasing to the Romans, is the *scirocco* ; the hot-house in which they thrive. The

[1] A warm, sultry, often rainy wind from Africa.
[2] A cold north wind.

true Roman not only was born on a day of *scirocco*, but the *scirocco* remains the norm of his consciousness and of his phlegm; and when the *scirocco* blows, he, usually so suspicious and reserved and haughty, unfolds himself in confidences and memories and kindness. This kindness is a levelling quality which, to make them brothers, reduces all men, even kings, Popes, emperors, geniuses, to an average size, shoulder to shoulder, comfortably, so that you can handle them, and even, in that warmth, undress them, to find out how much in each is wood and how much rag, and how much is flesh and blood. *Scirocco*, the first founder and eternal king of Rome.

Well then, the other night, under a low *scirocco* sky, two old Romans, Cesare Pascarella [1] and I, were standing in front of the Trevi fountain, sitting on the bar of iron which binds the stone posts between the steps and the street. Two minutes away, the Tritone, the Corso, Piazza Colonna, the huge new bank buildings, the arc-lamps, the fluttering of the newspapers, the murmur of the crowd and of the cafés.

Here, amidst the continuous, even, majestic plashing of the waters, all is unchanged since centuries; the immense fountain, the church at the corner, which seems to draw back lest it distract your eyes from so much pleasant and regal magnificence; the little houses opposite, old, faded and dwarfish, still the same as they were, luckily, so that of a surety, if it were day, I should find the shop of the 'fedelinaro' again, fat and bald, with the mole on his cheek and the fly-killer in his right hand; and when we schoolboys went to buy a halfpenny bun of

[1] Cesare Pascarella, Roman vernacular poet, famous for two volumes of sonnets, 'Villa Gloria' and 'The Discovery of America'.

him and, lifting the pink veil, selected the one with most raisins, the sight of that mole struck us as another raisin stuck in that big rubicund face almost as a sign-post and guarantee. And a little further down, at the corner of the Muratte, I should certainly rediscover the little coughing flower-seller, who, when we were at the *liceo*, sold us gardenias for our button-holes at half the price charged by the pompous florists in the Corso; but the tinfoil around the stem we had to put on ourselves, taking it from large-sized chocolates. All is unchanged and bewitched since a century and a half, under the dim light of the street-lamps, at this hour. And yet this dim light slips and dances over the running water, the spouts, the stones, as though it were enjoying itself, and caresses the white statues with the gentleness of reflected moonbeams, and in its discretion gives a still loftier aspect to the great pillared and pilastered façade, which disappears up there in the twilight of the sky.

So that the two angels with outspread plumes on each side of the Papal arms seem to have just alighted on that summit, and we did not hear the rustling of their wings because of the roar, down here, of the cascades. Stage-play. What stage-manager has ever imagined a finer and fuller finale than this, with the gigantic Neptune standing on his throne, and the horses and Tritons and Nereids and angels and the mossy grottos and the undying music of the waters? The great round basin is the orchestra; lower than the auditorium in which we are sitting; but the architect devised it a century earlier than Wagner.

The fact is that, passing from one subject to another, we came, in this quiet, to name Verdi too. Pascarella knew him in 1887. The year before, Pascarella had

written 'Villa Gloria', and Giosuè Carducci had crowned him poet. 'Never had Italian dialect poetry risen to such a height as this.' We had all learnt these words by heart at the *Ginnasio*; and with the praises we also knew by heart, of course, the sonnets, especially those of us who had heard them recited by Pascarella.

> 'A Terni dove fu l'appuntamento,
> Righetto ce schierò in d'una pianura. . . .'

[At Terni where the appointment was, Righetto lined us up on a plain.]

Pascarella used to begin with a dead voice and lowered head, as though absorbed in arranging his own memories, both hands in the pockets of his bright-blue coat. He stood firmly planted on his arched legs, resembling those of a barely-civilized satyr, on his big feet, which at that time he kept confined in two triangles of brown gaiters, and in a pair of pointed, parallel shoes, long as gondolas.

> 'E lì ce disse:—Er vostro sentimento
> Lo conosco e non c'è d'ave' paura. . . .'

[And there he said to us: I know your feelings and there is no need to be afraid.]

At that '*ce disse*' he would abruptly raise his square, sunburnt face, open wide both eyes at the public, and send his eye-brows half-way up his forehead, with so much feeling that at night we boys used to dream of him, the Cairolis, Mantovani, the wounded, Villa Gloria and the Dark Arch; and indeed, I only need to repeat that first quatrain to summon back the vision of him as in the dreams of those years.

Cesare Pascarella is, except for his finer clothes, just what he used then to be, solid and muscular, with resolute

gestures and liberal soul. This evening he began his story without gestures, *sotto voce*:

'After "Villa Gloria" Benedetto Cairoli had sent Federico Napoli to me: "Cairoli, you know, wants to knight you." "Me knighted? Tell him that if he tries, I shall not go to see him any more." Then came Peppino Turco: "Cairoli, you know, wants to give you a gold watch."—"A gold watch? And of what use is that to me? Tell him that if he tries I shall cut him dead." Federico Napoli comes back: "Cairoli is going to Groppello. He wants you to go with him too."—"Now we're indeed friends." And I left for Groppello with Benedetto Cairoli.'

Pascarella flashes back to my memory as, with his neck sunk between his shoulders, his eyes clouded, one hand raised with difficulty, he sighingly uttered the prayer of the wounded Giovanni Cairoli:

'Si camperete, ve scongiuro,
Dice, de facce seppellì a Groppello.'
[If you live, I beg you, he says, to have us buried at Groppello.]

'From Groppello I wanted to go, of course, to Milan. I had been there once to an exhibition, hastily. I go to Milan. I go in to the Cova,[1] I take place at a table. Then, you know I was in "uniform," that is, dressed, after my own fashion, with a check scarf, a *caciottella* on my head and a small pipe in my mouth. Hardly had I sat down, when there appeared a very tall, very thin thingumabob, with an almost skull-like face. That thingumabob wasn't new to me. Think how useful caricatures were at that time. I had seen him, and

[1] The biggest café in Milan.

I realized that he, too, had seen me in the same way He looks at me, he looks at me again, then he comes towards me: "You are Signor Pascarella."—"And you are Marco Sala", I answered him. He sits down too. A coffee, an iced drink, another coffee. Tosti comes in, Giulio Ricordi comes in. I felt as though I had become a magnet for drawing all my friends away from home and leading them there to land at that table. "You must stay, you shan't go back to Groppello again, you must come to the Master's." "To the Master's? What for?" "To Verdi's, to Verdi's." "I go to Verdi? You must all be mad." "Yes." "No." "We will go to the Hotel Milàn and you will recite your 'Villa Gloria' for him." "But I must go to Groppello."

'The long and the short of it was that they put me in the middle, two of them on each side of me, so that I seemed a dangerous person and they the policemen, and went to the Milàn. What a man, my boy! That was a man. "Pascarella, Pascarella"; yes, he had heard my name. He sized me up from head to foot, which he did quickly as he was very tall, and said to me, literally: "Ah, you are Pascarella? Then let's hurry." It seemed as though he had to have a tooth pulled and I were the dentist. The others arranged the chairs. Verdi alone, on one side, in an arm-chair. I alone, on this side, in front of an empty sofa. The rest at the back, all in a bunch.

'What was I to do? You would have recited too. So I recite. One sonnet, two. He begins to move. I see it, I feel it. When we get to the death of Enrico Cairoli, do you remember? the death of Mantovani, he doesn't move any more, he stares at me hard. I look at

him too. Two big tears, down from his eyes, down along his beard. At the end, he gets up, grabs me under the arms as though I were a baby, lifts me up, up, up, right up to his face and gives me two smacking kisses. Well: ever since then he was fond of me.'

Pascarella has risen. Once more I hear the plashing of the water, even, solemn, imperturbable as time. Verdi, Boito, Tosti, Ricordi, Sala: all dead. And he strokes the bristling hairs of his chin-beard: 'Quite so: all dead'.

I too have risen. We set out towards Monte Cavallo, pausing at every step.

'Since then, did you see Verdi again?'

'So many times. He came to Rome for the first-night of *Falstaff*. The following evening he invited me to dinner at the Quirinal Hotel. There was Boito, there was Ricordi with "*sora Giuditta*", there was *la Strepponi*. When dinner was over, in came Mascheroni, whom they used to call Piccinella, and showed the Master an article by Montefiore in the *Tribuna*: a regular hosanna. He looks at the heading, folds up the paper: "Praises, praises. What are they good for? If my music is beautiful, it is beautiful. If it is ugly, will praises save it?" And he starts walking up and down, humming: "*When I was a page of the Duke of Norfolk* . . ." What a giant he was. Suddenly some one comes in: "Over there, on the side near the *Teatro Costanzi*, there is a huge crowd under the windows, they are cheering and want you." "Want me? Then let us go."

'Through a long corridor we traverse the whole hotel in procession. Verdi's wife at the head, majestically, with the pace of a *carabiniere* on parade. At the rear, himself. Waiters, chamber-maids, guests, all outside

their doors to applaud. There was an American blonde, tall, with her shoulders bare, down to here. She didn't stand on ceremony. When Verdi arrived within her range, she leaped forward and threw her arms around his neck and gave him two resounding kisses. You should have seen how his wife turned around. He shook his head as though to make those two kisses drop off. Pshaw, who could have taken them off him? The fact is that he took three steps quite seriously, and then he turned to give a look, at that American, to take, you might have said, her measure. Towards the end of the corridor some music was heard. The Costanzi orchestra had gone out on to the terrace of the theatre over the entrance. "What are they playing?" says he. "The prelude to *La Traviata*" says Giulio Ricordi. And he: "Ah . . ." as though it weren't his own stuff.

'But over there they have lit a Bengal light. Then Verdi's face is transformed. He is as happy as a boy. "Come and see. Come and see the Bengal light." We others, outside on the balcony, made ourselves as small as small. He bows, bows again. I felt it: if he had been able to speak, he would have said: "Another Bengal light." We returned to the saloon. He, always standing, cheerful, erect and brisk as though he were only twenty.

'He takes his place, with his hands on his hips, in front of Boito, who is sitting next to me: "Boito, now you must find me another libretto, quick." "The subject is ready", says Boito, looking at him over his eye-glasses. "What is it"? "*Cleopatra*"—and he begins to tell it to me. But Verdi is inexorable: "What a lot of talk, you poets! Write the libretto at once, instead of talking." Boito, who was rolling—you remember?—one

of those cigarettes of his no thicker than a straw: "Eh, it takes time." "Time? That is just what I haven't any of." "If you accept it, I have another libretto ready." "And what is it?" "*Nero.*" Verdi did not even thank him. He thought only of himself, of his age, of his work: "If I were ten years younger, I would take it at once." And he turned his back on us.'

Pascarella turns his on me too. He has acted all the gestures, the intonations, the looks, the voices of his various characters, at once painter and narrator.

'You who knew Carducci so well, whom do you rate higher, Verdi or him?'

He stops, moves his head from right to left, from left to right:

'He . . . He. . . . Verdi was of another race—how should I say? he was not a man like the rest. With Carducci, and God only knows how devoted I was to him for all the good he did to me, with Carducci two or three times, in the heat of conversation, I chanced to put a hand on his shoulder. But Verdi? On Verdi's shoulder nobody ever set a hand. He—' He makes a gesture with his hand outstretched, and looks up to see if there is room between heaven and earth for a similar stature. Then he shrugs his shoulders, as though to free himself from too many memories and whispers to me, happily:

'What weather, eh, this *scirocchetto.* Seems like Spring.'

# *LA TRAVIATA* AT THE SCALA

MILAN,
*February* 10, 1925.

IN the darkened house a little light from the footlights and the lamps on the stage falls on the motionless faces in the long line of stalls. They are all of an equally pale pink colour against the black, in rows, like flowers in a garden over-blown from too much moonshine. Their bodies are invisible.

*Aime et tu renaîtras; fais-toi fleur pour éclore.*

A verse from Alfred de Musset? In what corner of my memory has it been hidden for so many years? And why did it burst out from my brain this evening? Violetta and Alfredo. Listening to these old melodramas, the spectator is doubly employed: listening and remembering. Almost I would say that he listens and sings; that something or some one sings within him, in unison with the orchestra below and the singer above; indeed that the whole theatre, full as it is, is singing. *Di quell'amor che è l'anima dell' universo intiero. . . .*[1] [Of that love which is the soul of the entire universe.] That is why we all have this enchanted look; we look at the actors on the stage, but we also look into ourselves. *Misterioso altero,—croce*

[1] All the quotations are from the libretto by Piave.

*e delizia al cor. . . .* [Mysterious and proud—a cross and a joy to the heart]. One or two generations before us, they fell in love sighing like this. It is they who sing this even in our hearts. Toscanini's baton does not evoke only live voices, but ghosts which enthrall us still more. The magician stands before a small white table, on which is seen the blue light of a spiritistic séance. Before mounting to trace in the semi-darkness the magic circles, he has dipped his baton in this celestial fluid. *Un dì felice eterea—mi balenasti innante. . . .* [One happy day you suddenly appeared, all ethereal, before me.]

And this is how a verse of de Musset flowered again in my brain; a thing to be ashamed of in 1925. My excuse is that here is another Alfredo, dressed like the poet of the *Nuit d'août*, large tie, twice twisted around a lace stock, bottle-winged coat tight at the waist, pearl-grey trousers tight on the hips and held down by straps. Violetta is all in yellow, with an immense fan of yellow plumes; the vile gold has dyed her its own hue. Now she is alone, and she is not still for a moment. She, looking out through the window at the starry night, repeats with us Alfredo's aria. The orchestra offers it to her, takes it away, suggests it to her again, timidly. She is the mistress of the hundred instruments as she is of the thousands of hearts. In far-off days, when the singer dominated the orchestra in this way, our youth also dominated the *universo intiero*, as the librettist, Piave, has it, or thought and hoped to dominate it; at that age, both mean the same thing. We did not know it; that is why it was ours. We did not hear it; that is why we thought it heard us. Violetta's song dies away. 'She goes out left' says the libretto. But that old fogey of a

Piave certainly did not mean to make any political insinuation.

We are at the second act. *Io vivo quasi in ciel.* [I live almost in Heaven.] . . . The scenery is faithful. A cashmere shawl on the sofa; a clock under a gilded bronze statuette; silk flowers under glass-shades. Reign of Pius IX. My grandmother was a great reader of novels, from Mastriani to Eugène Sue. But they were prohibited for me. And so, when I went to see her, and sat at her feet, as in a Winterhalter picture, on a black velvet footstool, with roses embroidered in cross-stitch, that she might continue her reading in peace, she would give me a sugar-drop and a bundle of opera-librettos from the Apollo Theatre, red, green, orange. I can see again her little black-silk-mittened hand, when she raised them to put on her spectacles under her lace cap. These were the first verses I ever read, and I understood nothing of them. That perhaps was why my grandmother gave them to me, and that perhaps is why I remember them. But my grandmother also had a parrot, my joy and fear at the same time, and the parrot could sing, *Di Provenza il mar, il suol.* [The sea and soil of Provence.] . . . Now I am afraid that when we reach this the enchantment will fade. With this banal music, *tiro tiro, tiro tì*, the dear ghosts will vanish, and I shall be irritated with myself for having let such pathos bemuse me. Instead I find that the song of old Germont is coming to an end. Perhaps Toscanini too once heard it sung by a parrot, for he has taken it very carefully and softly, slowly and lightly, so as not to rouse and distress us. And he has done neither. He knows all about his music and his public. *Alfredo, Alfredo, di questo core. . . .* This indeed rocks

us on the waves of memory. Violetta is dressed in black velvet, with a great waterfall of red flowers from her bosom to her hip. We are all twenty, we are all in love, thirsting to pardon anything or anyone, perhaps even ourselves. The curtain falls. Applause. Light.

'I tell you we reached Varese this morning in three-quarters of an hour, and I was driving.' In the next box is a blonde lady with short hair, *décolletée* to the waist, who talks like Ascari or Bordino. 'And we didn't use half a tin.' But her eyes are red, of course from the wind in the morning ride. Down in the stalls most people get up, pull down their waistcoats, adjust their ties. They appear to be stretching as if just awakened.

## BOITO AT VENICE

VENICE,
*May* 1, 1924.

BY this time, in Milan, the first performance of *Nero* has begun. Arrigo Boito[1] came here to Venice, I believe, for the last time in June 1915. Venice in war-time, Venice arrayed for war, he loved it more than ever. With short, dragging steps, glancing sharply from among his wrinkles, his neck pressed down between his shoulders with the air, half-timid, half-curious, of a tortoise carrying its house everywhere, and inside, well-closed-in, its secret, he circulated unwearyingly through the beloved city of his childhood. He wished to admire her carefully now that she was threatened and deserted. '*Venezia tutta nostra*, *Venezia tutta nostra*', [Venice all our own], he kept repeating to me, blissfully, in the evening, when we met again for supper.

One night, in a motor-boat of the Command, I led him around through the deserted, gloomy canals, shrouded in such a compact gloom that in the murky water you could see nothing beyond the reflection of the stars and the phosphorescent trail that panted in our wake. Behind the Arsenal, slipping along the castellated walls

[1] Boito first became celebrated as Verdi's librettist, but towards the end of his life his opera *Mefistofele* won him world-wide fame. His posthumous opera *Nero* has won a *succès d'estime*.

of the *Darsena grande*, in that black silence, we felt as though we were exploring a dead city, already half-buried by the torpid sea. Boito was silent. He leant out to stare at something that was gleaming far off, suspended in the darkness: the walls of the cemetery of San Michele, the belfry of the Madonna dell' Orto. Then he took off his glasses and with his thumb and index-finger rubbed his eyes, an habitual gesture with him, even in full light and quiet, but which there appeared full of trouble, as though of one who felt that he was suffocating in that desolate gloom.

When we stopped, the wash of the boat faded away in a sigh. We stopped because there was with us an officer of the aerial defence, and as soon as he saw a thread of light leaking from a loop-hole, he either cried out or got off. On the Fondamenta Nuove, towards the Jesuits' Church, he actually discovered an insolent little window, high up, all illuminated and wide open, and he began, according to his duty, to cry out. From the bank a merry voice was heard: '*I xe do sposi noveli, e i ga caldo.*' [It's a newly-married couple, and they are hot.] Boito laughed his good-humoured guttural laugh, and looked at the officer over his eye-glasses. The latter, angry, wished to get off, but as soon as he had touched the ground the little window was closed, and to look for it in that darkness in order to punish the culprits, was like looking for a penny in the depths of the lagoon. When we set off, Boito, to calm him, began to say: '*Andemo, andemo a vedar se trovemo dei altri sposi.*' [Let's go and see if we can find another couple.] The idea that Venice in that gloomy night under the invisible menace was serenely making love, amused him and consoled him. He began

to talk, he questioned us about the defences of Venice. From the sea, with high-calibre artillery, was the enemy's navy able to hit Venice? He thought of Rheims. When he was told that the Palazzo Ducale could be hit across the Lido, and that for this reason it was being strengthened so as to form a sole block and, if a corner-column was shattered, other props were standing there firm and ready to support it, he did not find another moment of peace.

Curious as he was of everything, when we got off on the Riva degli Schiavoni, Arrigo Boito went on speaking only of cannons: 'You should have seen in 1866 the bombardment of the little fort of Amalo carried out by the gunners of Major Dogliotti. I was in the battalion commanded by Carlo Guerrieri Gonzaga. It was as though you were in a gallery seat in a circus. The bullets fell inside the fort as oranges thrown by a juggler fall in his hat. We volunteers laughed and applauded, like the boys we were. And the Austrians ran away like grasshoppers. In half-an-hour they had all run away.'

We were sitting on the bench of the Loggetta. Boito in the dark attempted to roll one of his thin cigarettes.

'A fine war that, and happy, and, I may say, an easy one. The volunteer of those days was indeed a heart of gold under a red shirt; but when the enemy was not to be seen, it was a weary task holding us in line. What had frightened us most, had been the order to abandon our bags, our changes of linen, our toilet articles. One day, in front of Condino, Guerrieri Gonzaga had to address us. He said: "I would have you note, that the shirt I am wearing, I have been wearing it for a month." We

cheered him. Some of us, seeing that fine clear-eyed man confess to us like that, felt the tears come to their eyes.

'Those were days when the tears rose to our eyes easily. The fact is that, towards the end of July, as soon as I heard of the armistice, I appeared boldly before the colonel. My beard was black and my hair was blond, then, and it struck me as a ridiculous contrast. I found myself very ugly, and I confess that I was sorry. "Colonel, send me to Milan for a few days. I have been here for three months. If the armistice lasts, it is useless for me to stay here. If we begin again, I can get back from Milan in a moment." "But, my dear boy, I cannot see any reason for sending you to Milan." "A reason? I want to shave off this horrid beard and get a wash." He looked at me, I may say he weighed me, from head to foot: "Well, go and wash yourself." I slept at Bagolino. The next morning, I went to Brescia on foot. But as soon as I beheld myself in a city once more, I was overcome with mortification and anguish. I felt the happiness of three months would never come back again. I did not get a wink of sleep. Leaving a woman does not make you suffer so much, when you are young.'

Storo, Condino, Bezzecca: that was all he would tell me. Only when I asked him: 'What was Garibaldi like?' He answered me abruptly: 'Wonderful, wonderful. Old age, fatigue, the pain of his wound, the sufferings of the disappointments that were awaiting him, made his face even nobler and finer. He had the hands of a woman, and a voice that resounded in your heart for days and days like a song. We volunteers used to say: "He

has something of a woman and of a lion." We were all a bit baroque.'

The morning after, we left Venice together. Boito returned to Milan, I went to Verona and the Adige valley. Before leaving he went back to look once more at the great Tiepolo ceiling in the Scalzi, to the right of the station. Up there, next to the Madonna seated on the Holy House, borne by a vortex of unfolded wings and outstretched arms, you could see three angels issuing from a cloud with three long golden trumpets, and playing them with swollen cheeks they aimed at the Madonna. Boito did not weary of looking: 'It is the most perfect transposition of music into painting, of tones into colours, that has ever been seen. They are playing, and it is their music which makes the Madonna appear.' He raised his arm, his whole body vibrated. The friar who accompanied us, asked me *sotto voce*, astounded: 'Boito, the one who wrote *Mephistopheles*?'

Four months later, a bomb had reduced Tiepolo's fresco to dust. And now, as I write, from the window opening on the lagoon there reaches my ear the echo of the little concerts and songs on the illuminated barges before the *Punta della Dogana*, for the amusement of the Germans in the hotels. Even in piazza San Marco all the cafés have, since the war, started a little concert after the Viennese fashion.

## PUCCINI

VIAREGGIO,
*September* 30, 1923.

I KNOW nothing about music and not even on paper can I distinguish a quaver from a semi-quaver. Worse still, the music that to-day amuses or moves or elevates me, to-morrow puts me to sleep; and I cannot succeed in understanding why. Honestly, I have never written about music, but, ever ready to digest printed matter of every form or substance, I have read many articles and essays about things musical, often cheered by the doubt that the writer knew as little about them as I.

Once in my youth this irreverent suspicion induced me to claim, for a month or two, the name of a musical connoisseur, by simply repeating, with emphasis, four words that I had surprised on the lips of Enrico Bossi as he sat at the organ, and, with his hands and feet, unchained an orderly tempest, which, filling me with sounds and echoes, gave me the grateful illusion of losing the weight of my body and of being flung up and down by mighty waters. 'Here is the canon', Enrico Bossi had said to me, confidentially, in a lull of the resonance. Then the divine hurricane began once more to howl, to moan, to thunder, to enrapture me, and I forgot to ask the meaning of the four little words. But I remembered them a few evenings later in a great orchestral concert at the *Teatro-del*

*la Fenice* as I was sitting in the shadow of a box behind a lovely lady who was at that time a brunette and spoke too much. I held out one hand and gazing into space pronounced with an imperious accent: 'Here comes the canon.' All were silent, some looked at me with admiration.

After that trial, on other occasions, when the interlacing sounds most overcame me, to distract myself I would repeat those four words, and the effect was always powerful. Nor did I ever add anything else. 'Here comes the canon', and no more. It was enough for my fame. Celebrated musicians, misunderstood composers, invited me to enjoy the first fruits of their creations, to help them with my frank advice. I would get home at dawn distraught, my brain pounded by the hammering of the tones. It was not good for my health, and I once more took refuge in my ignorance, repudiating for ever the four magic words of which I should like to know the tremendous meaning, now that I have reached an age when one has the passion to understand everything because it is no longer of any use to do so.

Besides, even this serene ignorance has helped me to be, if not the confidant, at least the friend, of several musicians. In my candour they find admiration without prejudices, curiosity without malice, approval without hesitation, in short that ideal innocence which to-day has become rare even in the gallery. In fact, if at a concert or an opera I am bored, I swallow my yawn with resignation thinking: 'Perhaps in a month I shall like even this Stravinsky', and I set to work counting the spectators in the house who have fallen asleep: who are always a goodly number.

Among these musical friends of mine the dearest is Giacomo Puccini. And this morning in the train, on my way to visit him in his villa at Viareggio, I asked myself the reason why. I discovered three reasons, so humble that I ought not to reveal them. The first is that he does not dress like a genius, does not talk like a genius, has neither the aspect nor the locks of a genius. He is the best-known Italian in the whole world; what I mean is, known not only by name but also by his works, from Scotland to the Argentine; and yet if you had never seen him, not even on a picture-postcard, and found him next to you in a café or in a train, you would think he was an ordinary citizen, elegant and distinguished, slightly annoyed and irritated at being subjected to such promiscuous company, and no more. And the second reason is that this man of sentiment has the modesty of his affections and his passions. Like the good Tuscan, indeed Luccan, that he is, he hides them behind a mocking little smile which is like defending a little flame from the wind with your hand, even at the risk of burning your fingers. As long as they are his, you must not see these affections and these raptures of his. When they belong to Manon or Mimi, then you may applaud and cry as much as you will, for the author can no longer observe it, and, if you must perforce admire him, he will appear impassively before the footlights in the best-cut frock-coat that London has produced. And the third reason is that faint perfume of solitude and country-life which this square-shouldered, taciturn poet bears with him even in the sultry dressing-room of a prima-donna redolent of powder and lotions, even in the hall of a great hotel among the dwarf palms that seem to be painted. Torre del Lago, Massa-

ciuccoli, the *pineta* of Viareggio; he passes ten months of the year in this silence, and, years ago, a weariless hunter on land and sea, he had even chosen for his dwelling an old tower in the Maremma amidst sea and heath; and he still speaks of it as of a lost love.

To-day, here he is in his house, in his ground-floor studio, between me and his great shiny-black piano. He is dressed in grey without a false note; grey hair, steel-grey eyes deeply imbedded in their orbits, black eye-brows, one higher than the other, white and black cravat, black and white shoes, socks of grey silk, a grey handkerchief. His face, florid in hue, is rectangular, powerful and chiselled, recalling the face of his countryman Ferdinando Martini; but the mouth is small and closed, under a pepper-and-salt moustache. Only the lapel of the open coat thrown backwards on to his left shoulder gives him an indefinable air of insolence and restlessness.

The room is low, barely longer than the piano; on one side a sofa with glaring patchwork cushions, and next to the sofa the statue by Troubetzkoy of Caruso in the *Fanciulla del West*; on the other side, a little table and an eighteenth-century mirror; on the piano, among mountains of letters and newspapers, a small bronze of a Victory with wide-spread wings. Not even the photograph of a singer, not even the photograph of some dear colleague. Only an autograph of Rossini, inside a little mahogany frame. At first, you might think that the sounds inside this box would be confused in a huge uproar. But in fact this is the studio of a composer, not of a pianist, and the piano is simply his desk. On the music-stand, held in place by two little bronze

tablets, one with the portrait of Beethoven, another with the portrait of Wagner, the last pages of his beloved *Turandot* are standing upright; and I who am not able to read them, am allowed to look at them and to touch them. They are written in pencil, with lavish, picturesque and impetuous signs which give the page the impression of a landscape roughly outlined, with divisions between the bars that seem like trunks of trees, and serpentine erasures that seem like foliage, and round notes that seem like flowers in the meadows. When you look at those great pencil-strokes, so few on each page, rapid and nervous, it is easy to imagine the musician with his hands on the keyboard interrupting himself brusquely and raising one hand to write as quickly as he can. Around, everything is arranged so as not to delay for an instant the eager flow of his fancy: a supply of pencils soft as charcoal, two machines for sharpening them, boxes and packets of cigarettes and cigar-lighters of every shape and size within reach of his hand.

I read what I can, that is, the words. I look for Simoni's verses, which I imagine, in this fairy-tale China, as rustling as satin, as crackling as bamboo. Instead on the pages I cannot find a word of the libretto, but only stage-directions, pencilled in a heavy running hand sloping upwards: 'Crowd. Red lanterns. . . . Enter the black and violet servants. The masks appear. More light. . . . Here the white and yellow banners. . . . Green temple. . . . The crowd prostrates itself. . . . Flowers. The crowd scatters flowers. . . . Pang, Ping, Pong, green, red, yellow . . .'

'When you compose, do you feel the music or do you see the scene?'

'I see, I see above all. I see the characters and the colour and the gestures of the characters. I am a man of the theatre. I write for the theatre. If, closed in here as I am, I do not succeed in seeing the window opened before me, I mean the stage, I do not write, I cannot write a note. And I go away, in a motor-car, hunting, coming back to write after a month perhaps, when the scene and the characters have appeared to me once more, but clearly, precisely, tangibly, so that I can call them by name. I get ideas only when I am at the piano, my own piano. Sometimes, indeed, a motif may have passed through my head when I am absent; but that has happened to me but rarely. Once, at Mentessi's studio, many years ago. Mentessi had gone to visit a mad-house and he hummed for me the lament of a mad woman, a lament which she used to repeat indefinitely, heart-breakingly. Mentessi had a harmonium. I tried to render that lament on the harmonium. I liked it. I took it down on a sheet of paper; it is the finale of the third act of *Manon*. But, I repeat, I can write music only here at the piano, thus'—and he points at the landscapes on the paper—'to the despair of my copyists.'

At this moment there arrives from Milan Clausetti. Clausetti is Ricordi, Ricordi is the publisher. Clausetti is the most active of Neapolitans, and even at Milan, in his venerable office a step from the Galleria, has a heart ever ready to be stirred. To this origin he owes his rosy smile and slow, thick pronunciation; and for this reason he has framed the great photograph of Verdi, which he keeps hung on the wall over his head, in a veritable sinuous gilded Louis XV frame, as though it were the portrait of the Pompadour: his favourite. Since the

war he has been visited by a calamity: Puccini declares that Clausetti looks like President Wilson.

'You don't believe it? Clausetti, take a cigar. Light it, there's a dear, stick it in your mouth. Now judge: isn't that Wilson?' But to-day Clausetti brings with him something better than his resemblance to Wilson; he bears, in a great package, the score of the second act of *Turandot* neatly copied. Puccini is twenty; he would like to tear that copy from his hands, on its great sheets of paper rustling like parchment. But he controls himself, he pretends indifference, he lights the same cigarette three times with three different lighters, his left eyebrow goes up and ends half-way up his forehead. At last the string is untied, the page appears: 'octave-flute, flutes 1 and 2, English horn . . .' I should like to ask him why all scores have to begin with the humble flute; but the moment is solemn and I do not dare to open my mouth. Puccini has turned his back to us, he is seated at the little table, he can see and hear nothing but his music, his music at last in gala uniform, which must seem quite a different thing to him after those hastily scribbled sheets of his. I see his back, he is moving one hand as though to beat the time, as though to caress a *motif*. And now he is singing, *sotto voce*.

Clausetti and I go out into the garden. Clausetti brings us no less than news from Japan. A nephew of the Luther Long who wrote the story about Butterfly from which Belasco derived his play and Puccini his opera, is at Nagasaki, as consul of the United States, and with Tamaki Miura, a Japanese soprano, who sings Butterfly in her native tongue, he has gone on a pilgrimage up on to a hill outside the town where there still rises the little

house that sheltered the real Butterfly and the American officer and the real tragedy. Butterfly is still alive, they say, poor, lonely and aged, on the island of Kyushin, ignorant of the destiny that has made her famous, or, if not her, her desperate love. Tamaki Miura and the American consul have set their hearts on finding her; meanwhile they are satisfied with having found the house that sheltered her when she was happy; and Tamaki Miura knelt on the threshold and began to weep, partly through emotion, partly through gratitude, and partly because she felt that she was being looked at. And now they have written it to Clausetti so that he can tell Puccini.

Meanwhile the luncheon-hour has come. But first I want to make the acquaintance of Puccini's ancestors. They are standing around painted on little eighteenth-century canvases, watching over their descendant while he works: Giacomo Puccini *maestro di cappella* of the most serene republic of Lucca, a handsome, portly man, Mozartian and pleased with himself, dressed in puce-coloured satin, with a roll of paper in his hand; and next to him Antonio, father of Domenico, who was father of the contrapuntist Michele, who was father of this Giacomo. In the cathedral of Lucca, when Puccini was a boy, they still sang a Te Deum by his great-grandfather; and from a sense of family duty he took part in the choir with as much voice as he could muster, and with him Giovanni Rosadi in short trousers and bare calves. And Rosadi, when he meets his fellow-townsman, still hails him with a 'Te Deum laudamus' which would astound the Assizes.

We go up to the house from the garden. The villa

is built of brick and stone without plaster, with staircases and windows opening out on to the pinewoods, as in a colonial bungalow, as in Butterfly's house where the little Miura has gone on a pilgrimage.

'And the sea?'

'The sea? My dear friend, I have turned my back on the sea. Too much wind, too much noise. Either he or I. And I need to work in peace.'

# ANIMALS

Rome,
*March* 16, 1924.

ROME, on a Sunday, at the Zoological Gardens of Villa Borghese.

Now, if I were a leader of men, and had to make up my mind about their nature and their intentions, I would always set them off against some animal, domestic or wild, according to the use I had to make of those men, and I would judge them according to the judgment which they expressed about the animal, and which the animal, in turn, expressed about them. And I deeply regret that in election-time, when, as every one can see, the very cream of the citizens has to be picked, right here in Rome, the Government and the Opposition have forgotten this kind of criterion, so easy for them in this Zoo which is becoming one of the richest and pleasantest of Europe.

Tell me what animal you love and I will tell you who you are; or at least who you wish to be. That is not enough: let me see how and how much your animal responds to your love. All Sancho is in his donkey. All Leopardi is in the 'Praise of birds'. Much of Mussolini is in his lion-cub. But why is the President so sad and surly in the photographs that show him inside the cage petting his favourite beast? One might say that he is thinking: 'Not all cages are made of iron bars.'

For the same reason the greater part of the visitors here crowd around the monkeys. The theory which was the pride of savants in the days of my youth, that man is descended from the monkey, has fallen into disuse; but the resemblance between these two animals is still so great that the public looks at baboons, chimpanzees, gorillas, ouistitis, with practically the same curiosity as that with which it looks at actors on the stage.

Greed, cunning, servility, violence, sudden and furious love, malice in flea-hunting on one's neighbour: these have been subjects for farces since the world began—and here you see them laid bare. Do you want to know what this young couple desires, just arrived from the country, amazed, sleepy, unkempt and dusty? Look how they sigh as they watch a family of little monkeys, the youngest still rickety, half-bald, and trembling, holding on with two paws to his mother's breasts, and his father seated, serious and absorbed in the bliss of searching in his companion's fur. Do you want to know the ideal of this conscript who is throwing pea-nuts at the chimpanzee? At every nut the ape stands up stiffly in front of him, and salutes him in military fashion as though he were facing a general. And that anaemic, mature lady, whom fortune has abandoned for good, with her cotton gloves and her rubber heels and still a little lampblack on her eyelashes, why has she brought so many dried chestnuts from home in her very greasy hand-bag, and is now offering them to the baboon, telling him at every chestnut, 'Turn', and the baboon revolves on his scarlet fundament and holds out his hand with all the grace he commands, and, if she hesitates, invokes her with a passionate screech? He alone henceforth on the whole earth calls her with such

fervour. I have not seen monkeys at liberty in the jungle, except in Kipling's stories, but I ask myself: if, instead of Man, the lion or the tiger had become the kings of the earth, how would the monkeys have set about imitating them as well as they now ape us?

Lions, tigers, bears, elephants, eagles: what fills me with such respect when I look at them in these cages of theirs or among the cliffs and cement caves beyond the impassable moats, is their nobility in confinement. They rarely deign to look at you or to answer your call, except when you bring them something to eat—in other words, serve them. They look at you, and they seem not to see you. Whether they are walking or resting, you feel them, at a yard's distance, rather than hostile, remote, faithful to themselves and to their customs. The tiger measures this restricted space with long undulating steps, as though he were about to make a great leap in his native jungle; two black bears, as though they were in the thickest forest, sleep in one another's arms, while the city sparrows come hopping to peck a grain at a hand's-breadth from their claws; the eagle, perched on the top of an imitation tree made of trunks and branches nailed together, gazes at the sky as though he did not even notice the iron netting which is henceforth *his* sky. How many men have such strength and majesty in prison, in the pillory?

The nobility of the animals confined in this fashion is equalled by their resignation in sickness, and when they are faced with death. With all their life in their eyes, they await their end, immobile and silent, with the sadness of deserted divinities, almost as though they knew better than we that life and death are for Nature vain names created by our deluded pride.

And besides, arranged as it is amongst the trees, meadows and little lakes, between the trumpeting of an elephant who is answering the cry of a peacock, and the roaring of a lion who is answering the bleating of a sheep, is not this garden the only image left to us of the earthly paradise? But it was called Paradise because among thousands of animals there were only two human beings. To-day there are far more here.

Once more I am standing before the two tigers. One has returned to its den. The other is sleeping in the sun, stretched out at full length. A middle-class family, in holiday garb, is admiring it: 'What a lovely skin! It is just like Granny's rug.'

Suddenly, at these two words in the Roman dialect, my romantic admiration for the beasts is spoiled. And I am once more, in spite of all, the lord of creation, in sovereign Rome, which even in a tiger sees a carpet for its feet. The perfection of civilization.

## PAUL ADAM

FLORENCE,
*March* 30, 1925.

THE newspapers announce that Paul Adam's[1] widow has become a Dominican nun, and that his library is to be sold at public auction and scattered.

I need only to read again two pages of *Force* or *Trust* to see before me Paul Adam in a living form. The fertile and opulent prose, the picturesque style, rapid and precise at once, the desire to explain the universe in a few clear, and, for him, eternal, formulae, and to wrap it up once and for all in sure laws, could, if you watched and listened for a while, be his alone. Compact and squat, a helmet of shining, thick chestnut hair combed down over his forehead, the neckless head set on the square shoulders, the wide and round throat issuing from a black satin waistcoat with two buttonholes like a soldier in gala cuirass, legs and feet all attention, Adam appeared at first sight imperious and peremptory. But eyes, nostrils, lips, hands, all means for taking and learning, were mobile and delicate. To allow his questioner more freedom, Adam gave him an affable smile, which often turned into a burst of laughter from between his white teeth. And

[1] Paul Adam, well-known French man of letters and critic.

then he would applaud himself, beating the back of his right hand on the palm of his left.

His friends returned to him, not only out of affection, but with a lively desire to see once more such an exhibition of Latin intelligence, dazzling with light. Latin, Roman: these were the calls which always accompanied the thought and words of this epic and grandiose romancer, anxious to explain with his intrepid fantasy the history of the world and to model its future. At the beginning of the last book published during his life, on devastated Rheims, is printed: '*A l'Esprit Latin, fondateur, défenseur, conservateur de l'unité gallo-romaine depuis vingt siècles.*' And in the last book of his story of the Italian war, *La terre qui tonne*, he has written: '*A mon très cher ami—pour aimer ensemble l'Italie glorieuse, et tout l'espoir des Latins qui triompheront.*' He shut an eye to Spain. Not being able, like the *Roi Soleil*, to level the Pyrenees with a compliment, he was content to abolish the Alps.

He began to write when Zola was producing every year a novel with ten plots, and so he could not conceive of a literature without a social aim. But literature was for him synonymous with intelligence, with eloquence. He had been a follower of Boulanger, an anarchist, a socialist, a candidate in Lorraine at the side of Barrès. He became calm and orderly, always believing that writers ought to govern republics, and, during the war, writing and re-writing, that if the Chamber had listened in time to literary men France would have been victorious much sooner. He adored d'Annunzio, and the dream of his life would have been for him too to have dictated at least one constitution. His encyclopaedic and turbulent culture, and his courageous mentality, bold to imprudence,

made him see every problem, every deed, from every side, alive and mobile like so many faces.

When, first to the Avenue du Trocadéro, afterwards to the Quai de Passy, I went to luncheon with him, and he, after four or five hours of work, left his writing, not yet dry, to greet us, I always found, if his task were a newspaper article, an old pack of Tarot cards spread out on the corner of his mahogany and bronze writing-table. One morning I asked him the reason of this. He confided to me that, in order to curb his fantasy, having chosen his subject, before beginning to develop it, he consulted the cards. The Sun, the Moon, the Emperor, the Pope, the Hanged Man, and many other cards: he had attributed some branch of knowledge to each; and if, for instance, the Hanged Man turned up, he would treat his subject from the point of view of art or literature; if the Pope turned up, he treated it from the religious point of view; if the Moon, philosophically; and if the Empress should appear, from a moral one; and so on, for all expedients were for him good and exciting.

An oil-portrait of Colonel Adam hung on the wall in front of the writing-table; moustaches and whiskers like Murat, a full and florid face over a hedge of gold braid. Major Adam had enrolled himself under Napoleon in 1802 at Boulogne, had fought at Austerlitz in the light infantry, and had become adjutant to General Oudinot. At Wagram he was a captain. In the evening, on the battlefield, he had picked up the Count of Raxi-Flassans, a dragoon officer in the suite of General Moreau, with both legs wounded by a shot and almost dead. The dying man begged him to care for his beloved wife and young children. Twenty years after, Adam,

faithful to the promise, married the young Countess de Raxi-Flassans. They were the grandparents of the writer, a real romance in the midst of a bloodless and romantic Europe. From their adventures and from those of their descendants until 1830, Paul Adam has taken his four most ardent, stirring and sparkling tales: *La Force*, *L'Enfant d'Austerlitz*, *La Ruse*, *Au Soleil de Juillet*.

I knew him first in 1900, when *Force* had just appeared amid much enthusiasm; he was thirty-eight, but appeared thirty. He spoke of the Napoleonic wars with a knowledge of strategy and military precision which amazed an Italian citizen like myself, incapable of saying how many regiments went to make a brigade. Now we have all become strategists, but our youth in those days was almost proud of its peaceful ignorance. War? Utopias for the Germans and French. Not even Adua had moved us; a thunderbolt and a distant thunder. '*Vous ne croyez pas à la guerre?*' Paul Adam asked me. I, with the candour of a diplomat, replied that I did not. We were, I remember, at the *Féria*, which was a Spanish café in the World Exhibition, on the banks of the Seine, and while the rattles and the 'olèolé' made the night air tremble, you could see the reflections of the lights quiver on the water.

We had with us five very beautiful ladies: his wife, Marthe Adam, a rosebud, sweet and in love, who, when she smiled, turned towards her husband as if to share with him even a momentary joy, and now she is habited in black and white wool, a rosary hanging from her leathern girdle; his sister-in-law, the novelist Mühlfeld's wife, small, fragile, dainty and bright, with a brain in perpetual motion, who knew everything and wanted to

know everything, from politics to the metric system; the youngest sister of Madame Adam and Madame Mühlfeld, Suzanne Meyer, tall, limpid and stupefied as the dawn, engaged to Leonetto Capiello; the wife of Henri de Régnier, Marie de Hérédia, brown and powdered, who was not yet Gérard d'Houville and published verses only in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, signing them with three stars, but Anatole France, who had already read some of her prose, proclaimed her the most perfect prose-writer of France; and, lastly, the wife of Pierre Louys, her sister, reserved and silent in a dark green silk dress which shone like the waters of the Seine down below. With their husbands and fiancés, Adam, Mühlfeld, Régnier, Louys, Capiello, they were all round that perfect Parnassian, the academic hidalgo José Maria de Hérédia, short, replete and ceremonious, black eyes, grizzled little beard, the paunch of a monsignore, the little feet of a woman.

Hérédia asked, with sonorous adjectives, for news of an Italian actress, whom, beautiful as Medea and passionate as Sappho, he had known at Venice. 'She is called Pesanà'. I was lost, but Madame de Régnier warned me: '*Prenez garde, mon père a été à Venise il y a trente ans.*' He was speaking of Giacinta Pezzana.

The Spanish dancer who was the queen of this theatre, hearing that Hérédia was there in the first row to applaud her, came down from the platform to thank him and took a sherbet with us. She was dressed in red-and-black, and she fanned herself with her blond mantilla. Heated by the dance, she gave forth an odour of civet and jasmine. '*Vous ne croyez pas à la guerre?*' insisted Paul Adam in the midst of all that music, lights and perfumes. '*Nous en reparlerons dans dix ans.*'

He was mistaken but little. In 1916 I accompanied him to Monfalcone as far as the trenches of Salient 12. He whispered to me: '*Je voudrais bien tirer un coup de fusil.*' But it was one of those quiet days when, beneath the reflected glow of quarries and sea, the world seemed empty, fascinated by fear. Not one of the officers placed before the men in line would permit Adam to break the enchanted silence with a shot. Seated among the basilica-like ruins of the *Adria-Werke*, he reminded me of that evening on the banks of the Seine. '*Vous ne croyez pas à la guerre . . .*'

In literature one of his pet aversions was Molière. He accused him of being a defender of instinct against reason, classic in style, but disorderly and romantic in his soul: '*Ce royal tapissier*', he called him, sticking his chin out stiffly. The *Précieuses* had assaulted the intelligence and culture of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, had defended Scapin and the lackeys against their masters, with the Latin of Diafoirus had made the public laugh at the expense of science. Adam defended Arnulphe and his proposal to marry, at forty, the candid Agnès. Too young for him? But this was a serious and well-thought-out marriage, one which benefits society.

One evening, dining with Adam, Rodin was listening to this invective. He liked Adam because of the energy with which he flung himself head foremost into the defence of his ideas, nor, I thought, did he dare to contradict him, overcome by his literary fecundity and by his wealth of quotations and apt arguments. But all at once he said: '*Pourtant dans la forme ce romantique involontaire était simple, solide et classique, latin comme vous le dites. Et en fait d'art il n'y a que la forme qui compte. . . .*' After

a pause he concluded: '*Il n'y a que la forme qui dure. Je parle en sculpteur, vous savez.*' Adam was as courteous as he could be, smiled, accompanied his answer with a gesture of his right hand as though he were offering the sacramental wafer to Rodin: '*Mon cher maître, qu'est-ce que la forme sans la pensée?*' Rodin gave a hard tug at his flowing beard: '*Cela peut être la beauté. Regardez votre chien. N'est-il pas beau?*'

The Adams' dog was a white greyhound, one of the Russian greyhounds with pink eyes and silky hair known as *Borzoi.* After every one had gone Adam called him, made him stand up against his squared chest, petted him: '*Tu as sauvé Molière ce soir, et tu ne le sauras jamais.*'

As for me, I took the part of the dog and of Molière.

## PIERRE LOUYS

FLORENCE,
*June* 5, 1925.

DEATH has liberated Pierre Louys[1] from a sad similitude of life. A finished and stupefied recluse, nothing in him any longer recalled the delicate humanist with his soft blue eyes, his quiet voice, his slow, precise speech, his reserve which I should like to call monastic were it not that I feared to hear, bursting forth from his books, the laughter of Bilytis and Chrysis. Besides, whoever has read the preface to *Aphrodite* knows that he too had a religion after his own fashion and a fierce contempt for its heretics.

I had known him in Cairo in 1898. He had gone there to pass the winter with his brother George Louys the French Minister in Egypt, later risen to the rank of Ambassador to St. Petersburg. The house, rising over a garden of palms and rose-trees, was cool and silent, that living silence of Oriental houses where, in the half-shadow, over the soft carpets, servants in babouches and white tunics come and go and you do not hear even their breath.

At that time the two brothers were bachelors, and the elder had for Louys, already weak-chested and ailing, a

[1] French poet, author of *Chansons de Bilytis* and *La Femme et le Pantin.*

maternal benignity. Louys was writing *La femme et le Pantin.* He had gone to Spain especially, and had brought back from there among other things a collection of short popular poems, all about love, and sometimes he read and translated them to us, commenting on their metres and their sources, which might be even Persian or Indian. Europe sooty and feverish as the pistons of its machines: the European dressed in mourning colours under gloomy black-silk chimney-pot: hypocritical and over-subtle European civilization seemed to us farther off than the Pole, and the only habitable world the warm, perfumed zone which from Tokio to Seville, from Teheran to Fez, still embraced the world like a festoon of bare fruits and flowers. Neither of us was thirty yet.

Louys, learned in Latin and Greek, relying on classical texts and classical imagery, spoke of living female beauty with the same candid interest with which to-day one is allowed to speak only of statues. With his long head and his sharp chin, he was above all a theorist, lucid and proud, and, like our Agnolo Firenzuola, he wished to size up this perfect beauty and proportion in geometric and arithmetical formulae, because, as he said, there is a prosody and a metric of the body from the forehead to the foot quite as severe as those set by the ancients to watch over the excellence of their poetry. That year the notorious Princesse de Caraman-Chimay was passing the winter in Cairo, with some hairy tzigane, and we had met her one morning, blonde, puffy, and perspiring, in the spice-bazaar amidst a kitchen-aroma of pepper and cinnamon. Pierre Louys had cursed her for several days: '*On l'admire, on l'applaudit, on nous la sert dans tous les journaux, cette vieille rubensienne de kermesse. Il faudrait la déshabiller*

*sur une place publique pour montrer à nos contemporains la décrépitude de leurs goûts. Que l'immortelle Aphrodite nous pardonne nos péchés.*' His accommodating and diplomatic brother, on hearing this invective, maintained that woman, like politics, must be judged according to the climate, the period and the needs. But Pierre Louys, living in Egypt, thought only of the Alexandria of the Ptolemies as it had been described by Strabo in his Geography and more particularly by himself in *Aphrodite.*

Who will ever tell the truth about the morals and the ardour of erotic poets? And how much wakeful chastity was required from Theocritus or from Meleager down to Louys, to write of love with purity of language and certainty of accent? Only gardeners know the meticulous care and the cautious diet of hot-house flowers.

My friend, that winter, granted me the honour of introducing me to a very young friend of his—I do not remember whether she was a Berber or a Hebrew maiden— in the dusty suburb of Cairo which looks out on the crown of yellow and purple hills around the minarets over the tombs of the Mamelukes. He loaded me too with packages of sweets and sugar-candy. Beside a little mud-coloured house his lady love, with her black greasy hair combed in a hundred plaits, dressed in a tunic of white satin and a golden necklace, was waiting for him under the shade of a sycamore, in front of a little kitchen-garden of garlic and lettuce. We found her seated beside a chestnut-coloured puppy, on a mattress of red calico. She smiled at us and set to work swallowing sweets with the greediness of a kitten. But Louys allowed her no peace. Now he would make her open her arms to show me that when she spread them out she was as wide as she was tall, and

he turned them around and around to prove to me that the dimple at the elbow disappeared; and he raised her tresses so that I might see that her little ears were set much higher up than on the head of our decadent European women, and he made her raise her chin to reveal to me that her neck was a perfect cylinder.

The visit was long and minute. I felt as though I were a doctor in a recruiting office. As long as the sweetmeats lasted for her and the puppy, she was patient. All at once she rebelled, went back into the house, flinging rapid invectives at us, and slammed the door in our faces. The dog had remained outside, with us, and he too barked furiously at us. We went away. Louys could not find his cigarette-case again, which had a ruby on the clasp.

A few years later, on a summer afternoon, Louys, Debussy and I were wandering through the museum of the Louvre. In the great gallery we had stopped before Titian's 'Jupiter and Antiope.' Debussy, in front of us, with his head lowered, stretched out his high, box-like forehead, as though to catch the sound and the echoes of the hunting-horn over the waters and the meadows of the divine landscape, as far as the last cadence of the blue mountain at the horizon. Whereupon Louys at his back complained to me of the form of Antiope, saying that from her chin to her abdomen she would have been rejected by the Greeks as a vulgar blasphemy. Debussy turned, looked at him stupefied. '*Tu n'es qu'un théoricien*', he said to him.

## BONI

ROME,
*July* 11, 1925.

NOW that Giacomo Boni [1] is dead, I want to remember him when, as a merry and untiring young man, he worked at scraping and searching the Roman Forum, rather than when, infirm and prophetic, he went up to the Palatine to dig and live. Who at that time, between 1898 and 1910, saw and heard him, saw and heard one of this century's most singular and fascinating men. Solidly built and heavy in his peasant's shoes, dressed in rough wool or linen, his face red between his blue eyes and his beard, which early began to change its gold to silver, he used to throw into his mixture of Greek, Latin and Italian some native Venetian expressions which made even the dead in this holy place start. For he was born in Venice, this priest of the *Dea Romana* who, when he picked up from the Roman Forum a lump of muddy tufa to offer it for a visitor's admiration, seemed a celebrant about to offer the holy wafer.

Lord Kitchener, on hearing that he was a Venetian, asked him: 'Are you sure?' But Roberto Paribeni when writing of him affirms that there have been many provincial

[1] Giacomo Boni was for years the leading spirit in the task of unearthing the buried treasures of ancient Rome. Anatole France has immortalized him in *Sur la Pierre Blanche*.

Romans, and that they are fresher and more enthusiastic than Roman citizens.

I recollect the wonder, indeed the anger, of an old Trastevere artist, Ettore Ferrari's father, when one evening many years ago, at the Artists' Club in Via Margutta, Cesare Pascarella told him very seriously that Romans had never existed, and that Rome had always been a big hotel. 'Yes?' replied the former, shrugging his shoulders, 'and Cicero?' 'Cicero was from Arpino.' 'And Virgil?' 'He was from Mantua.' 'And Ovid?' 'He was from the Abruzzi.' 'And Horace?' 'From Apulia.' 'And Seneca?' 'He was Spanish.' 'And Cato?' 'He was from Frascati.' And then the questioner, stifled, shouted at Pascarella: 'And you, what are you?' Pascarella replied quietly, knocking the ash from his pipe: 'I was born here, but I am only a visitor.'

While working in the Forum, Giacomo Boni had his studio in the Convent of Santa Francesca Romana, which he had restored and changed into a museum for his excavations.

On the table, between heaps of maps and plans, a branch of laurel in a Murano glass protected an Egyptian bronze head, which he used, I do not know why, for comparing with the skulls found in the pre-Romulean cemetery between the Temple of Antoninus and the Temple of Romulus. On the walls an immense photograph of the base of Trajan's Column, and on the bookshelves cases full of Roman money and bones. The window near the writing-table was entirely filled with the inscription which is cut on the front of the Arch of Titus: *Senatus Populusque Romanus Divo Tito.*

Sometimes, in the winter, Boni covered his head with

the scarlet woollen cap of a skier. It suited him perfectly, for it is only when one looks at the Forum from afar, and in perspective, that it seems grey and brown, with marble and dark tufa. On the other hand, if one walks around the Forum on a bright winter morning, everything swept clean by the *tramontana*, among the laurels and pines and cypresses planted by Boni, it shimmers with so many colours that one can easily picture its multicoloured appearance of twenty or twenty-five centuries ago. As one descends by the Via Sacra from this studio, the red porphyry of the broken columns of the basilica of Constantine and of the intact ones of the Temple of Romulus, the *cipollino* of the columns before the Temple of Faustina and the mosaics of Egyptian porphyry, Numidian yellow, green serpentine in the pavements of the taverns at the entrance of the Aemilian Basilica—all seemed to vie with the flaming cap on that ardent head.

To follow the descriptions, the tales, the comments, the comparisons, the quotations, the hypotheses, the digressions and the counsels of Boni if he took you to see his discoveries and new things—perhaps the temple of the divine Julius on the altar where the body of Caesar was burned, the Regia or the Comitium, the *lapis niger* or the inscribed *stele*, the Aemilian basilica or the spring of Juturna, the tombs and the skeletons, the trees and shrubs of authentic Romanity, which he was planting —were you learned or ignorant, Italian or Hyperborean, left you open-mouthed.

Dates and facts, chemistry or physiology, ethnography or hagiography, botany or economics, agriculture or engineering, hygiene or hydraulics, all were mixed in and hustled each other in his talk. And if you tried to think

over what you had heard in the hope of remembering it all, the deeper you sank.

When speaking, Boni would stop, wait a moment for you to get ready, and then he would begin slowly and in a low voice, sometimes veiled and sometimes strident and cutting. He had few gestures, his gaze travelled far and wide, and he seldom looked at his questioner. He quickly jumped from historical and topographical information to the recital of myths and of religious and moral symbols. At the call of the magician the whole valley seemed a temple, and a meeting-place for gods and heroes; every ruin was a monument, and every monument an incentive: your own slippery and miserable littleness was desperately distant from those golden centuries when, 'twixt earth and heaven, conversation between living and dead was easy and continuous.

Midday sounded. From the Araceli and Santa Francesca, from the Consolazione to San Luca, the bells of all the churches which have encircled the Pagan Forum called and replied to one another, and the bright daylight was full of sounds and echoes. Then Boni would put a little spray of laurel or of myrtle in your hand, as if he were bestowing upon you a regal gift, accompanying it with a solemn command: *Nec fortuitum spernere caespitem Leges sinebant*, or with a line from Virgil: *Et vos, o lauri, carpam et te, proxima myrte* . . . so that when you found yourself in your little *botticella*, with this spray in your hand, and waked up again, it was almost mortifying to find the stairs of your commonplace house, to open a newspaper (which cost a ha'penny then), to open your table-napkin and, dwarfish and mortal, without any rites and formulae, begin your daily luncheon.

Sometimes Giacomo Boni would invite us to his house, a simple and airy home on the top floor. And he would offer us a meal in ancient Roman style, *ab ovo usque ad mala* in black terra-cotta basins, with wooden spoons and no forks. The stiffest test was the *pulmentum*, a porridge made of spelt and corn, which he himself ladled out, and the *mulsum*, wine mixed with honey. But Giacomo did not complain if we, corrupted by too many centuries of barbarism, ate little and drank less. Anatole France sighed out: *Hélas, si j'ai le coeur de Caton, je n'en ai pas l'estomac.*

When Boni went up to the Palatine, to live in the Casino Farnese, little by little, with age and illness, something of the old Ruskin, whom he had loved like a faithful son, appeared in his austere and bearded face, and also in his mind, anxious not only to discover truth under the earth or in books, but actually to benefit mankind and the world. He was twenty-five when, finding himself with John Ruskin in the Duomo in Pisa, he asked him if, of all beautiful things, of earth, sea or heaven, the best were not a kind act.

This for him was now no longer a question. From places like the Palatine, resplendent and full of history and glory, there goes up a perpetual breeze of fever. To live, I repeat, night and day among the dust and ruins of the houses of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Hadrian and Severus, and to know all about them, as Boni did, their exploits and faces, gestures, words and caprices, and to have, under so much classic culture, some of the yeast of Romance: from this there is no escape. The wish to take care of and cure the world, to liberate oneself from the great weight of the past, by a prophetic flight into the

future, to mould with one's own hands, in competition with these gifts, more present and weighty than living bodies, a little grandeur and happiness for all: this desire invades heart and brain, especially if they have the throb and power of Giacomo Boni's heart and brain.

His friends suffered because he published nothing of his past or recent excavations, made so conscientiously and intelligently. The shadows deepened over this maimed body. His face grew more emaciated, his hands more knotted, his step more difficult, his voice weaker.

We wished he had set down on paper at least the secret order and the chief discoveries and the reasonable hypotheses. Instead, the more illness tied him to these hills and ruins, the farther flew his soul. One day it was a crusade against drunkenness and wine, the next a project for reclaiming the desert with plantations of broom, or of dividing up uncultivated land among the war-veterans; then a propaganda for dancing in schools, or a better system for manuring the ground by fixing the nitrogen in the atmosphere, to draw out from the fumes of anthracite and lignite ammonia and tar to purify the waters of the Venetian lagoon.

Every time I saw him up there, I listened to some new idea, which he was tirelessly backing up by statistics, diagrams and experiments. When he thought of placing on the Vittorio Emanuele monument a carillon of tubular bells, he made a small one for his study, and taught his servant to play it properly by striking more or less strongly this or that pipe, and as he listened to its music floating out over the Forum, with half-shut eyes he would say: 'If Italian music played by the carillon on the Capitol were broadcast, it would reach our emigrants in America,

in Australia, in Asia, every day. Think of it: the voice of Rome would encircle the world.'

He was a poet, or rather an artist; and he has given his life to science. During the thirty or forty years of his work, uncovering ruins and tombs, he never once discovered anything which was in itself beautiful. Mutilated walls, pieces of column, broken bases, blocks of concrete, veins of tufa, paving-stones: he made them live again by means of knowledge, veneration and fantasy. With him present and speaking, they became the signs and symbols of palaces, temples, altars, fountains, stupendous statues and divine names. When he was not there, they became again poor and worn-out topographical signs, bones from a graveyard. His religious fervour in hiding, with knowledge and poetry, the present poverty, was increased by his secret sorrow that he could not offer even one discovery which without any words would be for all alive to-day as beautiful as are the sculptures under the Arch of Titus or the paintings in the tablinum of Augustus. With time this ardent imagination and second sight became almost an end in themselves. . . . But fortune was coming to him.

Among the ruins of the Frangipani tower in the heart of the Palatine he found a mutilated Victory of Pentelic marble which is all poise and flight. He had it placed on a tree-stump near his study table, and, up to his last day, he who could hardly move, contemplated and adored this candid and palpitating statue, whose peplum, swayed by the wind in the race, is crushed against the rounded breasts, against the smooth abdomen, against the firm legs. And he died beside her.

## VALÉRY

PARIS,
*October* 15, 1925.

PAUL VALÉRY [1] speaks Italian like you and me, but with a coquettish smile because he enjoys hearing the sound of his own Italian. If he hesitates, it is to hunt for an exacter and more significant word; even a word of dialect. He succeeds in taking the measure of his interlocutor by the nicety and refinement of the Italian that he uses. He esteems a statesman of ours with whom he conversed in Rome about poetry and poets a little less since hearing from his lips that the Italian poets live as they can 'from hand to mouth'. 'Not very choice, don't you think?'

We are in the *salon* of Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, who has described in prose and verse '*Les délices de l'Italie*'. The *salon* is crowded with young but extremely literary writers, that is, permeated with the classics and with Latin and Italian memories: *méditerranéens*, as poor Canudò roared out so many years ago, raising his face over his round little beard and swelling out his chest to resemble Paul Adam. Valéry and I lean out of the window. It gives on to the rectangular courtyard of the Palais

[1] Paul Valéry, great French poet and critic, follower of Mallarmé, has succeeded to Anatole France as France's leading man of letters.

Royal, vast and regular, with its continuous arcades like the Piazza San Marco. In the evening air a little blue mist descends like sleep on the few illuminated arches, and softly closes and extinguishes them.

I remember how I read for the first time, shortly after the war, a book by Paul Valéry. It was the *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*, and I read it in Venice itself while the city was being liberated from its war-time dress and silence, and the Venetians were crowding back over the bridge singing and laughing as water rushes happily through a tube into its reopened basin. The world around was still aghast. Stunned with the explosions and the anthems nobody could recover the natural tone of his voice and of his peace-time soul. Many lamps in the alleys were still painted dark blue, and over the stained-glass windows of the churches were still stretched black curtains like veils over eyes. The siren of a boat, almost like a last signal of alarm, made the passers-by look upwards to question the sky. The reflection of the old stars in the mirror of the lagoon still seemed to us the reflection of the cannons flashing between earth and sea below at Cortellazzo. Even though victorious, we were convalescents and on our walks the earth seemed to us as mobile as the waters.

In those days Valéry was the first who restored me to a sense of stability, to the pride of indulgence, to a respect, above all, for intelligence and that art of reasoning which the Thirty forbade Socrates to teach. Of himself he affirmed: '*Je ne crois pas à la puissance propre du délire, à la nécessité de l'ignorance, aux éclairs de l'absurde, à l'incohérence créatrice. L'enthousiasme n'est pas un état d'âme pour un écrivain.*' Of Leonardo he pointed out:

'*Son élégance supérieure nous déconcerte. Cette absence d'embarras, de prophétisme et de pathétisme; ces idéaux précis; ce tempérament entre les curiosités et les puissances, toujours rétabli par un maître de l'équilibre . . .*' Thankful for these gifts, I set to work to procure his other books. I succeeded only in getting their titles. Even in Paris the booksellers answered that they were undiscoverable treasures. Now they have reprinted several of them, now his Socratic dialogues on Dancing and on Architecture are dear and familiar to me as friends who, when you seek them and question them, seem to have always thought only of you, of the most affectionate way of convincing, consoling and aiding you alone.

At last I look their author in the face, leaning opposite me on the railing of this balcony. On one side the light of the clouded sky plays on him; on the other the lamps of the drawing-room illuminate him. One half of him is without country, vague, and immortal; the other half is of to-day, extremely Parisian, bony, armed with a monocle. For an Athenian returned to life I had expected him to be more athletic and Apollonian. His hair is grey; his eyes clear and round, well defended between the high cheek-bones and the bushy eyebrows; his moustaches are short and bristling under a small and sensitive nose; his face is fleshless, lengthened over the cheeks by two vertical furrows; his gestures are most mobile. Valéry explains to me the origin of his perfect Italian. The real miracle is that he picked it up at Genoa. Until he was twenty he went every year to pass his vacations at Genoa, where his mother lived, a Gemignani of Capodistria, but the daughter of Milanese parents. Of Italian authors he has read only Dante,

Petrarch, Machiavelli. 'But I have read them whole: from the first page to the last, and I re-read them.'

'And Leonardo?'

He makes the gesture of covering his eyes with both hands:

'If Leonardo were alive, Heaven knows how he would treat me for having lighted on him as the mouthpiece of my thoughts. Do you want to know how I happened thirty years ago to write the *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*? I had talked of the writings and drawings of Leonardo with Léon Daudet, and one evening the latter, resolute as he is, declared to Madame Juliette Adam that if she wanted an original study of Leonardo for her *Nouvelle Revue* she must ask me for it. Madame Adam asked me for it. I hesitated, because I am lazy, or at least very slow in my work; but at last I consented. A few months passed and my pages remained unpublished. Madame Adam informed me that she found the beginning of my study obscure. I answered her: "*Je regrette, Madame, d'avoir fait quelque chose sur commande mais pas sur mesure.*" She was a dear lady, and at last the article appeared. I also wrote the dialogue "Eupalinos ou l'Architecte" as preface to a book of architectural drawings published by the house of Sue and Mare: a magnificently printed book, so well divided and arranged that they even told me how many words my foreword had to contain. I selected the dialogue form because in the end it would be easier for me to cut here and there any superfluous lines.'

I interrupted these unexpected confidences as gently as I was able. Valéry is no longer smiling at his Italian, but at his own modesty Does he enjoy my astonish-

ment? Is he content with having led back to the crude earth this credulous reader and admirer who wished perforce to see him in the Elysian Fields? I commence talking politics with the ardent Marsan, and art with the placid Du Bos. 'Did you not know Paul Valéry?' 'No. How old is he?' They tell me: he is exactly my age. An insignificant fact, a census figure which ought to humiliate me. Instead, it brings me nearer to him, with that hidden fraternity of men on whom youth turned her back yesterday for ever and who of a truth, watching her vanish into thin air, have sighed in unison.

I come back and sit down beside Valéry once more. He offers me his open cigarette-case: 'Italian. Macedonias'—and laughs. He speaks of d'Annunzio, of the visit that he paid him last year, of the flight of that diabolical motor-launch from Desenzano to Gardone amidst clouds of water and bursts of wind that threatened to strip him of hair, clothes and skin. When he entered the poet's house, heated like a furnace, he saw him come towards him, all shaven, beard, moustaches, eyebrows: '*Me voilà*'—so that he seemed to have shaven for him. And they embraced: '*Je sais bien, c'était l'accolade d'un roi.*'

He tells it all so that it is a joy to listen to him, lively, picturesque, ready to choose the most significant detail and to sharpen it so that it may penetrate. And he takes an elegant pleasure in these gymnastics, in front of an audience which knows the rules of silence and of applause. The Socratic dialogues are far away; far away Socrates, Phaedrus, Eryximachus, spirits and shades.

'*Les vivants ont un corps qui leur permet de sortir de la connaissance et d'y rentrer. Ils sont faits d'une maison et*

*d'une abeille*', says his Socrates, thinking of Paul Valéry. But now my astonishment has given way to reason. Why contrast this living, agile, fervent Valéry, with his toil and his doubts and his jokes, with Valéry the poet, classical and marmoreal? Art is for him the better part of his life, his paradise, as it ought to be for all artists and poets who deserve this paradise. He enters it whenever he wishes, and constructs, measures, orders, adorns, polishes a page, a period, a strophe, just as the world ought to be ordered and arranged. Either art is a model or it is not art. We Italians, who have fallen back on to the easy poverty of 'writing as you speak', of the statue that seems real, of poetry that resembles the shorthand version of a conversation, we have reached the point where we experience great difficulty in understanding these two opposed worlds of the poet; the good fortune which is allotted him, even in the melancholy of purgatory, of having at every hour open before him the white loophole of the page looking out on to the sky of a paradise. In our ingenuity, we image all the women of Athens as resembling the Niké of Olympia or the Capitoline Amazon, and all the Athenians built like the Doryphoros of Polycletus or the Hermes of Praxiteles. In life they were our equals in looks, and perhaps one of them looked like Valéry; they are so many gods now that we behold them in marble and bronze, eternal. What we lack is art to comfort us in life, to transform us in death. And we believe that Socrates always spoke with the logical and musical precision with which we revel at hearing him speak in the dialogues of Plato. Perhaps, somewhere in Europe, a little Socrates exists. Our trouble is that he cannot find a Plato.

The themes which are offered him by a patron, Dancing or Architecture, the Method of Leonardo or the crisis of intelligence since the war, are to Valéry what the vague questions of a disciple were to Socrates, who gradually rose from them, wheeling with open wings, until he reached his own ether, all light. For this reason Valéry does not hesitate to explain to me with simplicity that all his prose, or almost all, was written to order. What does it matter? It would be like judging De Pinedo's aerial periplus by its point of departure—Sesto Calende or Marina da Pisa. The thing is to see where he gets to, and how.

'I work a great deal. I write very little. Sometimes the world seizes me. I passed many years in solitude, in seclusion, in the desire, even in the will, to be alone. And now the devil plays this joke on me of throwing me into this vain fever and into this useless going and coming.' He means the visits that he must pay for his imminent election to the Academy. He tells me of Pierre Louys who first induced him to publish his verse. They were both twenty. Louys wrote him letters upon letters about Greek poetry, about the essence of poetry, about this verity: that, from the *Iliad* to *Alcione*, from the *Carmina* to the *Charmes*, there are only two real heroes of every poem, the vigour and the sweetness of the verses. One day Louys wanted those letters back again. Valéry returned them reluctantly, asked for a receipt with an explicit promise to give them back on a certain day. A year, two years passed. 'And the letters?' 'Did you read the receipt?' Louys asked him. At last Valéry read it attentively: the promised restitution was to take place on the thirtieth of February.

He narrates, and I think of these two poets whose fame is going towards the future winged and serene, so light is the weight of the works that it bears. In a hundred years they may also write on Paul Valéry's monument the epigram of Meleager:

> 'Earth, the mother of all, cover Hexigenes lightly;
> He was not heavy, when he lived, on you.'

## MAETERLINCK

FLORENCE,
*April* 6, 1924.

THE Sicilians are furious against Maurice Maeterlinck, who, a few days ago, discovering Sicily, found it sterile, monotonous and dirty. The Sicilians are right, but their anger shows that they, at least those among them that protested, have not read anything by Maeterlinck.

Maeterlinck, notwithstanding his admiration for Marcus Aurelius, or rather for the wisdom of Marcus Aurelius, in whose Meditations he has sought so much help and counsel, is the most Gothic of all living writers: Gothic with all that the word connotes of mistiness, half-shadows, mystery, tension, nightmares, sleep-walking, slipshod goodness, aspiration towards the Infinite, and consequent falls, if possible on a pillow. With his easy French vocabulary he became the suavest consoler of us Latins when we had grown resigned to Latin decadence, generally recognized and demonstrated, as we knew, by science.

His most original books, *The Treasure of the Humble*, and *Wisdom and Destiny*, are, in fact the long, sweet and tremulous croonings of a sick-nurse at the bedside of an invalid, or rather of a dying man, amidst camphor, ether and oxygen; and his most suggestive and memorable dramas are enacted on the threshold of death, so narrow a

threshold that, if you shake yourself and take a step, you are either dashed down precipitously into gloom or you turn your back on the author and burst out laughing, for his welfare and your own. He himself, in the preface to his first drama, *La Princesse Maleine*, confesses that his characters are sleep-walkers, and worse still, he adds, a bit deaf.

And this man was expected to love Sicily? When he declares that all the Doric temples there strike him as being cast in the same mould, I should like to embrace him for being so sincere a Goth. If we were only equally sincere in the face of the fashions, the architecture and the fluted words of the North!

I have not seen Maeterlinck again since he came in March 1915 with Jules Destrée to describe to us the insolence and the ferocity of the Germans who had invaded his country. Destrée at once took possession of his audience, held it and moved it at his will. Poor Maeterlinck, fat and shaven, slow and timid, his grey hair arranged with careful art to hide incipient baldness, first looked at the crowd with the round, frightened eyes of a lamb dragged to the slaughter, then, with lowered eyes and lowered voice, read his sheets of paper, and stuttered and perspired.

We applauded him all the same because at that time he did not mind our fleas. In the end, behind the scenes, he unbosomed himself to me: '*On me pousse et je me laisse pousser. Mais quel tourment de parler en public! On ne m'entend pas, on ne me comprend pas, on m'applaudit: c'est très bien. Mais il faut que je rentre à Nice.*' He owned and still owns in the neighbourhood of Nice, at Grasse, amidst the flower-fields cultivated by the per-

fumers of Paris, a little villa on the hill, called *Les Abeilles* in memory of a book of his, exquisite in its intelligence, its admiration of bees and its little faith in man *'Il faut que je rentre à Nice.'*

He had also leased somewhere in the North, between Belgium and France, a château, St. Wandrille, more or less tumble-down and mediaeval, in a great park, and had there staged Macbeth in a vivid way—I mean, not on a stage, but in the real park, on the real terraces, under the real towers, with spectators running after the actors, up and down, hither and thither, from scene to scene: a marvel, the papers had said. To induce him to speak of art, I asked him for news of that romantic abbey of his and of the phantoms he had summoned up in it. He answered: *'J'y ai laissé beaucoup de vin, du bon vin. Je l'ai caché dans les tuyaux du calorifère. Une bouteille poussait l'autre. Maintenant les dangers sont deux: ou les allemands allument le calorifère; ou les allemands découvrent mon vin et le boivent.'*

A delightful companion for eating and walking, if he were not the great Maeterlinck. But it was an arduous task to attempt to discover, behind that square, sun-burnt face, in that powerful frame, the mystic poet and his aspirations, to transform that good Silenus into a sylph. Had he not himself written that we ought to accustom ourselves to live like an angel scarcely born, like a woman in love, or like a man about to die? Perhaps he had made an honest attempt to do so; but it was clear that he had not succeeded.

After lunch Destrée began once more to speak of war and invasion, in his simple, low tone which was the most touching and convincing. All at once Maeterlinck inter-

rupted him: '*Moi je voudrais leur coller un grand coup à la machoire*', and setting himself up on his legs against an imaginary German, he made the gesture, accompanying the blow with his head and chest, following it up. I stepped backwards, and, forgetting his books, I remembered a photograph of him in breeches and a sweater, practising boxing. I mentioned it to him. He answered: 'Of course, I do a little boxing to work off my fat. Unfortunately it has become known and all the professional pugilists who pass through Nice want to give me a lesson. There is no escape for me. They even send me their consul. I wear myself to pieces, perspire, and don't learn anything. A short time ago a most amiable American arrived: "Grant me the honour to cross gloves with you." I had to say yes. One, two, three: I do not know how it happened, I gave him a black eye. He was in ecstasy, wished to be photographed at my side. I was dumbfounded, and all the while we were being photographed I was saying to myself "I hope to goodness he won't begin again." But he was a noble soul; he didn't want to.'

That was the only time I ever heard him pronounce the word *soul*: he who uses it ten times on every page.

# BARRÈS

FLORENCE,
*December* 6, 1923.

BARRÈS [1] is dead. If we should be sincere at least with the dead, I must confess that I have never succeeded in loving him: not in the sense in which one says 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'. To esteem Maurice Barrès for his uprightness and his art; to admire him for the watchful harmony of his life; to re-read him for the enjoyment of the music, mainly in the bass, which he knew how to extract from the few strings of his lyre; to long for his wise and serious company—this indeed was a pleasure and a duty. But really to love him was utterly impossible.

And yet the man could not have been more affable. After months and years of absence you would go to see him in his little house on the Boulevard Maillot, in the vast studio whose windows opened on to the superb trees of the *Bois* and whose low bookcases were crowned by photographs of the Sistine vaults, where betwixt God and Man you cannot see which is the mightier, and by an oil-portrait of Bonaparte as First Consul, emaciated by anxiety; and Barrès would get up from his desk, with

[1] Maurice Barrès, famous both for the purity of his literary style and for his intransigent attitude as a conservative and nationalist in politics.

unvarying solicitude and come towards you with his hands outstretched, slightly stiff, always dressed in black or a dark colour, his thin neck supported by the high starched collar, so that if he wanted graciously to unbend a little he would lower his head towards the left shoulder and in that position gaze at you with the melancholy look of an eaglet chained to his stake. Under his smooth, black hair, under the long lock which divided his forehead slantingly from right to left, and fell on the left temple like the silk tassel of a nightcap, his thin face was earth-coloured. And as his cheek-bones were prominent and far apart, his jaw flat and his chin slightly retreating, this face of his, from in front, seemed long, sad and solemn; in profile, sharp and aggressive. There was an additional contrast in that burning spareness: the wide, thick, sensual lips, the lips of someone else, scarcely hidden by the thin light moustache. The years had formed at the corners of his mouth a network of tiny wrinkles, as though Age, chiselling that haughty mask, had desisted from these incisions in the face of such signs of youth and ardour.

One must not expect too many revelations from a face. But there you are: remembering him as he was, celebrated and voluptuous, inflexible and curious, egoist and patriot, politician and poet, those two faces and those contrasts may well reveal to our eyes the effort of will and style which, ever since he had written *Un Homme libre* and *Le culte du moi*, he attempted to reconcile into one piece, to submit to a rule, to obey it at all costs, to win proselytes to it by the seduction of his art and his example; or, thinking only of the writer, to dominate with a Stendhalian austerity his ardour worthy of a Michelet. '*Je suis tout ensemble un maître de danse et sa première dan-*

*seuse*', he wrote as a young man, when he still enjoyed smiling at himself.

One day, in the spring, I think, of 1902, Barrès took me from his house to the Invalides, in front of Napoleon's tomb. He himself drove his little grey car. Erect and rigid, he kept his hands on the wheel, which at that time was low, with the studied indifference with which a smart rider keeps the reins on the saddle-bow. Who among our younger generation had not read in the *Déracinés* his pages on that great tomb? Italy and France had but recently returned to a reciprocal understanding. I had published on this theme an interview with Delcassé, then minister for foreign affairs, and my interview had been talked about.

Leaning on the balustrade, looking down into the round crypt at the red sarcophagus within the circle of the banners, I tried to make Barrès speak of Italy. But I blundered in my first feint: Bonaparte, Corsican—Italian and French. I had hardly ended my approach *sotto voce*, when I perceived my error: did not Napoleon thus become, he of all people, the most glorious of the *déracinés*? Barrès moved in silence towards the exit. When he reached the door he said to me: '*Italien, italien. Mais, mon ami, vos rois ne sont-ils pas des savoisiens?*' And before I had time to breathe, he took refuge behind a book: 'What book do you recommend to me on the history of the house of Savoy? *J'adore Charles-Albert.*'

Another time we spoke only of the Pope. Barrès was flirting with Catholicism, although he never entered a church unless to see if it was beautiful or to read the great names on the slabs of the tombs. But that day Cardinal Sarto had been elected Pope, and Barrès had

to write an article on the new Pontiff for the *Echo de Paris.*

Marvellous workers, these celebrated Parisian writers: so many articles a month, so many books a year, and, for Barrès or Daudet, the Chamber as well, and the elections, public meetings, banquets, speeches. They find no rest except when they are ill. Their work assaults the public frontally with trooped regiments; and they find their public in a compact mass, gathered together in one city, indeed in two or three districts of a city, and the effect, so lucky are they, is sure. There you have Barrès, in a little restaurant in front of the Madeleine, sitting next to an obscure Italian journalist, his pencil and notebook half a hand's-breadth from his plate; a mouthful, a question, a line. Simple and practical questions, such as might be expected from a good reporter.

'*Donnez-moi sa figure.* Is he tall, short, dark, white-haired? Did you ever hear him speak? A fine voice? What? Quarrels with the canons of St. Mark's? We mustn't say that. Right: the ceremony for the laying of the first stone of the rebuilt Campanile. Next to the minister Nasi? N-a-s-i. *Ecrivez-moi le nom.*' He ate with a good appetite, wrote quickly, with that slanting, tiny, rapid handwriting, leaving out the dots on the i's and the crosses on the t's; the most unexpected handwriting in a man of such tense will-power, especially to an Italian, who at once compared it with the printed hand of d'Annunzio, with whom Barrès might for so many reasons have been compared, and to whom the art of Barrès owed so much (but none of the necrologies of these days has said so).

When I had emptied my poor bag of all that I knew

about Pope Sarto, Barrès, reassured as to his task and having by this time reached the fruit and the coffee, began to pour out ideas. Alas, he who had one of the most richly-stored and most carefully ordered brains in France, who had written about Venice, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Ravenna, Parma, pages that were harmonious and memorable, even if they were at times precious and unjust (‘*Ce Garibaldi au manteau flottant, de mémoire un peu suspecte en France. . . . En Italie les vins sont mauvais, les femmes pas jolies, la musique bien grêle. . . Venise . . . le paludisme de cette ruine romantique. Molmenti et Mantovani virent une femme manger une tranche de polenta avec une galette de terre pressée en guise de pain . . .*’, whereas they had written that she was eating polenta with lemon, but Barrès had taken *limone*, lemon, for *limo*, earth), this man began to speak of the papacy and of the Roman Question. Polite and wary, with that grave, gurgling voice that lacked the middle registers and lent weight even to a jest, he did not affirm, but questioned: ‘Would it really be so very difficult to give the Pope Rome beyond the Tiber? Is it the Freemasons who are opposed? And Victor Emmanuel II, when he entered Rome at the head of his *bersaglieri*, did he not think that it would be wise to give the sovereign Pope the Leonine City? *Léonine, quel beau nom pour une ville. . .*’

I had not met Barrès for several years when one evening, during the second year of our war, General Porro had me called to the Supreme Command and gave me the order to accompany Barrès, Pichon, Barthou, Reinach and Dervillé to visit our front from the sea to the Val d'Adige: a most welcome order.

I went to meet them at Turin, on the tenth of May.

Pichon, paternal, round, accommodating, parliamentary; Barthou dressed in mourning because the enemy had killed his son, precise, watchful, ready to grasp everything and to see everything, overflowing with anecdotes and enamoured of his Muse, who was to carry him to the Academy, occupied in satisfying Barrès in every caprice, in helping him over difficult bits, in making him cut a good figure even when he began to sulk like a hidalgo sensitive about the protocol; Joseph Reinach, in riding-boots and yachting-cap, fat-paunched, smiling, Parisian and snobbish, who even among the stones of the Carso picked a flower for his buttonhole and wanted to see only generals to discuss the higher strategy with them, over open maps; Dervillé, president of the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranée, a robust old man, with a white beard, the most 'English' of the lot, polished, silent and perfumed; all most companionably cordial, including Barrès.

I do not say that in his letters from the Italian front he abandoned himself to overmuch praise of our troops. But there you are, you felt that at last, after so many years of obstinate faith and hope deferred, the war had loosened a knot in his closed heart, and that at the sight of Europe cut in two by a wall from sea to sea, on this side his France and the friends of France, on that side Germany (just as he had divided the world of ideas in his books for thirty years), he experienced the feeling of grace vouchsafed to the pilgrim who after a dangerous pilgrimage reaches his shrine and sees, actually sees and touches the miracle. A hard reality, in those days, for France; and that solemn embassy had a practical and pressing end: Why not declare war on Germany? God knows how I laboured to invent the reasons. Barrès was the first to

answer me loyally: 'It is true, even France could not have been induced by anyone to wage war if Germany had not declared it and had not crossed the frontier.'

One day perhaps I shall tell the happenings of that week of excursions, on the Carso, to Grado, in Carnia, to Venice, in the Cadore. If only we had sent such weighty and sensible missions to France. But like Spartans we said: 'We must win the war. Words do not count.' We saw that afterwards, when we came to the war of words.

The fact is that, as a spectacle, we were not very lucky. The enemy was preparing the offensive in the Trentino, and the Isonzo sector was sleeping. In the three or four hours that we passed on the Carso, even beyond the 'big trench of the Engineers', not a shot was heard. General E., General P., who accompanied us, in despair gave orders to one of our batteries to shoot, if only to awaken the echoes. Nothing. It was like throwing stones into a swamp. On the other side they received and were silent. And in Carnia it rained, and in the Cadore there was mist. At Belluno, on May 16th, as we were about to cross into the Trentino, General di Robilant explained very amiably to our guests that in the Trentino, during those days, there was room only for combatants. No one objected. Only Joseph Reinach opened out his map: '*Donnez-moi la situation de ce soir. Dans la guerre de montagne la stratégie devient un art. . . .*' Unfortunately, at Belluno Maurice Barrès forgot his slippers at the hotel. Telephone-messages, telegrams; we hastily sent them back to Paris, with the courier of the French Mission. And that too, in that inauspicious week, helped to save our good name.

But another torment was the music.

We Italians, of course, used to sing even in the trenches; *sotto voce*, if we were not allowed to sing at the top of our voices. '*Canta che ti passa*' [Sing and your pain will pass.] But before those foreigners, allies but foreigners, every merry little concert, under the obstinate silence of the cannon, tortured my soul. At Grado the children of the asylum sang. At Sella Nevea, in a shed, after lunch, two officers sang, who in the evening would be returning to the lines and, to entertain us, dear ardent boys, were trying to be cheerful. At Cortina, half-way through the banquet, at the Divisional Command, there suddenly burst out, behind a curtain, nothing less than a concert.

When we at last reached Venice, I thought I was safe I took Barrès up at Campalto in a dirigible. His beloved Venice, the lagoon striped with emerald, sapphire and pearl, with those shining depths which, from above, between dune and dune seem empty of water, had never appeared to him before from the sky. He filled pages upon pages with rapid notes; he was ecstatic. We descended and went off to pay a visit to d'Annunzio, who was convalescent at the *Casetta rossa*, with his eyes still bandaged. He received us, as only he can, like a king. He could not have been more enchantingly hospitable. But after two minutes he announced to Barrès: 'To-day they were to have done a little operation on my sick eye. I postponed it to remain with you. But I was not able to postpone a concert, a quintet which is waiting for us there in the next room, because the players come from the batteries of the Lido and their superiors could not renew the brief leave which has been given them only

as a favour to me. They will play something by César Franck and by Maurice Ravel.' And they played.

When Barthou, Pichon, Barrès, Reinach and Dervillé had recrossed the Alps, General Cadorna telegraphed to Barthou: 'I thank you, *monsieur le président*, and the companions of your journey for the authoritative testimony you have borne to the strength and courage of the Italian army to your readers and friends.' But in his letters from the Italian front, Maurice Barrès did not forget a single one of those choirs, bands and concerts.

## MATILDE SERAO

VALLOMBROSA,
*August* 10, 1927.

WHEN a writer dies, I wish that the people who love him would commemorate him in silence, re-reading the books of his that they love the most, not only in order to renew their gratitude and their regret, but also to test this advantage of poets and artists, even the most distressed and way-worn, over the rest of mankind: that the best of them remains ever living and quick.

Out of affection to Matilde Serao,[1] I am re-reading *Fantasia*, which has forty-four years of life, under this fir-tree. Facing the frontispiece is a lithograph, with a portrait of the author when she still had only one chin and a neck rising out of her round shoulders. High up over her black hair rests a little hat with a curling brim, like a tile fallen harmlessly on that iron head. The ear is immense, with a gold ring in the lobe. 'Big ears, a long life. *Cent'anni, donna Matì.*' '*Me vulisse vedè rimbambita, e siete, n'amico?*' [A hundred years to you, donna Matilde. Do you want to see me in my dotage, and you call yourself a friend?] The eyes are black, shining, stupendous, of the kind that then used to be called velvety. When she stared at you, her stream of talk would cease. When she spoke, she would gaze in

[1] Matilde Serao was one of the leaders of the 'veristic' literary movement in the '90's. When she died last year, she had lost almost all her influence over the younger generation.

front of her, sometimes closing her eyes, and would not look at you again until she had finished her sentence or ended her narrative. '*Neh, vuie m'avite cunusciuta giovene, o quasi. Diteglielo a'stu guaglione cumm'ero.*' [Say, you knew me when I was young, or almost. Tell this lad what I was like.] The eyes are the same? Uh, how economical you are! Everything was relative: her youth when I first saw her in Rome towards 1894 or '95, and the age of the lad, who was Raffaele Calzini.

'Let's talk about something else, let's talk of Benito Mussolini. He kept me for an hour, at the last audience, and at the end, do you know what he said to me? "Signora Serao, many people wish you ill, but I wish you well." "Thanks, your excellency. And does no one wish *you* ill?" He shrugged his shoulders and presented me with his photograph. Do you want to laugh? To go to Benito Mussolini I had my hair marcelled. *Sittant' anne, sissignore.* [Seventy years old, yes sir.] But if you had the hair that I have, you would put a pink bow on it *cumm' a 'o pecuriello 'e Pasqua.* [Like the Easter lamb.] Let's talk about something else.' Sitting in the vestibule of the Hotel Cavour at Milan, at a little table, her chin resting on her chest, her chest supported by one of those armoured corsets that only she still continued to wear, with her podgy hand she would sweep the surface of the table, raise her eyebrows to the middle of her forehead and stare straight at her interlocutors. Then when she saw us thus rapt in admiration, she would burst into laughter; a great flow of silvery, insolent, divine laughter, like a flash of lightning out of a cloud, laughter that made the most absent-minded raise their heads, that made the neighbours run to their doors, a laugh of a

twenty-year-old, I should say, if I still heard to-day men and women of twenty laugh in that fashion.

'I am writing a book about Duse. But should I tell everything?' 'Everything, donna Matilde. If you do not tell, nobody else ever will.' 'Even about d'Annunzio?' 'And where is the harm? Do you too want to draw a parallel between Eleonora Duse and St. Clare of Assisi?'

'Poor Eleonora. She used to telegraph to me: "I must see you, I must confess." And she would lie down on the sofa with a hot-water bottle on her stomach. "Matilde, give me another pillow here, under my head. Another here, under my side. Matilde, I am old." "*Leonora mia, ringraziamm' a Madonna.*" [Leonora mine, let's thank the Virgin.] "I must confess, I feel an absolute need for confessing." "Go on, confess, my child." "I need two hours. Can you give me two hours?" "*Iamme, Leonò.*" [Come on, Eleonora.] Poor child, literature had poisoned her. I told her so a hundred times: "*Leonò*, literature is more poisonous than a cup of tea made of match-heads." '

And off she would go laughing, with her head backwards; then with the palm of her hand she would give the table another dusting. At the end she folded her hands and her broad face grew serious, attentive, sorrowful, full of maternal beauty and kindness. 'That woman was not spared anything, from ridicule to poverty. May God keep her with him after so much suffering.'

At once Signora Serao began to hunt for her eye-glasses amongst the folds of her skirts, eye-glasses like those of one of Goldoni's young marquises, with a golden handle, looked towards the glass-door, stood up on her little feet, and with short, wide steps, ran off with a flowing

motion. The movement of that ball-like body at once suggested the ample, shining black domino in which Oriental women shroud themselves when they go out, and you would sooner have expected to see those eyes behind the slit of a *charchàf*, mysterious and sparkling.

'Are you expecting people?' 'Nobody, only a big manufacturer. He promised to come at twelve. What time is it? *Mamma mia, 'a mezza. Mmò telèfono.*' [Mother! half-past twelve. Now I will telephone.] 'This evening will you dine with us?' 'Dine? At my age, one eats only once a day, in the morning. Doctor's orders. Besides, you can work better; your head's freer. Is your head free? Fast, you should fast. Pure spirit. Do you know Giovanni Gentile? *Sì, pur i' o voglio bene; ma zitto, ca si 'o ssape Croce, me spara.*' [Yes, I too am fond of him; but mum's the word, for if Croce finds out, he'll shoot me.]

I go on reading *Fantasia*. The branches of the fir-trees above me are motionless in the heat. This governmental fir-plantation is so well-groomed that not even a bird sings in it. When Matilde Serao left her passionate, tender, musical Naples, the luminous gulf which, however you love and throb, always strikes you as empty and indifferent, because it is so divine, left the humble, laborious companions of her humble youth, the thousand correspondents and confidantes of her 'social notes,' and decided to go up to Rome, or, worse still, to the neat, varnished Engadine amidst fir-trees even more polite, pruned and numbered than these, amidst a bevy of ladies and chevaliers, she was no longer herself, I know. *Addio amore*, *Gli amanti*, and *Evviva la vita*. Her heart overflowing with maternity, her stubby body like that of a drowsy Levantine, her aggressive vernacular, her bell-shaped

dresses, all ribbons and frills, were in exile amongst the serpentine flappers and the sportsmen who labour so hard to turn even their brains into muscles. But waste does not count when one has safely stored away in a strong-box such golden treasures as these: *Fantasia*, *Giovannino o la Morte*, *Il ventre di Napoli*, a hundred pages of *Riccardo Joanna*, a hundred of *Paese di Cuccagna*.

She had dedicated *Fantasia* 'to Edoardo Scarfoglio,[1] tenderly.' And Scarfoglio had given the name *Fantasia* to the white yacht on which, with a poet-friend, or with some charming companion of less literary attractions, he would disappear from Naples for weeks: Corfù, Spalato, the Piraeus, Cagliari, Tunis, Tripoli. I can still see him before my eyes, cynical and affectionate, pitiless and generous, timid and violent, dressed in white linen, stretched out in a wicker chair on the deck of *Fantasia*, with his legs crossed, immobile, his face turned upwards: 'Matilde can't write. What can I do? I told her so before we married, I told her so afterwards. She consoles herself with the reflection, that nobody knows how to write Italian any more. And she's right in that. Try this Abruzzese liqueur that Michetti has sent me; it's loathsome, but don't tell him so . . .' and he would lower his glance to the tablecloth, a squinting glance, for one eyebrow had been wounded in a duel and was higher than the other. And so he had a fierce and unbending look for enemies and bores, a veiled and indulgent look for friends.

Donna Matilde knew that severe sentence; she had forgiven him a long time ago, and defended herself by saying that in her books there was warmth, and that warmth not only vivifies bodies, but saves them from the corrup-

[1] A famous journalist and the husband of Matilde Serao.

tion of time. He retorted, from a distance: 'By force of warmth, everything will end in ashes', and threw away his cigarette. Meanwhile, on the plates, on the napkins, on the life-belts, on the cushion behind his head, painted, printed, embroidered in blue, the name of this novel was repeated everywhere: *Fantasia*, *Fantasia*.

They lived apart. He had a daughter by a friend who had afterwards killed herself. Matilde had gone to the hospital where the suicide had been taken to, had adopted the child and kept it in her home. Edoardo had by this time become like another son for her, the eldest and the most feared and beloved of her children.

Once I was at Naples for Christmas Eve. 'Heavens, Christmas Eve away from your home? Come and have dinner with me.' At the head of the table, of course, was her father, Francesco Serao, with a black velvet skull-cap embroidered with flowers. To the right, the guest. To the left, herself. Then a row of children, and among them the little orphan. Donna Matilde, with her hair still as black as a raven's wing, was dressed in satin, black skirt, light blue waist with white lace insertions. She spoke of Arrigo Boito: 'Oh, what phlegm! Giacosa once saw us together and called us the Pole and the Equator. And Boito's house, with those frigid Chinese bronzes, and the piano in the shadow like a thing of evil. But he is a wizard. With those falling eye-glasses he sees everything. Once Duse went to see him and after a minute he asked her: "Eleonora, who wrote you that letter you are holding in your bosom? Couldn't you have avoided bringing it here of all places?"'

The dinner was succulent, amidst the delighted cries of the children. Matilde watched over each one's plate,

more meat to this one, less pudding to that. Half-way through dinner she declared: '*Vuie site 'e casa.* [You belong to the family.] May I?' and playing on her breast with the fingers of both hands as on a keyboard, she unbuttoned her waist, unhooked her stays, with one motion slipped them off and threw them on a chair. Then she beckoned to the little one that was not her own, who gravely mounted a chair and with a little voice as faint as a sigh began:

"*Oggi è nato il Re del creato.*"
[To-day is born the King of Creation.]

Donna Matilde, with her hands, with her head, accompanied the rhythm of the verses. At the end she rose, embraced her, amidst kisses and tears: 'My joy, my joy . . .' and ran into the next room, to light the candles of the Presepio. 'Come, come, it is all lit. Well, papa, and your cap? *Vuo' sta' c' 'a papalina 'nnanz' 'o Bammino?*' [Do you mean to keep your cap on in front of the Bambino?]

I met her again a day or so later, coming out of her newspaper office. It was the hour of evening on the gulf. She saluted me hastily, for at the door a little carriage was waiting for her, with a black pony bedizened with ribbons and bells. She sank on to the cushions, solemnly, adjusting a great veil around her shoulders that fell from her little hat. She sighed, smiled to herself, to me, to the passers-by, and joyously ordered the coachman: '*Scinne pe' Chiaia.*'[1] [Drive down by Chiaia, pass by Chiaia.] And the little carriage drove off at a trot, with the noise of bells.

Since that time I never saw her in Naples again. But I fancy that the other day, with her last breath, she must have whispered the same request to her guardian angel: *Scinne pe' Chiaia'*—for that was for her perfect bliss.

[1] Chiaia is the fashionable drive along the sea-front towards Posilipo.

# THE ILLUMINATION OF ST. PETER'S

ROME,
*May* 17, 1925.

FOR the Jubilee Pope Pius XI desired the illumination of the basilica of St. Peter's to be resumed. Since the feast of St. Peter's in 1870 the spectacular illumination had no longer been seen.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, for from Castel Sant'Angelo you have to go on foot, and at a slow pace, as well as the crush allows. Borgo Nuovo does not open on to the centre of the Basilica, and we see as through two scenes only half the cupola lit up. The houses and hovels of Borgo, beginning with the two-windowed slice that looks out on the fountain between Borgo Nuovo and Borgo Vecchio, are draped with red hangings, rather woollen than silk, rather cotton than wool, with garlands of paper flowers and little Venetian lanterns: homely modesty which prepares our eyes for the outburst of regal display down at the end. A few small lemon-squash stands or coffee-houses are brilliantly lit, and then you can see nothing else.

The throng is orderly, hilarious and patient; priests, seminarists, soldiers, pilgrims, *carabinieri*, children, public-school-boys, women of the people with babies in their arms. In front of me, a little old man is walking with a gun on his shoulder. He explains to me that he is returning

from the chase, and before going home he wants to enjoy the illumination. The event is indeed extraordinary, but for a Roman it is a family feast and there is no need to dress up to enjoy it. A huge woman without a hat, with a gold chain between her double chin and her billowing breast, tells a girl: '*Io pe sta' commoda me so' messa li stivaletti de mi' marito. Ce se sta' come drent' al letto.*' [To be cosy I've put on my husband's boots. I'm as snug in them as in my bed.] The girl, in a small strawberry-coloured felt hat, over two snail-coils of hair, pretends not to hear.

Loud choral singing reaches our ears. It is a procession of bearded, sweating priests, their hands crossed on their stomachs. They are singing at the top of their voices and beat the time as they march. '*Noi vogliam Dììììo per nostro pa-a-a-a-dre.*' [We want God for our Father.] The hymn fills the street, is re-echoed up as far as the darkness of the highest stories, the blackness of the sky. But no one joins in. They are tired, and the effort of singing in marching-time gives them an angered look. 'We want God for our King——' 'And who wants to stop them?' the hunter asks me good-humouredly, adjusting the strap of the gun on his shoulder. A procession of English seminarists, with the red belt on their habit, watches the fanatical marching singers with the affectionate smile with which one watches children when they play at war. But seven or eight boys of ours have been aroused by that singing. They get into Indian file, each with his hands on the shoulders of the fellow that preceded him, and they too begin to sing, insolently: '*Era lui sì sì, era lei no no.*' [A popular song: It was he, yes, yes, it was she, no, no.] They disappear amidst the peaceful crowd. A

woman of the people wards off one of the ragamuffins with her elbow, observing: '*E che prescia ciài? Ciài paura che scappi er papa?*' [And what's your hurry? Are you afraid you'll lose your papa?]

Piazza Scossacavalli is cooler and darker, under the shadow of Palazzo Giraud and its stone walls where the lanterns burn behind the iron bars of windows with the pallor of cloistered virgins. From a group seated on the steps of the little church of St. James there passes over the tramping of the crowd the tinny sound of two mandolins.

Here we are in the piazza at last. The basilica has disappeared, now nothing can be seen of it but the lights. The mass of travertine, from the flight of stairs in front of the porch up, up, up to the top of the cupola, has vanished in the blackness of the holy night, has gone to mingle with the sky. Before your eyes you have nothing but the dazzling memory of it, all you can still discover of it is the outline, all on the same vertical plane, made of stars trembling in the sweet breeze of the May evening. The columns and the pilasters and the cornice and the tympanum of the porch and the cornice and the coats-of-arms of the colonnade are outlined with feebler lights, so that the cupola is exalted alone in the sky, encircled by six crowns of torches, with each column of the lantern transformed into a column of fire, and over all, the cross: so high, so high that it seems as though men must be watching it this evening astounded from every house and from every street in the world: the cross of Rome. The cupola thus resembles a measureless tiara, lowered from the heavens, suspended in heaven; a dark, empty heaven in which I can no longer distinguish more than one or two faint stars, wan, remote, exiled, like heretics

undergoing the penalty of envy. The colossi of St. Peter and St. Paul on guard over the steps, the apostles on the attic of the basilica, the saints in a row on the colonnade, are now no more than bodiless phantasms, spurned into darkness by the blazing apparition of the cross over the mountain of light.

The immense square, in spite of all the torrents of crowd that pour into it from the four Borgos (two with mortal names, the New Borgo and the Old Borgo, two with immortal names, Borgo Sant'Angelo and Borgo Santo Spirito), seems empty, in the mild, even light that rains down on it from its cupola. All the languages of the earth can be overheard. Spanish? French? German? English? Russian? Portuguese? Polish? Tired, dusty bodies, faces astonished but trustful, bathe blissfully in this dream-like light, in the cool repose of the eternal fountains, open-mouthed, without speaking. You feel that they will remember this spectacle, as a first vision of the promised Paradise, to the moment of their deaths, and in their distant beds and hovels they will yield their last breath with this placid smile stamped on their faces. Indeed, they will say 'St. Peter's of Rome' as the password to get by when they appear in their cerements on the clouds before the bearded apostle who holds the keys of the other world, and he will benevolently let them by, between one star and another.

Every now and then twenty pilgrims, more energetic than the rest, gather in a circle to sing a hymn. The farther ones accompany the singing, a third above, a third below. But if you take twenty steps, you do not hear them any more, for in this vastness voices are lost as in an ocean. Over the hum of the dazzled crowd,

over the alternating sing-songs, pierces the roar of the two fountains, continuous like a sea beating on an invisible coast, like a superhuman breath descending from the Empyrean to infuse life into this new constellation. Light and water, mobile, flowing, impalpable, make our souls like theirs to-night, timid as a candle-flame in the wind, fluid as a falling rivulet. The very pavement has the grey colour of a cloud. I sit down on one of the granite posts next to the fountain, watch the perpetual flow that laps the edge of the bowl and smiles to me with a thousand sparkling lips. If I raise my eyes, the lofty plume of the water seems motionless, a veil outstretched and spangled with gold.

'*A sentì 'sto rumore me viè voja de béve*' [Listening to this noise makes me thirsty] declares a swarthy man, round and sweating, with a baby on his arm and another one clinging to his hand. Beside him, she too gazing at the cascade of the waters, stands his spare, anaemic and melancholy little wife, leading another sleepy child. They make their way towards the osteria 'Thirty-one' which gleams with bottles and glasses amongst the columns. Here under the portico the *borghigiani* are quite at home. Lovers walk up and down, arm in arm, their hands intertwined. A priest lights a half-spent cigar. A woman seated at the base of a column nurses her baby, sheltering it under a green scarf. She declares proudly to a friend who is standing before her and is raising her arms to adjust her hair: '*Nun ce semo che noiantri romani pe' sapesse scéglie 'sti postarelli.*' [Only we Romans know how to find these cosy places.] A seller of lupins passes: '*Lupini dolci, lupini dolci.*' [Sweet lupins, sweet lupins.] '*Ma una vorta nun li chiamavi fusaie?*' '*Se capisce, ma*

*stasera co'tanti forestieri glie dicémo lupini.'* [But didn't you use to call them *fusaie*? Of course, but this evening with so many foreign visitors we call them *lupini*.]

I turn into Borgo Sant'Angelo. All the osterias are packed, they have set their tables even outside on the sidewalks, even in the street. *'Che sudata, eh sora Giggia? Ce semo venuti a asciugà du'bicchieri.'* [What a sweat, eh, Madam Giggia? We have come to dry two glasses.] Beside the litres of yellow wine, purple wine, parcels of sausage. The children have fallen to sleep, their faces in the arch of their arms on the white wooden tables wet with wine. At the door of a barracks, a benchful of soldiers enjoying the cool evening air. Outside a mean closed hotel two old women grumble in German, standing over two black oilcloth valises.

I return to the Borgo Nuovo by the Lane of the Three Puppets. Now the crush is coming towards me, with shiny faces, wide-open eyes, half-closed lips: it seems like a procession of men dying of thirst.

Among the modest little houses of the Borgo, with their narrow doorways and a little oil-lamp on the first landing of the steep stairways, I am looking for one where I used to go as a child with my mother, on the evening of the feast of the Constitution, to see the fireworks in Castel Sant'Angelo. The little house must be unchanged, but I cannot succeed in finding it again.

A dressmaker used to live there who came to us by the day; she was called Zelinda, she had a white skin and black eyes, and, as she cut and ripped, she was for ever talking about her unfortunate love-affairs. I never saw her home but in the evening, once a year, for the Constitution, and the verbena, mignonette, jasmine,

lavender, which grew there, although I never saw them, still linger in my memory, by the scent. That is why I remember them so well, and amongst them, in the gleam of the rockets and the Bengal lights, I can once more see my mother's face under her black hair piled up in a 'Psyche knot', her wasp-like waist, and on her breast the little bunch of flowers presented to her by her dressmaker. At the bursting of every bomb it seemed as though the old house shook and Rome were catching fire, and I pressed close to her side. 'Do not look at me, look at the fireworks', the dear voice whispered in my car. She was wrong, but I obeyed, for a perfumed hand placed itself on my head to protect me amidst the din and to caress me.

Too many years. I can no longer rediscover the door of those wonders. But I can summon up the scent of the flowers, the voice, the caress of long ago under the sky of flame; and although I am walking against the crowd and turning my back on the illumination, I feel that my face too is dreamy and ecstatic because of the little miracle that I bear within me, for myself alone.

# A MEDAL OF LEO XIII

ROME,
*January* 24, 1922.

THE Company of Jesus wishes to erect, over the church of St. Ignatius, the big cupola which for three centuries it has lacked. The observatory will have to go, and the Romans will no longer be able to set their watches by the ball which at noon sharp, one second before the cannon-shot, slips down the pole fastened to the top of the Collegio Romano. The biggest Roman church of the Jesuit Fathers will lose in popularity what it will win in splendour. But the millions of scudi have still to be found, and a few years may have to pass before we begin to sigh over the disappearance of one more custom of old Papal Rome.

Meanwhile, in order to see with my own eyes the roofs and the walls on which the sumptuous cupola devised by the architect Brasini will rest, I have climbed to the top of the church. Thirty-five or forty years ago I climbed up there once a week, on Sunday mornings, to hear Mass, and to recite the office in the Congregation, which was then called 'of the Little Stairs': an interminable little spiral staircase with steps of peperino, dark and narrow, hollowed out inside the pilaster between the altar of St. Aloysius, all gold, marble and lapis-lazuli, and the huge monument to Pope Gregory (of the Ludo-

visi) which has a baldaquin of bronze and billowing curtains of marble polished to resemble silk.

There were two or three hundred of us, all Roman boys, I should say 'romanesque', and we all took the stairs by storm. Everything is still as it was then, except the rush which is not for me any more, and a memorial stone 'to the members of the Congregation of the Scaletta fallen in the war': a stone which I must confess I had not expected to see and which has suddenly bound my old Congregation to me with something more than melancholy reminiscences. Here is the aroma of wax and here is the aroma of incense which usually wraps in one sole cloud, benignantly, both saints above and sinners below; here is the altar of gilded wood in the form of a sarcophagus, and on the altar the great painted Madonna, with her head veiled in a cloak; here before the altar, if I am not mistaken, the same carpet with yellow and red and green flowers; and the same oaken benches which in their careful alignment were a hard protest against the discordances of our indocile, youthful voices. And here is the dark corridor through which we passed, in Indian file, to confession; and, our peccadillos being always more or less the same, and the Paternosters, Aves and Glorias of the penance being therefore always of the same number, the more practical and impatient amongst us recited them *sotto voce* as we proceeded, before confession, so as to slip away as soon as we were absolved: what is known in the jargon of the tribunals as 'computing the penalty'. Through a great sloping terrace of moss-covered bricks I climb even higher, to the Little Chambers of Saint Aloysius.

Here I find once more the charming image of virtue,

nay, of sanctity, which the Jesuit Fathers so lovingly presented to our boys, and which has never left my heart: I mean a smooth, graceful virtue, composed and reasonable, radiant in its benevolence and its nobility, with a hint almost of snobbishness. There, in fact, all is gold, silver, damask, flowers, cushions, and laces. Inside a resplendent glass case, there gleams forth the red-silk skull-cap of the Blessed Cardinal Bellarmine, and next to it, in a carven frame, an autograph of Saint Aloysius which actually speaks of court-life: 'We being in a boat to cross over to Spain with the Empress——' Higher up, the same portrait, in oil, of him at eighteen, represents him as beautiful, amiable and enviable, dressed in black satin, his ringed hand on the golden hilt of a sword, with two miniature moustaches under his nostrils such as have now once more become the fashion, with thoughtful eyes slightly turned out, in the Chinese manner; and beneath, another picture shows him placidly expiring amongst his kneeling companions beside a table covered with gleaming batiste and laden with Venetian glass and flowers.

Where, I say, could we find a more seductive example of virtue, in the inexperience of that voluble age? At twelve, at thirteen, who would not have taken for his pattern that pallid saint who travelled with empresses and died amidst flowers? Who would not have tried to be as virtuous as he, so as to reach a portion at least of so much nobility, peace, fame, grace and beauty? The rugged, atrabilious virtue of suffering, of poverty, of obscurity, of fasting, of hair shirts, would have frightened and repelled our placid, easy Roman souls in the bud. I do not say that the Fathers did not represent the necessity of it to us, in sermons, with heroic examples. But they

presented it sweetly, in periods of classical cadence, without vain terrors; but these were only words, whereas for us the sensible reality always remained in those images of serenity, kindness, elegance, and that music, gold, incense, poetry and, on festal days, around some Bishop or Cardinal, orangeades, chocolates, sherbets and pastry. From up there on the terrace, moreover, if we rose on tiptoe, we could see, as I saw this morning, the arches, down below, of the Collegio Romano, gymnasium and lyceum, and the very doors of the schoolrooms in our Royal lay-school—bare, shabby, frigid, and dusty. A great science is pedagogy, even when it was not taught from a chair.

But at the beginning of that terrace, in a little chapel behind two fald-stools of red velvet now a trifle faded, between two vases with silken lilies now very faded, there rises a great statue, of painted wood, of St. Aloysius, which concerns me, be it said with all due modesty, more closely. The statue is dressed with real black serge, in the garb of the Jesuits, with a band at the waist. We had it carved at that time, by subscriptions, we congregationalists; ten of us conducted by two Fathers had the honour to escort it to the Vatican so that it might be blessed by Pope Leo; and I was charged with pronouncing, before the Pope and the statue, the eulogy of St. Aloysius, written by Padre Vitelleschi, who was, both in Latin and in Italian, in prose and in verse, a polished and eloquent writer.

The rehearsals for the prostrations, the gestures, the ups and downs of the voice, lasted, during the Easter vacation, about a dozen days. My defect was to accompany the cadence of the phrases with my right hand, and without thinking of the subject any more, to pay

more attention, in short, to the fine appearance than to the substance; a defect of which I have not yet, after all this time, quite cured myself, but from which I have drawn some not forgettable consolation.

'This beloved image carved in simple wood, now that we see it again in this sovereign hall——' To give strength to the antithesis I had here to raise both my arms in a circle and look over the Pope's head, at the no doubt gilded ceiling of the saloon in which we should be received. I always forgot to do that, I forgot it before the Pontiff too; worse still, I remembered as soon as the words had issued from my lips, and I looked at good old Father Vitelleschi, who had remained with my companions, kneeling before the Pope and me, and his face was so desolate that God alone knows how I got through to the end. I did though; and Leo the Thirteenth from his gilded throne, with his feet on a white velvet cushion, honoured me with many praises.

Long and emaciated and pale though he was, he had a deep nasal voice which did not seem to belong to him, and which he modulated in various registers, lending to the fairest words the fullest cadences, an unexpected sonority; a magnificent voice for Pontificals in St. Peter's. When the praises were ended, he snuffed some tobacco, and, with the hand in which he was clutching a great handkerchief, he made a sign to a monsignor standing erect behind him. The monsignor gave him a little white pasteboard box, its corners strengthened with green paper, and he passed it to me with a benevolent smile on his great lipless mouth. Withdrawing at once amongst the prelates, I opened the mysterious box, and discovered inside, in the cotton-wool, a silver medal as

big as a crown, and on the medal a portrait. I looked at the Pope, I looked at the portrait which was that of a fat, good-humoured man, and the two faces really did not look at all alike. The audience was by this time over; with a last gesture and a last smile the Pope blessed us, and we went out.

On the stairs I was able to read the inscription around the face on the medal: it was a medal of *Pio nono*. Seven or eight years after his assumption to the Papacy, Leo XIII was still distributing, out of economy, the medals coined by his predecessor. Padre Vitelleschi, putting a hand on my shoulder, informed me: 'It must have been a mistake.' A pause. He hastily added: 'A mistake of the monsignore's', and laughed with an air of tranquil superiority which I loved.

I did not, of course, believe in the mistake; I believed in the economy. But that discovery of the man behind the sovereign amused me, for in every Roman, even in every youthful Roman, there sleeps a Giovacchino Belli. Do you know what Giovacchino Belli wrote when Pope Gregory died? 'Pope Gregory is dead and I am tremendously sorry. I was fond of him because he gave me the fun of speaking ill of him.' Can the affection of a subject be more Roman, indeed more Italian, than that?

## CHINAMEN IN ST. PETER'S

ROME,
*October* 28, 1926.

I HAVE entered St. Peter's by the side-door near Santa Marta, at seven in the morning, because the blue ticket of the maggiordomo, *Richardus de Samper Apostolicae Domui praepositus*, announced eight o'clock as the hour for the ceremony, that is for the entrance of the Pope, and I wished to assure myself a place in the first row: the way of a reporter, for I truly think that if I had to depart for the other world an hour or a day earlier to secure a front seat, I should not hesitate.

Having to put on evening-dress, or, to adapt the words to the hour, a swallow-tail at seven in the morning, instead of at the usual seven or eight in the evening, is in itself a good reminder for absent minds. Your first steps in the streets make you feel as though you had never been to bed at all: but as soon as you pass the region of Ponte and down through Borgo enter under the shadow of the dome and the circle of the portico, protected by the hundred statues on whose ingenuous holiness the dawn breathes a touch of scarlet, every one understands that your dress is almost a gala uniform, and you cut quite a good figure. It does not last long, because under the basilica you at once meet the *camerieri di cappa e spada* dressed after the baroque fashion, in juste-au-coeurs, breeches and little

capes of black velvet, and your coat becomes commonplace and anonymous once more, a mere symbol of obedience.

Every time that I go to a papal ceremony, the familiar faces console me. I cannot find the names any more; but that monsignore was a companion of mine at the *ginnasio;* and that master of ceremonies at the university, but he used to come very rarely, because of his popularity in society; and with that well-preserved *guardia nobile* I used to frequent the congregation of Sant'Ignazio every Sunday, and I used to meet that other one during every Carnaval in the big box at the Costanzi ball. We watch and study one another from a distance. Someone honours me with a bow; the more conceited or the more timid end by turning elsewhere, adjusting their shoulder-straps or their belts, their capes or their skull-caps. But after all I am among my own people, and in a good place, just where the green carpet of the mighty begins, which in front of the Pope's throne and the altar gives place to another carpet of flaming red.

Shortly before eight o'clock they light the electric lamp under the two great arches of the clerestory and around the Chair of St. Peter which the four colossal Doctors in black and gold support in a whirl of Berninian eloquence. '*Adesso ce potemo dì bon giorno*' [Now we can say how d'ye do to one another], the nearest master of ceremonies says to me amiably. With his rosy bald head and his white-and-blond beard he is a picture by Rubens, and speaks in the Roman dialect: one of the miracles of this city. In front of my row, on the green carpet, bishops, monsignori, domestic prelates, *guardie nobili*, officers of the Swiss and Palatine Guards, have

established themselves, and we can no longer see anything. One of the *camerieri segreti*, florid and elegant in his purple garb, in the ruff which has been starched and ironed for him by nuns, turns with authority to the invaders: 'Mind, when His Holiness has entered, no one can move any more, and those back benches will remain empty.' Every one goes to sit at his place, amidst bows, smiles and compliments. Our friend comments audibly: 'They had forgotten to make themselves comfortable.'

But from the depths of the temple, from the balcony over the main portal, the sound of the silver trumpets fills the dome, the aisles, the souls of the spectators. The Pope has entered, but we do not see him yet. We only hear the distant applause, which sounds like hail under the blare of the trumpets. In front of me, on the two tapestry-covered benches, are seated the Cardinals from Gasparri, as hale and robust as Pope Sixtus V, to Merry del Val, as long and thin as Mazarin, with his spare, sharp face under the jet-black eyebrows. In the two Tribunes erected under the arches, the Pope's relatives are on the right hand, with nuns and diplomats; highest of all, the head-dresses of two Spanish ladies with their black mantillas raised over their big combs; on the left the Roman nobility, that is a few anaemic ladies of advanced age; and behind them, inside a brown grating, the organ, the choristers, and Monsignor Perosi with his curly, bullet-shaped head.

In the expectant silence what most amazes you and exalts you is the light: a fixed splendour of eternity which pours down from aloft evenly and softly, and does not allow even a line of shadow to accompany a prelate who crosses the vast green carpet. Great curtains and tapestries darken the Michelangelesque windows and

shut out the sun, the treacherous sun who as he passes measures the hours and the lives of men. In the motionless light of a thousand lamps, amidst music, words and costumes that have not been changed for centuries, from the two Pontiffs in bronze seated there on their monuments to this eleventh Pius in flesh and blood who appears on the *sedia gestatoria* to the rhythmical pace of the chair-bearers, days and not centuries seem to have passed; the same gesture of benediction, the same paraphernalia, the same words.

The China of our daily newspapers? The China of Borodin and Chang Tso Ling, or that of Marco Polo and the Blessed Odorico of Pordenone? After six hundred years of Roman preaching, here to the right of the altar are the first six Chinese bishops: without noses and chins, with heavy eyelids over their grave eyes, small, pale and livid in their white garments like catechumens, standing out from the boundless mass of their fellows. Yesterday evening they had to shave their moustaches, because this morning, for once only in their lifetime, they are to drink the consecrated wine from the same chalice as the Pope.

Behind a hedge of prelates the Pope under the red canopy vests for mass: there appear and disappear his square head, the white *zucchetto*, the gleam of his eye-glasses, the little hand with the weighty ring. From the opposite side the kneeling acolytes shoe the Chinamen with white silk gaiters and silver slippers. On the first and last stools sit the two assisting bishops, in red-and-gold copes, under their white mitres; and one is Monsignor Celso Costantini, Delegate of the Pope in China, who selected them and accompanied them as far as this sovereign

tribunal. With his blond beard, his ruddy face, his blue eyes, Archbishop Costantini has the stature and the aspect of the doughty prelates painted by Reni and Maratta; but when he moves, his long and resolute step reminds me a little of the military chaplain on the Carso and on the Piave.

Seated on the fald-stool near the altar, the Pope questions the six Chinamen one by one: 'Will you teach the people with words and examples what you have learned from the Sacred Scriptures? *Credis Sanctam, Catholicam et Apostolicam unam esse veram Ecclesiam?*' The examination is lengthy. They answer: '*Volo . . . volo . . . Credo . . . credo. . . .*' The Pope rests his red-gloved hands on the book. His voice is low and severe; thin and sharp is the voice of the Chosen Ones. Every word of the oath accentuates the height of the vault, and you instinctively accompany the echoes with your eyes up to the roofs, almost as if to ask yourself whether the invisible heavens are really any higher.

The Mass at the gemmed altar now begins. Rapid and familiar, the acolytes proceed with the vesting of the Chinamen, push them forward or hold them back, correct with a touch the fall of a cope, straighten on a head a mitre that threatens to topple over. Three to the right, three to the left, the Chinamen begin to officiate at the same altar as the Pope, to murmur the same words. All at once, after the offertory, out of an instant of silence, his voice rises as he intones the litany: '*Kyrie eleïson, Christe eleïson . . .*' At last the crowd answers him, for the first time the crowd participates in the ceremony, thundering forth: '*Christe audi nos, Christe exaudi nos . . .*' As the beauty of a fountain is not complete unless the water pours and spouts forth from it, so the

beauty and majesty of a church can be gauged only when the church is full of prayer and song. To the unanimous cry of *Te rogamus, audi nos* the basilica seems to be lifted up like a ship raised on a wave and to fall back with a deep moan from the depths of its fabric. Then the voice of Pope Pius resumes, alone and erect in the immensity: '*Tu inimicos Sanctae Ecclesiae humiliare digneris*', and the multitude once more thunders: '*Te rogamus, audi nos.*' I gaze at the eldest of the new bishops; at each of those roars he shuts the narrow slits of his eyes, opens his bloodless lips, presses his folded hands and trembling wrists against his chest as though the violence of the cry took away his breath.

When the litany is over and we are all standing, the Chinamen on the contrary have to prostrate themselves, flat on their faces, at full length, six poor bodies that seem like six corpses in white shrouds. And on the neck and shoulders of each an acolyte stoops down to lay the red book of the gospels, wide-open so that it seems like a yoke. It is the last trial, and they arise staggering. But from that point begins the ascension towards their new dignity and authority. The Pope intones the *Veni Creator*, anoints their tonsures and their hands with the sacred chrysm; at the end he receives communion with them, with the same wafer, from the same chalice. Then they are seated on the steps of the altar, facing the people, with mitre, cope and crozier, consecrated henceforth to command; and one bends his head on his chest praying, as you can tell from the movements of his lips, and one bends his head as if to try the weight of his new mitre, and one draws from his lace sleeve a handkerchief to wipe his forehead, and his hand trembles before his face.

Now, having returned to his fald-stool, the Pope is speaking, benignant and smiling, in sonorous Latin, accompanying the cadence of his periods with a slight motion of the neck, with an ample gesture of his right arm. He calls them brothers, recalls their populous and mysterious land, with its rivers wide as seas, and their landing in this blessed harbour, safe from all storms, and their consecration: '*in hac Sancta majestate et solemnitate Petriani templi.*' The Pontiff's voice and arms open from syllable to syllable almost as though to measure the width of the temple. The allocution closes with an order: '*Ite*, *prædicate*, *docete*—go, preach, teach.'

From Perosi's little choir there bursts forth the Te Deum. Then each bishop turns towards the people, holding fast in his left hand, like a sceptre, the stem of the crozier, dividing the air over our heads with the index-finger and the middle finger of his right hand. '*Benedicat vos* . . .'

The ceremony is over. The six bishops salute the Pope, that is, kneel down, one after the other, on the Epistle side, leaning on their croziers, and wish him softly '*Ad multos annos*'; then they take a few steps more, and kneel again before the centre of the altar, repeating louder: '*Ad multos annos*'; at last they have reached his feet and for the third time, with full voices, they repeat: '*Ad multos annos.*' They dwell on the *A* with a sustained cry which seems to hide a lamentation, a foreshadowing of the time when they will be far away, amongst the hundreds of millions of their still unbelieving and hostile brothers, and will remember this morning of glory and peace. When the Pope with a paternal gesture raises them and embraces them, you see their yellow heads rest for an

instant on his shoulder, as if too weary to leave it again.

The Pope has once more mounted his *sedia gestatoria*, and moves away through the nave amidst the throng that kneels and applauds. Above has risen a little cloud of silver like that which rises at dawn over the lakes; but when we come out into the Piazza Santa Marta and the Piazza San Pietro, the full Roman noon, with cannon and bells, blinds and deafens us, and what we have seen becomes all at once quite remote, like the remembrance of another life.

## KING VICTOR AT PESCHIERA

FLORENCE,
*November* 8, 1923.

YESTERDAY at Peschiera they uncovered a tablet on the façade of the house where the Command of the garrison was six years ago; a dwarfish, massive house like a barracks of the times of the Quadrilateral. The tablet commemorates the meeting after Caporetto between the King and the allied Prime Ministers and commanders-in-chief. And to-day Orlando has related what the King succeeded in accomplishing that morning. Why he waited six years to tell it, I cannot fathom. Did he of all men think that Sonnino would have spoken?

That morning at Peschiera it poured. A clear blue sky gives to men hardly treated by fortune, as we were then, the illusion that even the Godhead or Nature is in the end growing milder and that each one of them is becoming destiny's favourite and the centre of the universe under the clear gaze of propitious stars; and so he sighs his troubles into that fancied and infinite harmony and almost unburdens his bosom of them. 'God is with us.' Men have often said that and been convinced of it, but surely never under such a howling downpour as came over Peschiera on that day. The gloomy clouds grazed the towers of the castle. Water above, water below; the

Mincio, which at that point still consists of a score of rivulets and a hundred swampy banks, the lake which overflows under the scourge of the north wind, the puddles in the muddy roads, the trees which at every gust of wind let loose showers of water on the circle of their fallen leaves. Under the weight of the clouds we felt all alone in a faithless world lying in ambush behind the livid, icy curtain; so utterly alone as to take at once the measure of each man, because no one, thus held at bay, could trust in any one but in himself; not even Italy.

In the train that was carrying Orlando and Sonnino, Lloyd George and Robertson, Painlevé, Foch and Franklin-Bouillon, five minutes' talk with any member of the allied suite, were it even with Lloyd George's thin secretary, dressed in luxurious furs and soft silks, were enough to convince you that they were not thinking of us but of themselves. From this front, for them so secondary and provincial, from this line which for them was only a flank of the great front with the French and English standards, were they, after Caporetto, menaced by any serious danger? To avoid the danger was it sufficient to stop, as we had stopped by ourselves, at the Piave? Or was it necessary to fall back on the Adige? On the Mincio? On the Oglio?

They did not blurt it out openly in the official sessions. But as soon as they succeeded in speaking, as though casually, with one of us of the suite in a corridor of the train, with their backs against the pane clouded by the rain or on the threshold of a sleeping-compartment with its berth in disorder, they at once drew out a map and a blue pencil. '*L'Adigé ou est-il?*' or, in English: 'I beg your pardon, what is the name of this big river here? It

is a big river, is it not?' For them it was paper; for us, living flesh. In that instant, the point of the pencil was a bistoury which ran hesitatingly up and down our skin, pricking it, seeking the place for an incision, to begin the first cut for the great amputation. If we started and rebelled, no fear: master-surgeons. Did we doubt it? That was our ignorance. '*Vous avez visité notre front, n'est-ce pas? Il faudrait vous faire parler avec Foch.*'

Not the great cities only, but even the smaller towns, Este or Monselice, Soave or Sabbioneta, Schio or Lonigo, flashed into our memories like so many pallid faces, for we knew them one by one and adored them, and their towers and their belfries were arms outstretched. If we had at least been able to submit to those brief dialogues in a café or an hotel, with clear, free arguments. Here we were the prisoners of our uniforms, standing at attention, measuring our words carefully.

Perhaps it was even this conventional impassibility that made us as sensitive as a taut string. The very comparison between the saloon-car of the English, of light maple-wood, with sea-green-silk curtains, flowers on the tables, the precise fittings, every corner polished and utilized as on a ship, and our Government's old car, all the arm-chairs covered with shabby red woollen covers, with a mahogany-bordered folding-table, ink-stained and unstable as a juggler's or a spiritualist's, got on our nerves. Every blunder of Orlando's in French set our teeth on edge. That moment when Franklin-Bouillon put a pencil in his hand for him to point out the Montello on the map, '*ce Montelò dont tout le monde nous parle*', and for an instant that worthy man (who would certainly have given his life if it could have brought us back to

Gorizia or to the Carso,) did not succeed in finding it amidst the network of roads and rivers—that awful moment made us long for the train with the Ministers and Generals to rush off headlong. We felt that we were undergoing a sort of examination, an examination by which those men were judging of the life and strength of Italy by the accuracy of a Minister's French, by the degree of cleanliness of a secretary's collar, by the over-servile bow of a railway-employee, the flavour of a cup of tea or the slowness of a clock.

When we reached Peschiera, only the motor-car of the British Mission was waiting at the station; and they at once offered it to the French, offered it to the Italians, almost as though it were the last car left to the Italian army by the Germans and Austrians, whereas half-an-hour away, at Verona, there is a park fit to excite the envy of King George.

Count A., who is accompanying Sonnino, takes his place in a dog-cart with me, and we set off in the rain. At the Command of the garrison, two territorials show us the rooms swept with handsome arabesques of water, but chillier than the face of General Robertson. The Commander of the garrison? He is in bed with a rheumatic fever. A stove is charged with wood. All the chairs and tables in the shabby office are gathered together in the biggest room. A telephone-message is sent to Verona to General Tagliaferri, Commissary-General of Pecori Giraldi's army, asking him to send three or four highly-polished, neatly-closing motor-cars, worthy to carry so much glory. But the first to arrive is the automobile of the French Division. In union with the English one it plies backwards and forwards between the station

and the Command, transporting all the authorities, including our own, with their secretaries and portfolios.

An officer of Robertson's suite asks me, in good French, with that complacent air that the English assume when they listen to themselves speaking a foreign language: '*Monsieur Lloyd George voudrait savoir si l'on va déjeûner ici*', and offers me an Egyptian cigarette from a gold cigarette-case. Franklin-Bouillon, always ready to intervene, sets his imposing paunch between the two of us, bestowing on me and on him not only a smile but a luncheon. '*Nous avons fait venir un wagon-restaurant. Vous déjeûnerez avec nous.*' *Nous*, the French, *vous*, the English. And are we the hosts no longer? Commendatore G., of the police, who accompanies Signor Orlando, jumps back into the dog-cart, rushes to the station, announces to the conductor of the dining-car that the Italian Government is paying for everybody's lunch, dinner, tea, milk, cigars, liqueurs, parrots'-tongues, if there are any. And it is still pouring. From the first floor protestations are heard, in English and French, that it is cold, that one sole stove is little, nothing. Gentle protestations, softening the nouns with adjectives and smiles. The Englishman who took forethought for Mr. Lloyd George's lunch, suggests that it would be more practical, if we were in time, to ask the King to go into the train, because the train at least is heated.

Amidst the fog the horn of an automobile is heard. I lean out over the threshold. A huge and immensely tall territorial whom we had sent to the piazza to buy candles, arrives all out of breath, shoves four candles into my hands, shouts in my face: 'The King, the King!' and there is the King's big grey motor-car, stopping at the

door. From under the hood peers forth the sharp, rosy cordial face of General Cittadini. More slowly still descends the Minister, Mattioli, dressed as a captain of Engineers.

Then His Majesty gets out, and at once the confusion, the uncertainty, the impatience, the half-smiles, the veiled protests, all become entirely of secondary importance. The King, the leader of Italy. He knows where the Montello is. He knows everything. His French and his English need no comments. His calm faith is not to be shaken by anything. There, at the head of that rough table, he will sit at last, and no one else. He stops on the threshold, unbuttons his coat, looks every one of us in the face by turns, with that imperceptible shake of his head that is characteristic of him, salutes those whom he knows, and seems to be counting them. He knits his brows and opens his light eyes as though to restore the muscles of his face after the biting cold of the drive. We can already see that bony and incisive face before the fat round faces of Painlevé and Franklin-Bouillon, before the india-rubber face of Lloyd George. The King stands alone before everybody, for that instant, on the threshold of the dark, low vestibule. He says, I don't know to whom: 'Let's go upstairs', almost as though he already knew that house too, he a Savoia, since the 30th of May, 1848, when Manno's Piedmontese took Peschiera from the Austrians. Orlando and Sonnino come down the stairs to receive the King.

What happened then, what the King said, what the Allies and the Italians, under the presidency of Victor Emmanuel, said to one another and decided, I do not know. More than two hours after, the English and the

French came out, got into our handsome cars just arrived from Verona, returned to the station and the train. The King remained at the Command of the garrison with the two Italian Ministers. Their lunch was the very frugal one he had brought with him in his automobile.

Afterwards, when Orlando and Sonnino went back to the train, the train left for Milan. It continued to pour, but every one seemed changed. The French said to us: '*C'est un roi*', with the air of republicans who know what they are talking about; an air rather like bachelors looking at another man's wife.

Baron Sonnino grew talkative with us. According to his habit, he was looking for the concise expression and the right image for defining the reverse of Caporetto. He quoted Voltaire: '*Quand les hommes s'attroupent, les oreilles s'allongent.*' He added: 'The army is to-day like a machine that has been taken to pieces, the pieces are all there, only the screws are missing. Diaz will find them.' At that very hour General Cadorna was handing over his command-in-chief to General Diaz. He spoke to me of Senator Leopold Franchetti, who had committed suicide and to whom he had been bound by a brotherly affection of fifty years' standing. 'He had no right to kill himself. Even a grain of sand can be useful to-day.' He was seated near a window, with his legs crossed, his hands on his knees. He observed: 'Such consolations are not for us to indulge in nowadays.' Then he rubbed the window-pane with his hand to look out, to hide that proud red and white face of his from me.

We had reached Brescia; and it was still raining. On the station-platform I found the youthful Colonel Pratolongo of the Command of the Third Army Corps.

'News?' 'Good.' For how many days had I not received such an answer? The good news was snow. On all the Judicarian Alps, on the Adamello, on the Tonale, it had been snowing for three days, the snow was blocking all the passes, the snow was defending Italy, the circling movement from above that we had feared was becoming impossible. Orlando, Lloyd George, Painlevé, Franklin-Bouillon, formed a circle around that tall, slim, self-assured officer. Hard though we laboured to translate, they could not understand: the Alps did not belong to their war. At last they understood: the snow, the mountain-passes, the frontier closed, the lines safe. At the end of that laborious day, at last even the icy, endless, pricking rain, which up there was snow, appeared to us in a friendly light. We were once more on good terms with our destiny.

In that very sector was the division that had come from France. Painlevé and Franklin-Bouillon got off at Brescia in order to salute it. Lloyd George on the steps of his car felt that he was in the lime-light. He waved his little hat like a flag, with one look passed in review the infinitesimal crowd that had gathered at the back behind the station-master, and with a great voice shouted at the two Frenchmen: 'Drive back the enemy!' They, because it was cold, put their hats on again. The train departed with a whistle.

## QUEEN MARGHERITA

ROME,
*January* 15, 1926.

NOW the Pantheon is open to the people. Under the portico, against the sixteen columns, and outside along the brick wall, lie wreaths piled up, already faded, so that only the laurel-leaves and the silk ribbons still gleam on the faded foliage, the bunches of carnations, the ruined chrysanthemums, the shrivelled violets. The last time that she spoke to me, she was wearing around her black crêpe hat a wreath of violets pale as these. As I read on the ribbons the names of the cities that have sent these thousands of garlands, it strikes me as though all the flowers must have been cut down for her from the flower-beds and meadows of Italy, with not a bud left; and yet they cover only the feet of these Roman shafts, standing for twenty centuries.

It has just been pouring, and the smell of damp mould pervades the moist air, close and sunless. The granite of the columns and the bronze of the great door are dripping with water. The crowd proceeds in silence between the black-draped barriers. Many take off their hats as soon as they pass the gateway of the portico. But how many of these knew her when she was young and blonde, her face pale and oval, her lips crimson, and with that kestrel-like profile between the soft dove's eyes? If

I could, I would give orders that they should never again publish pictures of her as an old woman, curved and shrivelled, with her eyes dismayingly enlarged by the round lenses, a banal ceremonious smile on her lips, taut as two threads. Perhaps with the lugubrious fashion of official and photographic sculpture, they will also give us a monument of her as she was an hour before her death, so that the last people who saw her may recognize her and find once more their sorrow and their tears. But we who remember will always bear her in our hearts as she was in her youth, when we were young and she a queen.

Step by step we have entered the temple. It has never seemed to me so vast and sacred as in this misty half-shadow; nor Man, beneath it, so tiny. Instinctively all eyes rise to the hidden dome, and seek its gigantic dimensions; in the gloomy mist it is as high as the vault of a nocturnal sky. A dash of light, which pierces up there through a loop-hole, resembles the long cloud of the Milky Way. On the square catafalque, black, red and violet, so well adapted to the temple that from whatever side you look at it it does not rise above the architrave that runs along the columns, is the bier, and on the bier the silken tri-colour. The bier with its tri-colour alone is illuminated, by little lamps hidden around, and against the dull weight of the stairs and of the landings, against the little flames of the azure and rayless tripods, it seems tremulous and suspended, purest light. The six chapels behind the dark columns have merely dim candles and oil-lamps, almost as though whoever is praying back there had retired so as to leave the bier alone in its glory, surrounded by the black stream of the crowd.

No one breathes. Only the crying of a child is heard,

frightened in his mother's arms. A procession of school-boys slips along the parapet and the festoons of laurel, to escape more quickly, if possible, from this spectacular gloom of death; they are children between ten and twelve, and one of them holds between his teeth the stem of a red carnation torn from one of the wreaths. That is what I must have looked like when I saw her pass every after-noon on the Pincio in her blue carriage-of-state with the out-riders and coachmen dressed in scarlet.

I used to know the hour and the itinerary of the carriages, and from the fountain of Moses, running between the crowd and the iron chairs, I managed to see her two or three times: in the avenue along the great wall over Villa Borghese or in the great square of the terrace from which she could see all Rome stretched out at her feet under the gold of the setting sun. But here the crush of the carriages and the foot-goers was such that she could not see me. Where she certainly would answer the salute of my little sailor's cap was in front of the closed door of Villa Medici. I took up my stand there, near a great plane-tree whose knotty, barked trunk I still seem to touch, one of those trunks which nymphs in fairy-tales hide in. Here she comes, here she comes.

Amidst the procession of brown, greenish, buff liveries, I catch a glimpse of her scarlet coachmen with powdered hair. I blush and tremble, as the landau is fifty, twenty yards away, is before me. One step forward, and off comes my cap. Under the plumed felt the blonde head scarcely bends towards the lace and pearls of her breast, smiles with the eyes, vanishes; and the whole world seems empty to me, with no more air to breathe. Once she did not respond. Perhaps she did not see me, perhaps she

noticed, she who saw everything and remembered everybody, that I was the same little chap who just half an hour before had saluted her on that same spot. The fact is that she did not answer. I went back home, a Republican for one evening.

But what distressed me even more was when, instead of coming in her eight-springed carriage, she appeared on the Pincio aloft in the King's towering phæton. She no longer struck me as my affable queen, dressed like a queen, and seated on her soft throne. There at the top of that tower, she was the wife seated beside her husband, remote, unattainable, oppressed, and perhaps unhappy. I remained sullenly playing and walking with the other boys, contenting myself with throwing a glance through the trees and the gates towards the avenues of the carriages. It is certain that in those years we boys of Rome cried *Viva la Regina* before *Viva il Re*; and we never dreamt that we were imitating Carducci.

There was a small photograph of her in my father's office, against a mirror, between the glass and the frame, and it represented her standing at a window, full face, slim and blonde, with 'bangs' covering half her forehead, her eyes encircled with melancholy, her head slightly bent towards the shadow, one hand resting on the curtain, the other arm hanging at her side, a black velvet ribbon at her wrist, a bit of tulle around her neck. Over her head her blonde plaits were twisted into a turban; and, set in the plaits, the only jewel on her whole person, a five-pointed star of brilliants. What has become of that little portrait? I close my eyes and see it once more. Now, as then, I think that her simple dress, more like a girl's than a queen's, must have been sky-blue like her eyes.

The crowd presses me towards the exit. I draw aside towards the porphyry altar which stands over King Humbert's tomb. They will bury her here in the very same vault where her husband's body lies, at his side, alone in eternity, at last. They had not made the vault so big from thought of her, but at least destiny has seconded her. And they will write her name on the strip of *pavonazzetto* gleaming above: Margherita di Savoia: a verse of four feet, such as they used in her day, with the suggestion of music.

In the choir behind the High Altar two priests are praying on their knees, turned towards the right stalls. Their two stalls are movable, badly fitted, like a door that is not quite closed. They were moved in order to uncover the door that leads through the wall to the little chapel where, since the other evening, her coffin has rested before the altar. I remember that there is another entrance to that chapel on the left from a landing on the stairs that leads to the sacristy. I slip boldly between two *carabinieri*, climb the stairs and find the door. The landing is deserted. From the architrave hangs a violet cloth with a silver cross on it. I raise it. The door has been freshly walled up. Between one brick and the other the lime is still soft. She is on the other side, alone, the queen of my childhood, between two walled-up doors.

It begins to rain again. If I lean out on the wooden stairs I can see the rain falling in a straight fringe before the great arch of the upper landing, quite evenly, inexorably as the sand in an immense hour-glass. If I turn towards the temple, I hear the tramp, tramp of the crowd on the wet marble, just as even, as monotonous as the rain. She, too, spoke softly, especially if she spoke in

public. She spoke softly and rapidly, because she wished to make a gift to you alone of whatever she was saying to you, and she kept both hands resting on her parasol and her head slightly bent on to one shoulder, as in the little portrait at the window. I have let the velvet hanging drop back against the bare wall, and, without knowing why, I discover that I am smoothing out the folds, so that they fall properly. From above on the stairs three cats look at me questioningly.

At Gressoney, in the summer, I used to see her every Sunday coming out of church. For five minutes she held court, on consecrated ground, in the shade, between the church and the little portico. 'Do you do much climbing?' 'No, Your Majesty.' 'I did not think you were so lazy. Petrarch was an Alpinist.' For that very reason (I should have liked to answer) I am not, for even in literature we have to respect the hierarchies; but by this time she had turned to some one else. 'How many months did you stay in America?' she asked me at the end of a lecture in the hall of the Collegio Romano, I forget how many years ago. Behind it the gilded arm-chair lorded it and the spectators crowded around on tip-toe to watch. 'And would you like to return to America?' 'No, Your Majesty.' 'Why would you not like to return to America?'

She interrogated with expert mastery in the art of darting the most unexpected and penetrating questions, so as to judge men in the flash of an eye. 'Your Majesty, I should have to give another lecture to explain why not.' She laughed, turning towards her lady and gentleman. 'You must give it, next year', and she held out her hand to me, dismissing me. I did not give the lecture, of

course, but the subject was a good one; and the 'Ladies of the Little Dove' (the name, resembling a pseudonym of the Holy Ghost, then used by the ladies of the committee for the Queen's lectures held, before the Collegio Romano was used for the purpose, in the School in Via della Palombella near Sant' Eustacchio) reminded me faithfully of it for two or three years, until, in despair, I went back to America, contradicting but saving myself.

Poor trifles, to-day, now that she is so near to me, behind this fragile wall, and so far, enshrined henceforth in History with her flower-like name carved for the centuries in golden letters on a wall of the Pantheon. Now I realize that always, whenever I enjoyed the privilege of speaking with her, punctuating my measured words with 'Your Majestys', one single question was hidden at the back of my heart, a timid and ridiculous one: 'Does Your Majesty remember a little boy in a sailor-suit who on the Pincio, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, used to post himself behind a plane-tree before the gate of Villa Medici, to salute you and go home, illuminated by the smile that his blonde Queen presented him with?' And as she certainly would have thought that I had gone mad, it would have been possible for me to add: 'Then, Your Majesty, you were for me the most beautiful woman in the world'.

I return with lowered head amidst the crowd into the damp gloom, amongst the withered wreaths, and, one step at a time, come out into the open under the rain.

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