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Produced by Dagny [dagnypg@yahoo.com]  
and David Widger [widger@cecomet.net]

THE THREE CITIES

ROME

BY

EMILE ZOLA

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

PART V

XIV

THAT evening, when Pierre emerged from the Borgo in front of the Vatican, a sonorous stroke rang out from the clock amidst the deep silence of the dark and sleepy district. It was only half-past eight, and being in advance the young priest resolved to wait some twenty minutes in order to reach the doors of the papal apartments precisely at nine, the hour fixed for his audience.

This respite brought him some relief amidst the infinite emotion and grief which gripped his heart. That tragic afternoon which he had spent in the chamber of death, where Dario and Benedetta now slept the eternal sleep in one another's arms, had left him very weary. He was haunted by a wild, dolorous vision of the two lovers, and involuntary sighs came from his lips whilst tears continually moistened his eyes. He had been altogether unable to eat that evening. Ah! how he would have liked to hide himself and weep at his ease! His heart melted at each fresh thought. The pitiful death of the lovers intensified the grievous feeling with which his book was instinct, and impelled him to yet greater compassion, a perfect anguish of charity for all who suffered in the world. And he was so distracted by the thought of the many physical and moral sores of Paris and of Rome, where he had beheld so much unjust and abominable suffering, that at each step he took he feared lest he should burst into sobs with arms upstretched towards the blackness of heaven.

In the hope of somewhat calming himself he began to walk slowly across the Piazza of St. Peter's, now all darkness and solitude. On arriving he had fancied that he was losing himself in a murky sea, but by degrees his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness. The vast expanse was only lighted by the four candelabra at the corners of the obelisk and by infrequent lamps skirting the buildings which run on either hand towards the Basilica. Under the colonnade, too, other lamps threw yellow gleams across the forest of pillars, showing up their stone trunks in fantastic fashion; while on the piazza only the pale, ghostly obelisk was at all distinctly

visible. Pierre could scarcely perceive the dim, silent facade of St. Peter's; whilst of the dome he merely divined a gigantic, bluey roundness faintly shadowed against the sky. In the obscurity he at first heard the plashing of the fountains without being at all able to see them, but on approaching he at last distinguished the slender phantoms of the ever rising jets which fell again in spray. And above the vast square stretched the vast and moonless sky of a deep velvety blue, where the stars were large and radiant like carbuncles; Charles's Wain, with golden wheels and golden shaft tilted back as it were, over the roof of the Vatican, and Orion, bedizened with the three bright stars of his belt, showing magnificently above Rome, in the direction of the Via Giulia.

At last Pierre raised his eyes to the Vatican, but facing the piazza there was here merely a confused jumble of walls, amidst which only two gleams of light appeared on the floor of the papal apartments. The Court of San Damaso was, however, lighted, for the conservatory-like glass-work of two of its sides sparkled as with the reflection of gas lamps which could not be seen. For a time there was not a sound or sign of movement, but at last two persons crossed the expanse of the piazza, and then came a third who in his turn disappeared, nothing remaining but a rhythmical far-away echo of steps. The spot was indeed a perfect desert, there were neither promenaders nor passers-by, nor was there even the shadow of a prowler in the pillared forest of the colonnade, which was as empty as the wild primeval forests of the world's infancy. And what a solemn desert it was, full of the silence of haughty desolation. Never had so vast and black a presentment of slumber, so instinct with the sovereign nobility of death, appeared to Pierre.

At ten minutes to nine he at last made up his mind and went towards the bronze portal. Only one of the folding doors was now open at the end of the right-hand porticus, where the increasing density of the gloom steeped everything in night. Pierre remembered the instructions which Monsignor Nani had given him; at each door that he reached he was to ask for Signor Squadra without adding a word, and thereupon each door would open and he would have nothing to do but to let himself be guided on. No one but the prelate now knew that he was there, since Benedetta, the only being to whom he had confided the secret, was dead. When he had crossed the threshold of the bronze doors and found himself in presence of the motionless, sleeping Swiss Guard, who was on duty there, he simply spoke the words agreed upon: "Signor Squadra." And as the Guard did not stir, did not seek to bar his way, he passed on, turning into the vestibule of the Scala Pia, the stone stairway which ascends to the Court of San Damaso. And not a soul was to be seen: there was but the faint sound of his own light footsteps and the sleepy glow of the gas jets whose light was softly whitened by globes of frosted glass. Up above, on reaching the courtyard he found it a solitude, whose slumber seemed sepulchral amidst the mournful gleams of the gas lamps which cast a pallid reflection on the lofty glass-work of the facades. And feeling somewhat nervous, affected by the quiver which pervaded all that void and silence, Pierre hastened on, turning to the right, towards the low flight of steps which leads to the staircase of the Pope's private apartments.

Here stood a superb gendarme in full uniform. "Signor Squadra," said

Pierre, and without a word the gendarme pointed to the stairs.

The young man went up. It was a broad stairway, with low steps, balustrade of white marble, and walls covered with yellowish stucco. The gas, burning in globes of round glass, seemed to have been already turned down in a spirit of prudent economy. And in the glimmering light nothing could have been more mournfully solemn than that cold and pallid staircase. On each landing there was a Swiss Guard, halbard in hand, and in the heavy slumber spreading through the palace one only heard the regular monotonous footsteps of these men, ever marching up and down, in order no doubt that they might not succumb to the benumbing influence of their surroundings.

Amidst the invading dimness and the quivering silence the ascent of the stairs seemed interminable to Pierre, who by the time he reached the second-floor landing imagined that he had been climbing for ages. There, outside the glass door of the Sala Clementina, only the right-hand half of which was open, a last Swiss Guard stood watching.

"Signor Squadra," Pierre said again, and the Guard drew back to let him pass.

The Sala Clementina, spacious enough by daylight, seemed immense at that nocturnal hour, in the twilight glimmer of its lamps. All the opulent decorative-work, sculpture, painting, and gilding became blended, the walls assuming a tawny vagueness amidst which appeared bright patches like the sparkle of precious stones. There was not an article of furniture, nothing but the endless pavement stretching away into the semi-darkness. At last, however, near a door at the far end Pierre espied some men dozing on a bench. They were three Swiss Guards. "Signor Squadra," he said to them.

One of the Guards thereupon slowly rose and left the hall, and Pierre understood that he was to wait. He did not dare to move, disturbed as he was by the sound of his own footsteps on the paved floor, so he contented himself with gazing around and picturing the crowds which at times peopled that vast apartment, the first of the many papal ante-chambers. But before long the Guard returned, and behind him, on the threshold of the adjoining room, appeared a man of forty or thereabouts, who was clad in black from head to foot and suggested a cross between a butler and a beadle. He had a good-looking, clean-shaven face, with somewhat pronounced nose and large, clear, fixed eyes. "Signor Squadra," said Pierre for the last time.

The man bowed as if to say that he was Signor Squadra, and then, with a fresh reverence, he invited the priest to follow him. Thereupon at a leisurely step, one behind the other, they began to thread the interminable suite of waiting-rooms. Pierre, who was acquainted with the ceremonial, of which he had often spoken with Narcisse, recognised the different apartments as he passed through them, recalling their names and purpose, and peopling them in imagination with the various officials of the papal retinue who have the right to occupy them. These according to their rank cannot go beyond certain doors, so that the persons who are to

have audience of the Pope are passed on from the servants to the Noble Guards, from the Noble Guards to the honorary /Camerieri/, and from the latter to the /Camerieri segreti/, until they at last reach the presence of the Holy Father. At eight o'clock, however, the ante-rooms empty and become both deserted and dim, only a few lamps being left alight upon the pier tables standing here and there against the walls.

And first Pierre came to the ante-room of the /bussolanti/, mere ushers clad in red velvet broided with the papal arms, who conduct visitors to the door of the ante-room of honour. At that late hour only one of them was left there, seated on a bench in such a dark corner that his purple tunic looked quite black. Then the Hall of the Gendarmes was crossed, where according to the regulations the secretaries of cardinals and other high personages await their masters' return; and this was now completely empty, void both of the handsome blue uniforms with white shoulder belts and the cassocks of fine black cloth which mingled in it during the brilliant reception hours. Empty also was the following room, a smaller one reserved to the Palatine Guards, who are recruited among the Roman middle class and wear black tunics with gold epaulets and shakoes surmounted by red plumes. Then Pierre and his guide turned into another series of apartments, and again was the first one empty. This was the Hall of the Arras, a superb waiting-room with lofty painted ceiling and admirable Gobelins tapestry designed by Audran and representing the miracles of Jesus. And empty also was the ante-chamber of the Noble Guards which followed, with its wooden stools, its pier table on the right-hand surmounted by a large crucifix standing between two lamps, and its large door opening at the far end into another but smaller room, a sort of alcove indeed, where there is an altar at which the Holy Father says mass by himself whilst those privileged to be present remain kneeling on the marble slabs of the outer apartment which is resplendent with the dazzling uniforms of the Guards. And empty likewise was the ensuing ante-room of honour, otherwise the grand throne-room, where the Pope receives two or three hundred people at a time in public audience. The throne, an arm-chair of elaborate pattern, gilded, and upholstered with red velvet, stands under a velvet canopy of the same hue, in front of the windows. Beside it is the cushion on which the Pope rests his foot in order that it may be kissed. Then facing one another, right and left of the room, there are two pier tables, on one of which is a clock and on the other a crucifix between lofty candelabra with feet of gilded wood. The wall hangings, of red silk damask with a Louis XIV palm pattern, are topped by a pompous frieze, framing a ceiling decorated with allegorical figures and attributes, and it is only just in front of the throne that a Smyrna carpet covers the magnificent marble pavement. On the days of private audience, when the Pope remains in the little throne-room or at times in his bed-chamber, the grand throne-room becomes simply the ante-room of honour, where high dignitaries of the Church, ambassadors, and great civilian personages, wait their turns. Two /Camerieri/, one in violet coat, the other of the Cape and the Sword, here do duty, receiving from the /bussolanti/ the persons who are to be honoured with audiences and conducting them to the door of the next room, the secret or private ante-chamber, where they hand them over to the /Camerieri segreti/.

Signor Squadra who, walking on with slow and silent steps, had not yet

once turned round, paused for a moment on reaching the door of the /anticamera segreta/ so as to give Pierre time to breathe and recover himself somewhat before crossing the threshold of the sanctuary. The /Camerieri segreti/ alone had the right to occupy that last ante-chamber, and none but the cardinals might wait there till the Pope should condescend to receive them. And so when Signor Squadra made up his mind to admit Pierre, the latter could not restrain a slight nervous shiver as if he were passing into some redoubtable mysterious sphere beyond the limits of the lower world. In the daytime a Noble Guard stood on sentry duty before the door, but the latter was now free of access, and the room within proved as empty as all the others. It was rather narrow, almost like a passage, with two windows overlooking the new district of the castle fields and a third one facing the Piazza of St. Peter's. Near the last was a door conducting to the little throne-room, and between this door and the window stood a small table at which a secretary, now absent, usually sat. And here again, as in all the other rooms, one found a gilded pier table surmounted by a crucifix flanked by a pair of lamps. In a corner too there was a large clock, loudly ticking in its ebony case incrustated with brass-work. Still there was nothing to awaken curiosity under the panelled and gilded ceiling unless it were the wall-hangings of red damask, on which yellow scutcheons displaying the Keys and the Tiara alternated with armorial lions, each with a paw resting on a globe.

Signor Squadra, however, now noticed that Pierre still carried his hat in his hand, whereas according to etiquette he should have left it in the hall of the /bussolanti/, only cardinals being privileged to carry their hats with them into the Pope's presence. Accordingly he discreetly took the young priest's from him, and deposited it on the pier table to indicate that it must at least remain there. Then, without a word, by a simple bow he gave Pierre to understand that he was about to announce him to his Holiness, and that he must be good enough to wait for a few minutes in that room.

On being left to himself Pierre drew a long breath. He was stifling; his heart was beating as though it would burst. Nevertheless his mind remained clear, and in spite of the semi-obscurity he had been able to form some idea of the famous and magnificent apartments of the Pope, a suite of splendid /salons/ with tapestried or silken walls, gilded or painted friezes, and frescoed ceilings. By way of furniture, however, there were only pier table, stools,\* and thrones. And the lamps and the clocks, and the crucifixes, even the thrones, were all presents brought from the four quarters of the world in the great fervent days of jubilee. There was no sign of comfort, everything was pompous, stiff, cold, and inconvenient. All olden Italy was there, with its perpetual display and lack of intimate, cosy life. It had been necessary to lay a few carpets over the superb marble slabs which froze one's feet; and some /caloriferes/ had even lately been installed, but it was not thought prudent to light them lest the variations of temperature should give the Pope a cold. However, that which more particularly struck Pierre now that he stood there waiting was the extraordinary silence which prevailed all around, silence so deep that it seemed as if all the dark quiescence of that huge, somniferous Vatican were concentrated in that one suite of lifeless, sumptuous rooms, which the motionless flamelets of the lamps as

dimly illumined.

\* M. Zola seems to have fallen into error here. Many of the seats, which are of peculiar antique design, do, in the lower part, resemble stools, but they have backs, whereas a stool proper has none. Briefly, these seats, which are entirely of wood, are not unlike certain old-fashioned hall chairs.--Trans.

All at once the ebony clock struck nine and the young man felt astonished. What! had only ten minutes elapsed since he had crossed the threshold of the bronze doors below? He felt as if he had been walking on for days and days. Then, desiring to overcome the nervous feeling which oppressed him--for he ever feared lest his enforced calmness should collapse amidst a flood of tears--he began to walk up and down, passing in front of the clock, glancing at the crucifix on the pier table, and the globe of the lamp on which had remained the mark of a servant's greasy fingers. And the light was so faint and yellow that he felt inclined to turn the lamp up, but did not dare. Then he found himself with his brow resting against one of the panes of the window facing the Piazza of St. Peter's, and for a moment he was thunderstruck, for between the imperfectly closed shutters he could see all Rome, as he had seen it one day from the /loggie/ of Raffaella, and as he had pictured Leo XIII contemplating it from the window of his bed-room. However, it was now Rome by night, Rome spreading out into the depths of the gloom, as limitless as the starry sky. And in that sea of black waves one could only with certainty identify the larger thoroughfares which the white brightness of electric lights turned, as it were, into Milky Ways. All the rest showed but a swarming of little yellow sparks, the crumbs, as it were, of a half-extinguished heaven swept down upon the earth. Occasional constellations of bright stars, tracing mysterious figures, vainly endeavoured to show forth distinctly, but they were submerged, blotted out by the general chaos which suggested the dust of some old planet that had crumbled there, losing its splendour and reduced to mere phosphorescent sand. And how immense was the blackness thus sprinkled with light, how huge the mass of obscurity and mystery into which the Eternal City with its seven and twenty centuries, its ruins, its monuments, its people, its history seemed to have been merged. You could no longer tell where it began or where it ended, whether it spread to the farthest recesses of the gloom, or whether it were so reduced that the sun on rising would illumine but a little pile of ashes.

However, in spite of all Pierre's efforts, his nervous anguish increased each moment, even in presence of that ocean of darkness which displayed such sovereign quiescence. He drew away from the window and quivered from head to foot on hearing a faint footfall and thinking it was that of Signor Squadra approaching to fetch him. The sound came from an adjacent apartment, the little throne-room, whose door, he now perceived, had remained ajar. And at last, as he heard nothing further, he yielded to his feverish impatience and peeped into this room which he found to be fairly spacious, again hung with red damask, and containing a gilded arm-chair, covered with red velvet under a canopy of the same material. And again there was the inevitable pier table, with a tall ivory crucifix, a clock, a pair of lamps, a pair of candelabra, a pair of large

vases on pedestals, and two smaller ones of Sevres manufacture decorated with the Holy Father's portrait. At the same time, however, the room displayed rather more comfort, for a Smyrna carpet covered the whole of the marble floor, while a few arm-chairs stood against the walls, and an imitation chimney-piece, draped with damask, served as counterpart to the pier table. As a rule the Pope, whose bed-chamber communicated with this little throne-room, received in the latter such persons as he desired to honour. And Pierre's shiver became more pronounced at the idea that in all likelihood he would merely have the throne-room to cross and that Leo XIII was yonder behind its farther door. Why was he kept waiting, he wondered? He had been told of mysterious audiences granted at a similar hour to personages who had been received in similar silent fashion, great personages whose names were only mentioned in the lowest whispers. With regard to himself no doubt, it was because he was considered compromising that there was a desire to receive him in this manner unknown to the personages of the Court, and so as to speak with him at ease. Then, all at once, he understood the cause of the noise he had recently heard, for beside the lamp on the pier table of the little throne-room he saw a kind of butler's tray containing some soiled plates, knives, forks, and spoons, with a bottle and a glass, which had evidently just been removed from a supper table. And he realised that Signor Squadra, having seen these things in the Pope's room, had brought them there, and had then gone in again, perhaps to tidy up. He knew also of the Pope's frugality, how he took his meals all alone at a little round table, everything being brought to him in that tray, a plate of meat, a plate of vegetables, a little Bordeaux claret as prescribed by his doctor, and a large allowance of beef broth of which he was very fond. In the same way as others might offer a cup of tea, he was wont to offer cups of broth to the old cardinals his friends and favourites, quite an invigorating little treat which these old bachelors much enjoyed. And, O ye orgies of Alexander VI, ye banquets and /galas/ of Julius II and Leo X, only eight /lire/ a day--six shillings and fourpence--were allowed to defray the cost of Leo XIII's table! However, just as that recollection occurred to Pierre, he again heard a slight noise, this time in his Holiness's bed-chamber, and thereupon, terrified by his indiscretion, he hastened to withdraw from the entrance of the throne-room which, lifeless and quiescent though it was, seemed in his agitation to flare as with sudden fire.

Then, quivering too violently to be able to remain still, he began to walk up and down the ante-chamber. He remembered that Narcisse had spoken to him of that Signor Squadra, his Holiness's cherished valet, whose importance and influence were so great. He alone, on reception days, was able to prevail on the Pope to don a clean cassock if the one he was wearing happened to be soiled by snuff. And though his Holiness stubbornly shut himself up alone in his bed-room every night from a spirit of independence, which some called the anxiety of a miser determined to sleep alone with his treasure, Signor Squadra at all events occupied an adjoining chamber, and was ever on the watch, ready to respond to the faintest call. Again, it was he who respectfully intervened whenever his Holiness sat up too late or worked too long. But on this point it was difficult to induce the Pope to listen to reason. During his hours of insomnia he would often rise and send Squadra to fetch a secretary in order that he might detail some memoranda or sketch



out an encyclical letter. When the drafting of one of the latter impassioned him he would have spent days and nights over it, just as formerly, when claiming proficiency in Latin verse, he had often let the dawn surprise him whilst he was polishing a line. But, indeed, he slept very little, his brain ever being at work, ever scheming out the realisation of some former ideas. His memory alone seemed to have slightly weakened during recent times.

Pierre, as he slowly paced to and fro, gradually became absorbed in his thoughts of that lofty and sovereign personality. From the petty details of the Pope's daily existence, he passed to his intellectual life, to the /role/ which he was certainly bent on playing as a great pontiff. And Pierre asked himself which of his two hundred and fifty-seven predecessors, the long line of saints and criminals, men of mediocrity and men of genius, he most desired to resemble. Was it one of the first humble popes, those who followed on during the first three centuries, mere heads of burial guilds, fraternal pastors of the Christian community? Was it Pope Damasus, the first great builder, the man of letters who took delight in intellectual matters, the ardent believer who is said to have opened the Catacombs to the piety of the faithful? Was it Leo III, who by crowning Charlemagne boldly consummated the rupture with the schismatic East and conveyed the Empire to the West by the all-powerful will of God and His Church, which thenceforth disposed of the crowns of monarchs? Was it the terrible Gregory VII, the purifier of the temple, the sovereign of kings; was it Innocent III or Boniface VIII, those masters of souls, nations, and thrones, who, armed with the fierce weapon of excommunication, reigned with such despotism over the terrified middle ages that Catholicism was never nearer the attainment of its dream of universal dominion? Was it Urban II or Gregory IX or another of those popes in whom flared the red Crusading passion which urged the nations on to the conquest of the unknown and the divine? Was it Alexander III, who defended the Holy See against the Empire, and at last conquered and set his foot on the neck of Frederick Barbarossa? Was it, long after the sorrows of Avignon, Julius II, who wore the cuirass and once more strengthened the political power of the papacy? Was it Leo X, the pompous, glorious patron of the Renaissance, of a whole great century of art, whose mind, however, was possessed of so little penetration and foresight that he looked on Luther as a mere rebellious monk? Was it Pius V, who personified dark and avenging reaction, the fire of the stakes that punished the heretic world? Was it some other of the popes who reigned after the Council of Trent with faith absolute, belief re-established in its full integrity, the Church saved by pride and the stubborn upholding of every dogma? Or was it a pope of the decline, such as Benedict XIV, the man of vast intelligence, the learned theologian who, as his hands were tied, and he could not dispose of the kingdoms of the world, spent a worthy life in regulating the affairs of heaven?

In this wise, in Pierre's mind there spread out the whole history of the popes, the most prodigious of all histories, showing fortune in every guise, the lowest, the most wretched, as well as the loftiest and most dazzling; whilst an obstinate determination to live enabled the papacy to survive everything--conflagrations, massacres, and the downfall of many nations, for always did it remain militant and erect in the persons of

its popes, that most extraordinary of all lines of absolute, conquering, and domineering sovereigns, every one of them--even the puny and humble--masters of the world, every one of them glorious with the imperishable glory of heaven when they were thus evoked in that ancient Vatican, where their spirits assuredly awoke at night and prowled about the endless galleries and spreading halls in that tomb-like silence whose quiver came no doubt from the light touch of their gliding steps over the marble slabs.

However, Pierre was now thinking that he indeed knew which of the great popes Leo XIII most desired to resemble. It was first Gregory the Great, the conqueror and organiser of the early days of Catholic power. He had come of ancient Roman stock, and in his heart there was a little of the blood of the emperors. He administered Rome after it had been saved from the Goths, cultivated the ecclesiastical domains, and divided earthly wealth into thirds, one for the poor, one for the clergy, and one for the Church. Then too he was the first to establish the Propaganda, sending his priests forth to civilise and pacify the nations, and carrying his conquests so far as to win Great Britain over to the divine law of Christ. And the second pope whom Leo XIII took as model was one who had arisen after a long lapse of centuries, Sixtus V, the pope financier and politician, the vine-dresser's son, who, when he had donned the tiara, revealed one of the most extensive and supple minds of a period fertile in great diplomatists. He heaped up treasure and displayed stern avarice, in order that he might ever have in his coffers all the money needful for war or for peace. He spent years and years in negotiations with kings, never despairing of his own triumph; and never did he display open hostility for his times, but took them as they were and then sought to modify them in accordance with the interests of the Holy See, showing himself conciliatory in all things and with every one, already dreaming of an European balance of power which he hoped to control. And withal a very saintly pope, a fervent mystic, yet a pope of the most absolute and domineering mind blended with a politician ready for whatever courses might most conduce to the rule of God's Church on earth.

And, after all, Pierre amidst his rising enthusiasm, which despite his efforts at calmness was sweeping away all prudence and doubt, Pierre asked himself why he need question the past. Was not Leo XIII the pope whom he had depicted in his book, the great pontiff, who was desired and expected? No doubt the portrait which he had sketched was not accurate in every detail, but surely its main lines must be correct if mankind were to retain a hope of salvation. Whole pages of that book of his arose before him, and he again beheld the Leo XIII that he had portrayed, the wise and conciliatory politician, labouring for the unity of the Church and so anxious to make it strong and invincible against the day of the inevitable great struggle. He again beheld him freed from the cares of the temporal power, elevated, radiant with moral splendour, the only authority left erect above the nations; he beheld him realising what mortal danger would be incurred if the solution of the social question were left to the enemies of Christianity, and therefore resolving to intervene in contemporary quarrels for the defence of the poor and the lowly, even as Jesus had intervened once before. And he again beheld him putting himself on the side of the democracies, accepting the Republic in

France, leaving the dethroned kings in exile, and verifying the prediction which promised the empire of the world to Rome once more when the papacy should have unified belief and have placed itself at the head of the people. The times indeed were near accomplishment, Caesar was struck down, the Pope alone remained, and would not the people, the great silent multitude, for whom the two powers had so long contended, give itself to its Father now that it knew him to be both just and charitable, with heart aglow and hand outstretched to welcome all the penniless toilers and beggars of the roads! Given the catastrophe which threatened our rotten modern societies, the frightful misery which ravaged every city, there was surely no other solution possible: Leo XIII, the predestined, necessary redeemer, the pastor sent to save the flock from coming disaster by re-establishing the true Christian community, the forgotten golden age of primitive Christianity. The reign of justice would at last begin, all men would be reconciled, there would be but one nation living in peace and obeying the equalising law of work, under the high patronage of the Pope, sole bond of charity and love on earth!

And at this thought Pierre was upbuoyed by fiery enthusiasm. At last he was about to see the Holy Father, empty his heart and open his soul to him! He had so long and so passionately looked for the advent of that moment! To secure it he had fought with all his courage through ever recurring obstacles, and the length and difficulty of the struggle and the success now at last achieved, increased his feverishness, his desire for final victory. Yes, yes, he would conquer, he would confound his enemies. As he had said to Monsignor Fornaro, could the Pope disavow him? Had he not expressed the Holy Father's secret ideas? Perhaps he might have done so somewhat prematurely, but was not that a fault to be forgiven? And then too, he remembered his declaration to Monsignor Nani, that he himself would never withdraw and suppress his book, for he neither regretted nor disowned anything that was in it. At this very moment he again questioned himself, and felt that all his valour and determination to defend his book, all his desire to work the triumph of his belief, remained intact. Yet his mental perturbation was becoming great, he had to seek for ideas, wondering how he should enter the Pope's presence, what he should say, what precise terms he should employ. Something heavy and mysterious which he could hardly account for seemed to weigh him down. At bottom he was weary, already exhausted, only held up by his dream, his compassion for human misery. However, he would enter in all haste, he would fall upon his knees and speak as he best could, letting his heart flow forth. And assuredly the Holy Father would smile on him, and dismiss him with a promise that he would not sign the condemnation of a work in which he had found the expression of his own most cherished thoughts.

Then, again, such an acute sensation as of fainting came over Pierre that he went up to the window to press his burning brow against the cold glass. His ears were buzzing, his legs staggering, whilst his brain throbbed violently. And he was striving to forget his thoughts by gazing upon the black immensity of Rome, longing to be steeped in night himself, total, healing night, the night in which one sleeps on for ever, knowing neither pain nor wretchedness, when all at once he became conscious that somebody was standing behind him; and thereupon, with a start, he turned

round.

And there, indeed, stood Signor Squadra in his black livery. Again he made one of his customary bows to invite the visitor to follow him, and again he walked on in front, crossing the little throne-room, and slowly opening the farther door. Then he drew aside, allowed Pierre to enter, and noiselessly closed the door behind him.

Pierre was in his Holiness's bed-room. He had feared one of those overwhelming attacks of emotion which madden or paralyse one. He had been told of women reaching the Pope's presence in a fainting condition, staggering as if intoxicated, while others came with a rush, as though upheld and borne along by invisible pinions. And suddenly the anguish of his own spell of waiting, his intense feverishness, ceased in a sort of astonishment, a reaction which rendered him very calm and so restored his clearness of vision, that he could see everything. As he entered he distinctly realised the decisive importance of such an audience, he, a mere petty priest in presence of the Supreme Pontiff, the Head of the Church. All his religious and moral life would depend on it; and possibly it was this sudden thought that thus chilled him on the threshold of the redoubtable sanctuary, which he had approached with such quivering steps, and which he would not have thought to enter otherwise than with distracted heart and loss of senses, unable to do more than stammer the simple prayers of childhood.

Later on, when he sought to classify his recollections he remembered that his eyes had first lighted on Leo XIII, not, however, to the exclusion of his surroundings, but in conjunction with them, that spacious room hung with yellow damask whose alcove, adorned with fluted marble columns, was so deep that the bed was quite hidden away in it, as well as other articles of furniture, a couch, a wardrobe, and some trunks, those famous trunks in which the treasure of the Peter's Pence was said to be securely locked. A sort of Louis XIV writing-desk with ornaments of engraved brass stood face to face with a large gilded and painted Louis XV pier table on which a lamp was burning beside a lofty crucifix. The room was virtually bare, only three arm-chairs and four or five other chairs, upholstered in light silk, being disposed here and there over the well-worn carpet. And on one of the arm-chairs sat Leo XIII, near a small table on which another lamp with a shade had been placed. Three newspapers, moreover, lay there, two of them French and one Italian, and the last was half unfolded as if the Pope had momentarily turned from it to stir a glass of syrup, standing beside him, with a long silver-gilt spoon.

In the same way as Pierre saw the Pope's room, he saw his costume, his cassock of white cloth with white buttons, his white skull-cap, his white cape and his white sash fringed with gold and brodered at either end with golden keys. His stockings were white, his slippers were of red velvet, and these again were brodered with golden keys. What surprised the young priest, however, was his Holiness's face and figure, which now seemed so shrunken that he scarcely recognised them. This was his fourth meeting with the Pope. He had seen him walking in the Vatican gardens, enthroned in the Hall of Beatifications, and pontifying at St. Peter's, and now he beheld him on that arm-chair, in privacy, and looking so

slight and fragile that he could not restrain a feeling of affectionate anxiety. Leo's neck was particularly remarkable, slender beyond belief, suggesting the neck of some little, aged, white bird. And his face, of the pallor of alabaster, was characteristically transparent, to such a degree, indeed, that one could see the lamplight through his large commanding nose, as if the blood had entirely withdrawn from that organ. A mouth of great length, with white bloodless lips, streaked the lower part of the papal countenance, and the eyes alone had remained young and handsome. Superb eyes they were, brilliant like black diamonds, endowed with sufficient penetration and strength to lay souls open and force them to confess the truth aloud. Some scanty white curls emerged from under the white skull-cap, thus whitely crowning the thin white face, whose ugliness was softened by all this whiteness, this spiritual whiteness in which Leo XIII's flesh seemed as it were but pure lily-white florescence.

At the first glance, however, Pierre noticed that if Signor Squadra had kept him waiting, it had not been in order to compel the Holy Father to don a clean cassock, for the one he was wearing was badly soiled by snuff. A number of brown stains had trickled down the front of the garment beside the buttons, and just like any good /bourgeois/, his Holiness had a handkerchief on his knees to wipe himself. Apart from all this he seemed in good health, having recovered from his recent indisposition as easily as he usually recovered from such passing illnesses, sober, prudent old man that he was, quite free from organic disease, and simply declining by reason of progressive natural exhaustion.

Immediately on entering Pierre had felt that the Pope's sparkling eyes, those two black diamonds, were fixed upon him. The silence was profound, and the lamps burned with motionless, pallid flames. He had to approach, and after making the three genuflections prescribed by etiquette, he stooped over one of the Pope's feet resting on a cushion in order to kiss the red velvet slipper. And on the Pope's side there was not a word, not a gesture, not a movement. When the young man drew himself up again he found the two black diamonds, those two eyes which were all brightness and intelligence, still riveted on him.

But at last Leo XIII, who had been unwilling to spare the young priest the humble duty of kissing his foot and who now left him standing, began to speak, whilst still examining him, probing, as it were, his very soul. "My son," he said, "you greatly desired to see me, and I consented to afford you that satisfaction."

He spoke in French, somewhat uncertain French, pronounced after the Italian fashion, and so slowly did he articulate each sentence that one could have written it down like so much dictation. And his voice, as Pierre had previously noticed, was strong and nasal, one of those full voices which people are surprised to hear coming from debile and apparently bloodless and breathless frames.

In response to the Holy Father's remark Pierre contented himself with bowing, knowing that respect required him to wait for a direct answer before speaking. However, this question promptly came. "You live in

Paris?" asked Leo XIII.

"Yes, Holy Father."

"Are you attached to one of the great parishes of the city?"

"No, Holy Father. I simply officiate at the little church of Neuilly."

"Ah, yes, Neuilly, that is in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne, is it not? And how old are you, my son?"

"Thirty-four, Holy Father."

A short interval followed. Leo XIII had at last lowered his eyes. With frail, ivory hand he took up the glass beside him, again stirred the syrup with the long spoon, and then drank a little of it. And all this he did gently and slowly, with a prudent, judicious air, as was his wont no doubt in everything. "I have read your book, my son," he resumed. "Yes, the greater part of it. As a rule only fragments are submitted to me. But a person who is interested in you handed me the volume, begging me to glance through it. And that is how I was able to look into it."

As he spoke he made a slight gesture in which Pierre fancied he could detect a protest against the isolation in which he was kept by those surrounding him, who, as Monsignor Nani had said, maintained a strict watch in order that nothing they objected to might reach him. And thereupon the young priest ventured to say: "I thank your Holiness for having done me so much honour. No greater or more desired happiness could have befallen me." He was indeed so happy! On seeing the Pope so calm, so free from all signs of anger, and on hearing him speak in that way of his book, like one well acquainted with it, he imagined that his cause was won.

"You are in relations with Monsieur le Vicomte Philibert de la Choue, are you not, my son?" continued Leo XIII. "I was struck by the resemblance between some of your ideas and those of that devoted servant of the Church, who has in other ways given us previous testimony of his good feelings."

"Yes, indeed, Holy Father, Monsieur de la Choue is kind enough to show me some affection. We have often talked together, so it is not surprising that I should have given expression to some of his most cherished ideas."

"No doubt, no doubt. For instance, there is that question of the working-class guilds with which he largely occupies himself--with which, in fact, he occupies himself rather too much. At the time of his last journey to Rome he spoke to me of it in the most pressing manner. And in the same way, quite recently, another of your compatriots, one of the best and worthiest of men, Monsieur le Baron de Fouras, who brought us that superb pilgrimage of the St. Peter's Pence Fund, never ceased his efforts until I consented to receive him, when he spoke to me on the same subject during nearly an hour. Only it must be said that they do not agree in the matter, for one begs me to do things which the other will

not have me do on any account."

Pierre realised that the conversation was straying away from his book, but he remembered having promised the Viscount that if he should see the Pope he would make an attempt to obtain from him a decisive expression of opinion on the famous question as to whether the working-class guilds or corporations should be free or obligatory, open or closed. And the unhappy Viscount, kept in Paris by the gout, had written the young priest letter after letter on the subject, whilst his rival the Baron, availing himself of the opportunity offered by the international pilgrimage, endeavoured to wring from the Pope an approval of his own views, with which he would have returned in triumph to France. Pierre conscientiously desired to keep his promise, and so he answered: "Your Holiness knows better than any of us in which direction true wisdom lies. Monsieur de Fouras is of opinion that salvation, the solution of the labour question, lies simply in the re-establishment of the old free corporations, whilst Monsieur de la Choue desires the corporations to be obligatory, protected by the state and governed by new regulations. This last conception is certainly more in agreement with the social ideas now prevalent in France. Should your Holiness condescend to express a favourable opinion in that sense, the young French Catholic party would certainly know how to turn it to good result, by producing quite a movement of the working classes in favour of the Church."

In his quiet way Leo XIII responded: "But I cannot. Frenchmen always ask things of me which I cannot, will not do. What I will allow you to say on my behalf to Monsieur de la Choue is, that though I cannot content him I have not contented Monsieur de Fouras. He obtained from me nothing beyond the expression of my sincere good-will for the French working classes, who are so dear to me and who can do so much for the restoration of the faith. You must surely understand, however, that among you Frenchmen there are questions of detail, of mere organisation, so to say, into which I cannot possibly enter without imparting to them an importance which they do not have, and at the same time greatly discontenting some people should I please others."

As the Pope pronounced these last words he smiled a pale smile, in which the shrewd, conciliatory politician, who was determined not to allow his infallibility to be compromised in useless and risky ventures, was fully revealed. And then he drank a little more syrup and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, like a sovereign whose Court day is over and who takes his ease, having chosen this hour of solitude and silence to chat as long as he may be so inclined.

Pierre, however, sought to bring him back to the subject of his book. "Monsieur de la Choue," said he, "has shown me so much kindness and is so anxious to know the fate reserved to my book--as if, indeed, it were his own--that I should have been very happy to convey to him an expression of your Holiness's approval."

However, the Pope continued wiping his mouth and did not reply.

"I became acquainted with the Viscount," continued Pierre, "at the

residence of his Eminence Cardinal Bergerot, another great heart whose ardent charity ought to suffice to restore the faith in France."

This time the effect was immediate. "Ah! yes, Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot!" said Leo XIII. "I read that letter of his which is printed at the beginning of your book. He was very badly inspired in writing it to you; and you, my son, acted very culpably on the day you published it. I cannot yet believe that Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot had read some of your pages when he sent you an expression of his complete and full approval. I prefer to charge him with ignorance and thoughtlessness. How could he approve of your attacks on dogma, your revolutionary theories which tend to the complete destruction of our holy religion? If it be a fact that he had read your book, the only excuse he can invoke is sudden and inexplicable aberration. It is true that a very bad spirit prevails among a small portion of the French clergy. What are called Gallican ideas are ever sprouting up like noxious weeds; there is a malcontent Liberalism rebellious to our authority which continually hungers for free examination and sentimental adventures."

The Pope grew animated as he spoke. Italian words mingled with his hesitating French, and every now and again his full nasal voice resounded with the sonority of a brass instrument. "Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot," he continued, "must be given to understand that we shall crush him on the day when we see in him nothing but a rebellious son. He owes the example of obedience; we shall acquaint him with our displeasure, and we hope that he will submit. Humility and charity are great virtues doubtless, and we have always taken pleasure in recognising them in him. But they must not be the refuge of a rebellious heart, for they are as nothing unless accompanied by obedience--obedience, obedience, the finest adornment of the great saints!"

Pierre listened thunderstruck, overcome. He forgot himself to think of the apostle of kindness and tolerance upon whose head he had drawn this all-powerful anger. So Don Vigilio had spoken the truth: over and above his--Pierre's--head the denunciations of the Bishops of Evreux and Poitiers were about to fall on the man who opposed their Ultramontane policy, that worthy and gentle Cardinal Bergerot, whose heart was open to all the woes of the lowly and the poor. This filled the young priest with despair; he could accept the denunciation of the Bishop of Tarbes acting on behalf of the Fathers of the Grotto, for that only fell on himself, as a reprisal for what he had written about Lourdes; but the underhand warfare of the others exasperated him, filled him with dolorous indignation. And from that puny old man before him with the slender, scraggy neck of an aged bird, he had suddenly seen such a wrathful, formidable Master arise that he trembled. How could he have allowed himself to be deceived by appearances on entering? How could he have imagined that he was simply in presence of a poor old man, worn out by age, desirous of peace, and ready for every concession? A blast had swept through that sleepy chamber, and all his doubts and his anguish awoke once more. Ah! that Pope, how thoroughly he answered to all the accounts that he, Pierre, had heard but had refused to believe; so many people had told him in Rome that he would find Leo XIII a man of intellect rather than of sentiment, a man of the most unbounded pride, who from his very



youth had nourished the supreme ambition, to such a point indeed that he had promised eventual triumph to his relatives in order that they might make the necessary sacrifices for him, while since he had occupied the pontifical throne his one will and determination had been to reign, to reign in spite of all, to be the sole absolute and omnipotent master of the world! And now here was reality arising with irresistible force and confirming everything. And yet Pierre struggled, stubbornly clutching at his dream once more.

"Oh! Holy Father," said he, "I should be grieved indeed if his Eminence should have a moment's worry on account of my unfortunate book. If I be guilty I can answer for my error, but his Eminence only obeyed the dictates of his heart and can only have transgressed by excess of love for the disinherited of the world!"

Leo XIII made no reply. He had again raised his superb eyes, those eyes of ardent life, set, as it were, in the motionless countenance of an alabaster idol; and once more he was fixedly gazing at the young priest.

And Pierre, amidst his returning feverishness, seemed to behold him growing in power and splendour, whilst behind him arose a vision of the ages, a vision of that long line of popes whom the young priest had previously evoked, the saintly and the proud ones, the warriors and the ascetics, the theologians and the diplomatists, those who had worn armour, those who had conquered by the Cross, those who had disposed of empires as of mere provinces which God had committed to their charge. And in particular Pierre beheld the great Gregory, the conqueror and founder, and Sixtus V, the negotiator and politician, who had first foreseen the eventual victory of the papacy over all the vanquished monarchies. Ah! what a throng of magnificent princes, of sovereign masters with powerful brains and arms, there was behind that pale, motionless, old man! What an accumulation of inexhaustible determination, stubborn genius, and boundless domination! The whole history of human ambition, the whole effort of the ages to subject the nations to the pride of one man, the greatest force that has ever conquered, exploited, and fashioned mankind in the name of its happiness! And even now, when territorial sovereignty had come to an end, how great was the spiritual sovereignty of that pale and slender old man, in whose presence women fainted, as if overcome by the divine splendour radiating from his person. Not only did all the resounding glories, the masterful triumphs of history spread out behind him, but heaven opened, the very spheres beyond life shone out in their dazzling mystery. He--the Pope--stood at the portals of heaven, holding the keys and opening those portals to human souls; all the ancient symbolism was revived, freed at last from the stains of royalty here below.

"Oh! I beg you, Holy Father," resumed Pierre, "if an example be needed strike none other than myself. I have come, and am here; decide my fate, but do not aggravate my punishment by filling me with remorse at having brought condemnation on the innocent."

Leo XIII still refrained from replying, though he continued to look at the young priest with burning eyes. And he, Pierre, no longer beheld Leo

XIII, the last of a long line of popes, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the East, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the Temporal Domains of the Holy Church; he saw the Leo XIII that he had dreamt of, the awaited saviour who would dispel the frightful cataclysm in which rotten society was sinking. He beheld him with his supple, lofty intelligence and fraternal, conciliatory tactics, avoiding friction and labouring to bring about unity whilst with his heart overflowing with love he went straight to the hearts of the multitude, again giving the best of his blood in sign of the new alliance. He raised him aloft as the sole remaining moral authority, the sole possible bond of charity and peace--as the Father, in fact, who alone could stamp out injustice among his children, destroy misery, and re-establish the liberating Law of Work by bringing the nations back to the faith of the primitive Church, the gentleness and the wisdom of the true Christian community. And in the deep silence of that room the great figure which he thus set up assumed invincible all-powerfulness, extraordinary majesty.

"Oh, I beseech you, Holy Father, listen to me," he said. "Do not even strike me, strike no one, neither a being nor a thing, anything that can suffer under the sun. Show kindness and indulgence to all, show all the kindness and indulgence which the sight of the world's sufferings must have set in you!"

And then, seeing that Leo XIII still remained silent and still left him standing there, he sank down upon his knees, as if felled by the growing emotion which rendered his heart so heavy. And within him there was a sort of *debacle*; all his doubts, all his anguish and sadness burst forth in an irresistible stream. There was the memory of the frightful day that he had just spent, the tragic death of Dario and Benedetta, which weighed on him like lead; there were all the sufferings that he had experienced since his arrival in Rome, the destruction of his illusions, the wounds dealt to his delicacy, the buffets with which men and things had responded to his young enthusiasm; and, lying yet more deeply within his heart, there was the sum total of human wretchedness, the thought of famished ones howling for food, of mothers whose breasts were drained and who sobbed whilst kissing their hungry babes, of fathers without work, who clenched their fists and revolted--indeed, the whole of that hateful misery which is as old as mankind itself, which has preyed upon mankind since its earliest hour, and which he now had everywhere found increasing in horror and havoc, without a gleam of hope that it would ever be healed. And withal, yet more immense and more incurable, he felt within him a nameless sorrow to which he could assign no precise cause or name--an universal, an illimitable sorrow with which he melted despairingly, and which was perhaps the very sorrow of life.

"O Holy Father!" he exclaimed, "I myself have no existence and my book has no existence. I desired, passionately desired to see your Holiness that I might explain and defend myself. But I no longer know, I can no longer recall a single one of the things that I wished to say, I can only weep, weep the tears which are stifling me. Yes, I am but a poor man, and the only need I feel is to speak to you of the poor. Oh! the poor ones,

oh! the lowly ones, whom for two years past I have seen in our faubourgs of Paris, so wretched and so full of pain; the poor little children that I have picked out of the snow, the poor little angels who had eaten nothing for two days; the women too, consumed by consumption, without bread or fire, shivering in filthy hovels; and the men thrown on the street by slackness of trade, weary of begging for work as one begs for alms, sinking back into night, drunken with rage and harbouring the sole avenging thought of setting the whole city afire! And that night too, that terrible night, when in a room of horror I beheld a mother who had just killed herself with her five little ones, she lying on a palliase suckling her last-born, and two little girls, two pretty little blondes, sleeping the last sleep beside her, while the two boys had succumbed farther away, one of them crouching against a wall, and the other lying upon the floor, distorted as though by a last effort to avoid death! . . . O Holy Father! I am but an ambassador, the messenger of those who suffer and who sob, the humble delegate of the humble ones who die of want beneath the hateful harshness, the frightful injustice of our present-day social system! And I bring your Holiness their tears, and I lay their tortures at your Holiness's feet, I raise their cry of woe, like a cry from the abyss, that cry which demands justice unless indeed the very heavens are to fall! Oh! show your loving kindness, Holy Father, show compassion!"

The young man had stretched out his arms and implored Leo XIII with a gesture as of supreme appeal to the divine compassion. Then he continued: "And here, Holy Father, in this splendid and eternal Rome, is not the want and misery as frightful! During the weeks that I have roamed hither and thither among the dust of famous ruins, I have never ceased to come in contact with evils which demand cure. Ah! to think of all that is crumbling, all that is expiring, the agony of so much glory, the fearful sadness of a world which is dying of exhaustion and hunger! Yonder, under your Holiness's windows, have I not seen a district of horrors, a district of unfinished palaces stricken like rickety children who cannot attain to full growth, palaces which are already in ruins and have become places of refuge for all the woeful misery of Rome? And here, as in Paris, what a suffering multitude, what a shameless exhibition too of the social sore, the devouring cancer openly tolerated and displayed in utter heedlessness! There are whole families leading idle and hungry lives in the splendid sunlight; fathers waiting for work to fall to them from heaven; sons listlessly spending their days asleep on the dry grass; mothers and daughters, withered before their time, shuffling about in loquacious idleness. O Holy Father, already to-morrow at dawn may your Holiness open that window yonder and with your benediction awaken that great childish people, which still slumbers in ignorance and poverty! May your Holiness give it the soul it lacks, a soul with the consciousness of human dignity, of the necessary law of work, of free and fraternal life regulated by justice only! Yes, may your Holiness make a people out of that heap of wretches, whose excuse lies in all their bodily suffering and mental night, who live like the beasts that go by and die, never knowing nor understanding, yet ever lashed onward with the whip!"

Pierre's sobs were gradually choking him, and it was only the impulse of his passion which still enabled him to speak. "And, Holy Father," he

continued, "is it not to you that I ought to address myself in the name of all these wretched ones? Are you not the Father, and is it not before the Father that the messenger of the poor and the lowly should kneel as I am kneeling now? And is it not to the Father that he should bring the huge burden of their sorrows and ask for pity and help and justice? Yes, particularly for justice! And since you are the Father throw the doors wide open so that all may enter, even the humblest of your children, the faithful, the chance passers, even the rebellious ones and those who have gone astray but who will perhaps enter and whom you will save from the errors of abandonment! Be as the house of refuge on the dangerous road, the loving greeter of the wayfarer, the lamp of hospitality which ever burns, and is seen afar off and saves one in the storm! And since, O Father, you are power be salvation also! You can do all; you have centuries of domination behind you; you have nowadays risen to a moral authority which has rendered you the arbiter of the world; you are there before me like the very majesty of the sun which illumines and fructifies! Oh! be the star of kindness and charity, be the redeemer; take in hand once more the purpose of Jesus, which has been perverted by being left in the hands of the rich and the powerful who have ended by transforming the work of the Gospel into the most hateful of all monuments of pride and tyranny! And since the work has been spoilt, take it in hand, begin it afresh, place yourself on the side of the little ones, the lowly ones, the poor ones, and bring them back to the peace, the fraternity, and the justice of the original Christian communion. And say, O Father, that I have understood you, that I have sincerely expressed in this respect your most cherished ideas, the sole living desire of your reign! The rest, oh! the rest, my book, myself, what matter they! I do not defend myself, I only seek your glory and the happiness of mankind. Say that from the depths of this Vatican you have heard the rending of our corrupt modern societies! Say that you have quivered with loving pity, say that you desire to prevent the awful impending catastrophe by recalling the Gospel to the hearts of your children who are stricken with madness, and by bringing them back to the age of simplicity and purity when the first Christians lived together in innocent brotherhood! Yes, it is for that reason, is it not, that you have placed yourself, Father, on the side of the poor, and for that reason I am here and entreat you for pity and kindness and justice with my whole soul!"

Then the young man gave way beneath his emotion, and fell all of a heap upon the floor amidst a rush of sobs--loud, endless sobs, which flowed forth in billows, coming as it were not only from himself but from all the wretched, from the whole world in whose veins sorrow coursed mingled with the very blood of life. He was there as the ambassador of suffering, as he had said. And indeed, at the foot of that mute and motionless pope, he was like the personification of the whole of human woe.

Leo XIII, who was extremely fond of talking and could only listen to others with an effort, had twice raised one of his pallid hands to interrupt the young priest. Then, gradually overcome by astonishment, touched by emotion himself, he had allowed him to continue, to go on to the end of his outburst. A little blood even had suffused the snowy whiteness of the Pontiff's face whilst his eyes shone out yet more

brilliantly. And as soon as he saw the young man speechless at his feet, shaken by those sobs which seemed to be wrenching away his heart, he became anxious and leant forward: "Calm yourself, my son, raise yourself," he said.

But the sobs still continued, still flowed forth, all reason and respect being swept away amidst that distracted plaint of a wounded soul, that moan of suffering, dying flesh.

"Raise yourself, my son, it is not proper," repeated Leo XIII. "There, take that chair." And with a gesture of authority he at last invited the young man to sit down.

Pierre rose with pain, and at once seated himself in order that he might not fall. He brushed his hair back from his forehead, and wiped his scalding tears away with his hands, unable to understand what had just happened, but striving to regain his self-possession.

"You appeal to the Holy Father," said Leo XIII. "Ah! rest assured that his heart is full of pity and affection for those who are unfortunate. But that is not the point, it is our holy religion which is in question. I have read your book, a bad book, I tell you so at once, the most dangerous and culpable of books, precisely on account of its qualities, the pages in which I myself felt interested. Yes, I was often fascinated, I should not have continued my perusal had I not felt carried away, transported by the ardent breath of your faith and enthusiasm. The subject 'New Rome' is such a beautiful one and impassions me so much! and certainly there is a book to be written under that title, but in a very different spirit to yours. You think that you have understood me, my son, that you have so penetrated yourself with my writings and actions that you simply express my most cherished ideas. But no, no, you have not understood me, and that is why I desired to see you, explain things to you, and convince you."

It was now Pierre who sat listening, mute and motionless. Yet he had only come thither to defend himself; for three months past he had been feverishly desiring this interview, preparing his arguments and feeling confident of victory; and now although he heard his book spoken of as dangerous and culpable he did not protest, did not reply with any one of those good reasons which he had deemed so irresistible. But the fact was that intense weariness had come upon him, the appeal that he had made, the tears that he had shed had left him utterly exhausted. By and by, however, he would be brave and would say what he had resolved to say.

"People do not understand me, do not understand me!" resumed Leo XIII with an air of impatient irritation. "It is incredible what trouble I have to make myself understood, in France especially! Take the temporal power for instance; how can you have fancied that the Holy See would ever enter into any compromise on that question? Such language is unworthy of a priest, it is the chimerical dream of one who is ignorant of the conditions in which the papacy has hitherto lived and in which it must still live if it does not desire to disappear. Cannot you see the sophistry of your argument that the Church becomes the loftier the more

it frees itself from the cares of terrestrial sovereignty? A purely spiritual royalty, a sway of charity and love, indeed, 'tis a fine imaginative idea! But who will ensure us respect? Who will grant us the alms of a stone on which to rest our head if we are ever driven forth and forced to roam the highways? Who will guarantee our independence when we are at the mercy of every state? . . . No, no! this soil of Rome is ours, we have inherited it from the long line of our ancestors, and it is the indestructible, eternal soil on which the Church is built, so that any relinquishment would mean the downfall of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church. And, moreover, we could not relinquish it; we are bound by our oath to God and man."

He paused for a moment to allow Pierre to answer him. But the latter to his stupefaction could say nothing, for he perceived that this pope spoke as he was bound to speak. All the heavy mysterious things which had weighed the young priest down whilst he was waiting in the ante-room, now became more and more clearly defined. They were, indeed, the things which he had seen and learnt since his arrival in Rome, the disillusion, the rebuffs which he had experienced, all the many points of difference between existing reality and imagination, whereby his dream of a return to primitive Christianity was already half shattered. And in particular he remembered the hour which he had spent on the dome of St. Peter's, when, in presence of the old city of glory so stubbornly clinging to its purple, he had realised that he was an imbecile with his idea of a purely spiritual pope. He had that day fled from the furious shouts of the pilgrims acclaiming the Pope-King. He had only accepted the necessity for money, that last form of servitude still binding the Pope to earth. But all had crumbled afterwards, when he had beheld the real Rome, the ancient city of pride and domination where the papacy can never be complete without the temporal power. Too many bonds, dogma, tradition, environment, the very soil itself rendered the Church for ever immutable. It was only in appearances that she could make concessions, and a time would even arrive when her concessions would cease, in presence of the impossibility of going any further without committing suicide. If his, Pierre's, dream of a New Rome were ever to be realised, it would only be faraway from ancient Rome. Only in some distant region could the new Christianity arise, for Catholicism was bound to die on the spot when the last of the popes, riveted to that land of ruins, should disappear beneath the falling dome of St. Peter's, which would fall as surely as the temple of Jupiter had fallen! And, as for that pope of the present day, though he might have no kingdom, though age might have made him weak and fragile, though his bloodless pallor might be that of some ancient idol of wax, he none the less flared with the red passion for universal sovereignty, he was none the less the stubborn scion of his ancestry, the Pontifex Maximus, the Caesar Imperator in whose veins flowed the blood of Augustus, master of the world.

"You must be fully aware," resumed Leo XIII, "of the ardent desire for unity which has always possessed us. We were very happy on the day when we unified the rite, by imposing the Roman rite throughout the whole Catholic world. This is one of our most cherished victories, for it can do much to uphold our authority. And I hope that our efforts in the East will end by bringing our dear brethren of the dissident communions back

to us, in the same way as I do not despair of convincing the Anglican sects, without speaking of the other so-called Protestant sects who will be compelled to return to the bosom of the only Church, the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, when the times predicted by the Christ shall be accomplished. But a thing which you did not say in your book is that the Church can relinquish nothing whatever of dogma. On the contrary, you seem to fancy that an agreement might be effected, concessions made on either side, and that, my son, is a culpable thought, such language as a priest cannot use without being guilty of a crime. No, the truth is absolute, not a stone of the edifice shall be changed. Oh! in matters of form, we will do whatever may be asked. We are ready to adopt the most conciliatory courses if it be only a question of turning certain difficulties and weighing expressions in order to facilitate agreement. . . . Again, there is the part we have taken in contemporary socialism, and here too it is necessary that we should be understood. Those whom you have so well called the disinherited of the world, are certainly the object of our solicitude. If socialism be simply a desire for justice, and a constant determination to come to the help of the weak and the suffering, who can claim to give more thought to the matter and work with more energy than ourselves? Has not the Church always been the mother of the afflicted, the helper and benefactress of the poor? We are for all reasonable progress, we admit all new social forms which will promote peace and fraternity. . . . Only we can but condemn that socialism which begins by driving away God as a means of ensuring the happiness of mankind. Therein lies simple savagery, an abominable relapse into the primitive state in which there can only be catastrophe, conflagration, and massacre. And that again is a point on which you have not laid sufficient stress, for you have not shown in your book that there can be no progress outside the pale of the Church, that she is really the only initiatory and guiding power to whom one may surrender oneself without fear. Indeed, and in this again you have sinned, it seemed to me as if you set God on one side, as if for you religion lay solely in a certain bent of the soul, a florescence of love and charity, which sufficed one to work one's salvation. But that is execrable heresy. God is ever present, master of souls and bodies; and religion remains the bond, the law, the very governing power of mankind, apart from which there can only be barbarism in this world and damnation in the next. And, once again, forms are of no importance; it is sufficient that dogma should remain. Thus our adhesion to the French Republic proves that we in no wise mean to link the fate of religion to that of any form of government, however august and ancient the latter may be. Dynasties may have done their time, but God is eternal. Kings may perish, but God lives! And, moreover, there is nothing anti-Christian in the republican form of government; indeed, on the contrary, it would seem like an awakening of that Christian commonwealth to which you have referred in some really charming pages. The worst is that liberty at once becomes license, and that our desire for conciliation is often very badly required. . . . But ah! what a wicked book you have written, my son,--with the best intentions, I am willing to believe,--and how your silence shows that you are beginning to recognise the disastrous consequences of your error."

Pierre still remained silent, overcome, feeling as if his arguments would fall against some deaf, blind, and impenetrable rock, which it was

useless to assail since nothing could enter it. And only one thing now preoccupied him; he wondered how it was that a man of such intelligence and such ambition had not formed a more distinct and exact idea of the modern world. He could divine that the Pope possessed much information and carried the map of Christendom with many of the needs, deeds, and hopes of the nations, in his mind amidst his complicated diplomatic enterprises; but at the same time what gaps there were in his knowledge! The truth, no doubt, was that his personal acquaintance with the world was confined to his brief nunciature at Brussels.\*

\* That too, was in 1843-44, and the world is now utterly unlike what it was then!--Trans.

During his occupation of the see of Perugia, which had followed, he had only mingled with the dawning life of young Italy. And for eighteen years now he had been shut up in the Vatican, isolated from the rest of mankind and communicating with the nations solely through his /entourage/, which was often most unintelligent, most mendacious, and most treacherous. Moreover, he was an Italian priest, a superstitious and despotic High Pontiff, bound by tradition, subjected to the influences of race environment, pecuniary considerations, and political necessities, not to speak of his great pride, the conviction that he ought to be implicitly obeyed in all things as the one sole legitimate power upon earth. Therein lay fatal causes of mental deformity, of errors and gaps in his extraordinary brain, though the latter certainly possessed many admirable qualities, quickness of comprehension and patient stubbornness of will and strength to draw conclusions and act. Of all his powers, however, that of intuition was certainly the most wonderful, for was it not this alone which, owing to his voluntary imprisonment, enabled him to divine the vast evolution of humanity at the present day? He was thus keenly conscious of the dangers surrounding him, of the rising tide of democracy and the boundless ocean of science which threatened to submerge the little islet where the dome of St. Peter's yet triumphed. And the object of all his policy, of all his labour, was to conquer so that he might reign. If he desired the unity of the Church it was in order that the latter might become strong and inexpugnable in the contest which he foresaw. If he preached conciliation, granting concessions in matters of form, tolerating audacious actions on the part of American bishops, it was because he deeply and secretly feared the dislocation of the Church, some sudden schism which might hasten disaster. And this fear explained his returning affection for the people, the concern which he displayed respecting socialism, and the Christian solution which he offered to the woes of earthly life. As Caesar was stricken low, was not the long contest for possession of the people over, and would not the people, the great silent multitude, speak out, and give itself to him, the Pope? He had begun experiments with France, forsaking the lost cause of the monarchy and recognising the Republic which he hoped might prove strong and victorious, for in spite of everything France remained the eldest daughter of the Church, the only Catholic nation which yet possessed sufficient strength to restore the temporal power at some propitious moment. And briefly Leo's desire was to reign. To reign by the support of France since it seemed impossible to do so by the support of Germany! To reign by the support of the people, since the people was now becoming the



master, the bestower of thrones! To reign by means even of an Italian Republic, if only that Republic could wrest Rome from the House of Savoy and restore her to him, a federal Republic which would make him President of the United States of Italy pending the time when he should be President of the United States of Europe! To reign in spite of everybody and everything, such was his ambition, to reign over the world, even as Augustus had reigned, Augustus whose devouring blood alone upheld this expiring old man, yet so stubbornly clinging to power!

"And another crime of yours, my son," resumed Leo XIII, "is that you have dared to ask for a new religion. That is impious, blasphemous, sacrilegious. There is but one religion in the world, our Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Religion, apart from which there can be but darkness and damnation. I quite understand that what you mean to imply is a return to early Christianity. But the error of so-called Protestantism, so culpable and so deplorable in its consequences, never had any other pretext. As soon as one departs from the strict observance of dogma and absolute respect for tradition one sinks into the most frightful precipices. . . . Ah! schism, schism, my son, is a crime beyond forgiveness, an assassination of the true God, a device of the loathsome Beast of Temptation which Hell sends into the world to work the ruin of the faithful! If your book contained nothing beyond those words 'a new religion,' it would be necessary to destroy and burn it like so much poison fatal in its effects upon the human soul."

He continued at length on this subject, while Pierre recalled what Don Vigilio had told him of those all-powerful Jesuits who at the Vatican as elsewhere remained in the background, secretly but none the less decisively governing the Church. Was it true then that this pope, whose opportunist tendencies were so freely displayed, was one of them, a mere docile instrument in their hands, though he fancied himself penetrated with the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas? In any case, like them he compounded with the century, made approaches to the world, and was willing to flatter it in order that he might possess it. Never before had Pierre so cruelly realised that the Church was now so reduced that she could only live by dint of concessions and diplomacy. And he could at last distinctly picture that Roman clergy which at first is so difficult of comprehension to a French priest, that Government of the Church, represented by the pope, the cardinals, and the prelates, whom the Deity has appointed to govern and administer His mundane possessions--mankind and the earth. They begin by setting that very Deity on one side, in the depths of the tabernacle, and impose whatever dogmas they please as so many essential truths. That the Deity exists is evident, since they govern in His name which is sufficient for everything. And being by virtue of their charge the masters, if they consent to sign covenants, Concordats, it is only as matters of form; they do not observe them, and never yield to anything but force, always reserving the principle of their absolute sovereignty which must some day finally triumph. Pending that day's arrival, they act as diplomatists, slowly carrying on their work of conquest as the Deity's functionaries; and religion is but the public homage which they pay to the Deity, and which they organise with all the pomp and magnificence that is likely to influence the multitude. Their only object is to enrapture and conquer mankind in order that the

latter may submit to the rule of the Deity, that is the rule of themselves, since they are the Deity's visible representatives, expressly delegated to govern the world. In a word, they straightway descend from Roman law, they are still but the offspring of the old pagan soul of Rome, and if they have lasted until now and if they rely on lasting for ever, until the awaited hour when the empire of the world shall be restored to them, it is because they are the direct heirs of the purple-robed Caesars, the uninterrupted and living progeny of the blood of Augustus.

And thereupon Pierre felt ashamed of his tears. Ah! those poor nerves of his, that outburst of sentiment and enthusiasm to which he had given way! His very modesty was appalled, for he felt as if he had exhibited his soul in utter nakedness. And so uselessly too, in that room where nothing similar had ever been said before, and in presence of that Pontiff-King who could not understand him. His plan of the popes reigning by means of the poor and lowly now horrified him. His idea of the papacy going to the people, at last rid of its former masters, seemed to him a suggestion worthy of a wolf, for if the papacy should go to the people it would only be to prey upon it as the others had done. And really he, Pierre, must have been mad when he had imagined that a Roman prelate, a cardinal, a pope, was capable of admitting a return to the Christian commonwealth, a fresh florescence of primitive Christianity to pacify the aged nations whom hatred consumed. Such a conception indeed was beyond the comprehension of men who for centuries had regarded themselves as masters of the world, so heedless and disdainful of the lowly and the suffering, that they had at last become altogether incapable of either love or charity.\*

\* The reader should bear in mind that these remarks apply to the Italian cardinals and prelates, whose vanity and egotism are remarkable.--Trans.

Leo XIII, however, was still holding forth in his full, unwearying voice. And the young priest heard him saying: "Why did you write that page on Lourdes which shows such a thoroughly bad spirit? Lourdes, my son, has rendered great services to religion. To the persons who have come and told me of the touching miracles which are witnessed at the Grotto almost daily, I have often expressed my desire to see those miracles confirmed, proved by the most rigorous scientific tests. And, indeed, according to what I have read, I do not think that the most evilly disposed minds can entertain any further doubt on the matter, for the miracles /are/ proved scientifically in the most irrefutable manner. Science, my son, must be God's servant. It can do nothing against Him, it is only by His grace that it arrives at the truth. All the solutions which people nowadays pretend to discover and which seemingly destroy dogma will some day be recognised as false, for God's truth will remain victorious when the times shall be accomplished. That is a very simple certainty, known even to little children, and it would suffice for the peace and salvation of mankind, if mankind would content itself with it. And be convinced, my son, that faith and reason are not incompatible. Have we not got St. Thomas who foresaw everything, explained everything, regulated everything? Your faith has been shaken by the onslaught of the spirit of

examination, you have known trouble and anguish which Heaven has been pleased to spare our priests in this land of ancient belief, this city of Rome which the blood of so many martyrs has sanctified. However, we have no fear of the spirit of examination, study St. Thomas, read him thoroughly and your faith will return, definitive and triumphant, firmer than ever."

These remarks caused Pierre as much dismay as if fragments of the celestial vault were raining on his head. O God of truth, miracles--the miracles of Lourdes!--proved scientifically, faith in the dogmas compatible with reason, and the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas sufficient to instil certainty into the minds of this present generation! How could one answer that, and indeed why answer it at all?

"Yes, yours is a most culpable and dangerous book," concluded Leo XIII; "its very title 'New Rome' is mendacious and poisonous, and the work is the more to be condemned as it offers every fascination of style, every perversion of generous fancy. Briefly it is such a book that a priest, if he conceived it in an hour of error, can have no other duty than that of burning it in public with the very hand which traced the pages of error and scandal."

All at once Pierre rose up erect. He was about to exclaim: "'Tis true, I had lost my faith, but I thought I had found it again in the compassion which the woes of the world set in my heart. You were my last hope, the awaited saviour. But, behold, that again is a dream, you cannot take the work of Jesus in hand once more and pacify mankind so as to avert the frightful fratricidal war which is preparing. You cannot leave your throne and come along the roads with the poor and the humble to carry out the supreme work of fraternity. Well, it is all over with you, your Vatican and your St. Peter's. All is falling before the onslaught of the rising multitude and growing science. You no longer exist, there are only ruins and remnants left here."

However, he did not speak those words. He simply bowed and said: "Holy Father, I make my submission and reprobate my book." And as he thus replied his voice trembled with disgust, and his open hands made a gesture of surrender as though he were yielding up his soul. The words he had chosen were precisely those of the required formula: */Auctor laudabiliter se subjecit et opus reprobavit/*. "The author has laudably made his submission and reprobated his work." No error could have been confessed, no hope could have accomplished self-destruction with loftier despair, more sovereign grandeur. But what frightful irony: that book which he had sworn never to withdraw, and for whose triumph he had fought so passionately, and which he himself now denied and suppressed, not because he deemed it guilty, but because he had just realised that it was as futile, as chimerical as a lover's desire, a poet's dream. Ah! yes, since he had been mistaken, since he had merely dreamed, since he had found there neither the Deity nor the priest that he had desired for the happiness of mankind, why should he obstinately cling to the illusion of an awakening which was impossible! 'Twere better to fling his book on the ground like a dead leaf, better to deny it, better to cut it away like a dead limb that could serve no purpose whatever!

Somewhat surprised by such a prompt victory Leo XIII raised a slight exclamation of content. "That is well said, my son, that is well said! You have spoken the only words that can become a priest."

And in his evident satisfaction, he who left nothing to chance, who carefully prepared each of his audiences, deciding beforehand what words he would say, what gestures even he would make, unbent somewhat and displayed real */bonhomie/*. Unable to understand, mistaking the real motives of this rebellious priest's submission, he tasted positive delight in having so easily reduced him to silence, the more so as report had stated the young man to be a terrible revolutionary. And thus his Holiness felt quite proud of such a conversion. "Moreover, my son," he said, "I did not expect less of one of your distinguished mind. There can be no loftier enjoyment than that of owning one's error, doing penance, and submitting."

He had again taken the glass off the little table beside him and was stirring the last spoonful of syrup before drinking it. And Pierre was amazed at again finding him as he had found him at the outset, shrunken, bereft of sovereign majesty, and simply suggestive of some aged */bourgeois/* drinking his glass of sugared water before getting into bed. It was as if after growing and radiating, like a planet ascending to the zenith, he had again sunk to the level of the soil in all human mediocrity. Again did Pierre find him puny and fragile, with the slender neck of a little sick bird, and all those marks of senile ugliness which rendered him so exacting with regard to his portraits, whether they were oil paintings or photographs, gold medals, or marble busts, for of one and the other he would say that the artist must not portray "Papa Pecci" but Leo XIII, the great Pope, of whom he desired to leave such a lofty image to posterity. And Pierre, after momentarily ceasing to see them, was again embarrassed by the handkerchief which lay on the Pope's lap, and the dirty cassock soiled by snuff. His only feelings now were affectionate pity for such white old age, deep admiration for the stubborn power of life which had found a refuge in those dark black eyes, and respectful deference, such as became a worker, for that large brain which harboured such vast projects and overflowed with such innumerable ideas and actions.

The audience was over, and the young man bowed low: "I thank your Holiness for having deigned to give me such a fatherly reception," he said.

However, Leo XIII detained him for a moment longer, speaking to him of France and expressing his sincere desire to see her prosperous, calm, and strong for the greater advantage of the Church. And Pierre, during that last moment, had a singular vision, a strange haunting fancy. As he gazed at the Holy Father's ivory brow and thought of his great age and of his liability to be carried off by the slightest chill, he involuntarily recalled the scene instinct with a fierce grandeur which is witnessed each time a pope dies. He recalled Pius IX, Giovanni Mastai, two hours after death, his face covered by a white linen cloth, while the pontifical family surrounded him in dismay; and then Cardinal Pecci, the

/Camerlingo/, approaching the bed, drawing aside the veil and dealing three taps with his silver hammer on the forehead of the deceased, repeating at each tap the call, "Giovanni! Giovanni! Giovanni!" And as the corpse made no response, turning, after an interval of a few seconds, and saying: "The Pope is dead!" And at the same time, yonder in the Via Giulia Pierre pictured Cardinal Boccanera, the present /Camerlingo/, awaiting his turn with his silver hammer, and he imagined Leo XIII, otherwise Gioachino Pecci, dead, like his predecessor, his face covered by a white linen cloth and his corpse surrounded by his prelates in that very room. And he saw the /Camerlingo/ approach, draw the veil aside and tap the ivory forehead, each time repeating the call: "Gioachino! Gioachino! Gioachino!" Then, as the corpse did not answer, he waited for a few seconds and turned and said "The Pope is dead!" Did Leo XIII remember how he had thrice tapped the forehead of Pius IX, and did he ever feel on the brow an icy dread of the silver hammer with which he had armed his own /Camerlingo/, the man whom he knew to be his implacable adversary, Cardinal Boccanera?

"Go in peace, my son," at last said his Holiness by way of parting benediction. "Your transgression will be forgiven you since you have confessed and testify your horror for it."

With distressful spirit, accepting humiliation as well-deserved chastisement for his chimerical fancies, Pierre retired, stepping backwards according to the customary ceremonial. He made three deep bows and crossed the threshold without turning, followed by the black eyes of Leo XIII, which never left him. Still he saw the Pope stretch his arm towards the table to take up the newspaper which he had been reading prior to the audience, for Leo retained a great fancy for newspapers, and was very inquisitive as to news, though in the isolation in which he lived he frequently made mistakes respecting the relative importance of articles. And once more the chamber sank into deep quietude, whilst the two lamps continued to diffuse a soft and steady light.

In the centre of the /anticamera segreta/ Signor Squadra stood waiting black and motionless. And on noticing that Pierre in his flurry forgot to take his hat from the pier table, he himself discreetly fetched it and handed it to the young priest with a silent bow. Then without any appearance of haste, he walked ahead to conduct the visitor back to the Sala Clementina. The endless promenade through the interminable ante-rooms began once more, and there was still not a soul, not a sound, not a breath. In each empty room stood the one solitary lamp, burning low amidst a yet deeper silence than before. The wilderness seemed also to have grown larger as the night advanced, casting its gloom over the few articles of furniture scattered under the lofty gilded ceilings, the thrones, the stools, the pier tables, the crucifixes, and the candelabra which recurred in each succeeding room. And at last the Sala Clementina which the Swiss Guards had just quitted was reached again, and Signor Squadra, who hitherto had not turned his head, thereupon drew aside without word or gesture, and, saluting Pierre with a last bow, allowed him to pass on. Then he himself disappeared.

And Pierre descended the two flights of the monumental staircase where

the gas jets in their globes of ground glass glimmered like night lights amidst a wondrously heavy silence now that the footsteps of the sentries no longer resounded on the landings. And he crossed the Court of St. Damasus, empty and lifeless in the pale light of the lamps above the steps, and descended the Scala Pia, that other great stairway as dim, deserted, and void of life as all the rest, and at last passed beyond the bronze door which a porter slowly shut behind him. And with what a rumble, what a fierce roar did the hard metal close upon all that was within; all the accumulated darkness and silence; the dead, motionless centuries perpetuated by tradition; the indestructible idols, the dogmas, bound round for preservation like mummies; every chain which may weigh on one or hamper one, the whole apparatus of bondage and sovereign domination, with whose formidable clang all the dark, deserted halls re-echoed.

Once more the young man found himself alone on the gloomy expanse of the Piazza of St. Peter's. Not a single belated pedestrian was to be seen. There was only the lofty, livid, ghost-like obelisk, emerging between its four candelabra, from the mosaic pavement of red and serpentine porphyry. The facade of the Basilica also showed vaguely, pale as a vision, whilst from it on either side like a pair of giant arms stretched the quadruple colonnade, a thicket of stone, steeped in obscurity. The dome was but a huge roundness scarcely discernible against the moonless sky; and only the jets of the fountains, which could at last be detected rising like slim phantoms ever on the move, lent a voice to the silence, the endless murmur of a plaint of sorrow coming one knew not whence. Ah! how great was the melancholy grandeur of that slumber, that famous square, the Vatican and St. Peter's, thus seen by night when wrapped in silence and darkness! But suddenly the clock struck ten with so slow and loud a chime that never, so it seemed, had more solemn and decisive an hour rung out amidst blacker and more unfathomable gloom. All Pierre's poor weary frame quivered at the sound as he stood motionless in the centre of the expanse. What! had he spent barely three-quarters of an hour, chatting up yonder with that white old man who had just wrenched all his soul away from him! Yes, it was the final wrench; his last belief had been torn from his bleeding heart and brain. The supreme experiment had been made, a world had collapsed within him. And all at once he thought of Monsignor Nani, and reflected that he alone had been right. He, Pierre, had been told that in any case he would end by doing what Monsignor Nani might desire, and he was now stupefied to find that he had done so.

But sudden despair seized upon him, such atrocious distress of spirit that, from the depths of the abyss of darkness where he stood, he raised his quivering arms into space and spoke aloud: "No, no, Thou art not here, O God of life and love, O God of Salvation! But come, appear since Thy children are perishing because they know neither who Thou art, nor where to find Thee amidst the Infinite of the worlds!"

Above the vast square spread the vast sky of dark-blue velvet, the silent disturbing Infinite, where the constellations palpitated. Over the roofs of the Vatican, Charles's Wain seemed yet more tilted, its golden wheels straying from the right path, its golden shaft upreared in the air; whilst yonder, over Rome towards the Via Giulia, Orion was about to

disappear and already showed but one of the three golden stars which bedecked his belt.

XV

IT was nearly daybreak when Pierre fell asleep, exhausted by emotion and hot with fever. And at nine o'clock, when he had risen and breakfasted, he at once wished to go down into Cardinal Boccanera's rooms where the bodies of Dario and Benedetta had been laid in state in order that the members of the family, its friends and clients, might bring them their tears and prayers.

Whilst he breakfasted, Victorine who, showing an active bravery amidst her despair, had not been to bed at all, told him of what had taken place in the house during the night and early morning. Donna Serafina, prude that she was, had again made an attempt to have the bodies separated; but this had proved an impossibility, as /rigor mortis/ had set in, and to part the lovers it would have been necessary to break their limbs. Moreover, the Cardinal, who had interposed once before, almost quarrelled with his sister on the subject, unwilling as he was that any one should disturb the lovers' last slumber, their union of eternity. Beneath his priestly garb there coursed the blood of his race, a pride in the passions of former times; and he remarked that if the family counted two popes among its forerunners, it had also been rendered illustrious by great captains and ardent lovers. Never would he allow any one to touch those two children, whose dolorous lives had been so pure and whom the grave alone had united. He was the master in his house, and they should be sewn together in the same shroud, and nailed together in the same coffin. Then too the religious service should take place at the neighbouring church of San Carlo, of which he was Cardinal-priest and where again he was the master. And if needful he would address himself to the Pope. And such being his sovereign will, so authoritatively expressed, everybody in the house had to bow submissively.

Donna Serafina at once occupied herself with the laying-out. According to the Roman custom the servants were present, and Victorine as the oldest and most appreciated of them, assisted the relatives. All that could be done in the first instance was to envelop both corpses in Benedetta's unbound hair, thick and odorous hair, which spread out into a royal mantle; and they were then laid together in one shroud of white silk, fastened about their necks in such wise that they formed but one being in death. And again the Cardinal imperatively ordered that they should be brought into his apartments and placed on a state bed in the centre of the throne-room, so that a supreme homage might be rendered to them as to the last scions of the name, the two tragic lovers with whom the once resounding glory of the Boccaneras was about to return to earth. The story which had been arranged was already circulating through Rome; folks related how Dario had been carried off in a few hours by infectious fever, and how Benedetta, maddened by grief, had expired whilst clasping him in her arms to bid him a last farewell; and there was talk too of the royal honours which the bodies were to receive, the superb funeral

nuptials which were to be accorded them as they lay clasped on their bed of eternal rest. All Rome, quite overcome by this tragic story of love and death, would talk of nothing else for several weeks.

Pierre would have started for France that same night, eager as he was to quit the city of disaster where he had lost the last shreds of his faith, but he desired to attend the obsequies, and therefore postponed his departure until the following evening. And thus he would spend one more day in that old crumbling palace, near the corpse of that unhappy young woman to whom he had been so much attached and for whom he would try to find some prayers in the depths of his empty and lacerated heart.

When he reached the threshold of the Cardinal's reception-rooms, he suddenly remembered his first visit to them. They still presented the same aspect of ancient princely pomp falling into decay and dust. The doors of the three large ante-rooms were wide open, and the rooms themselves were at that early hour still empty. In the first one, the servants' anteroom, there was nobody but Giacomo who stood motionless in his black livery in front of the old red hat hanging under the /baldacchino/ where spiders spun their webs between the crumbling tassels. In the second room, which the secretary formerly had occupied, Abbe Paparelli, the train-bearer, was softly walking up and down whilst waiting for visitors; and with his conquering humility, his all-powerful obsequiousness, he had never before so closely resembled an old maid, whitened and wrinkled by excess of devout observances. Finally, in the third ante-room, the /anticamera nobile/, where the red cap lay on a credence facing the large imperious portrait of the Cardinal in ceremonial costume, there was Don Vigilio who had left his little work-table to station himself at the door of the throne-room and there bow to those who crossed the threshold. And on that gloomy winter morning the rooms appeared more mournful and dilapidated than ever, the hangings frayed and ragged, the few articles of furniture covered with dust, the old wood-work crumbling beneath the continuous onslaught of worms, and the ceilings alone retaining their pompous show of gilding and painting.

However, Pierre, to whom Abbe Paparelli addressed a profound bow, in which one divined the irony of a sort of dismissal given to one who was vanquished, felt more impressed by the mournful grandeur which those three dilapidated rooms presented that day, conducting as they did to the old throne-room, now a chamber of death, where the two last children of the house slept their last sleep. What a superb and sorrowful /gala/ of death! Every door wide open and all the emptiness of those over-spacious rooms, void of the throngs of ancient days and leading to the supreme affliction--the end of a race! The Cardinal had shut himself up in his little work-room where he received the relatives and intimates who desired to present their condolences to him, whilst Donna Serafina had chosen an adjoining apartment to await her lady friends who would come in procession until evening. And Pierre, informed of the ceremonial by Victorine, had in the first place to enter the throne-room, greeted as he passed by a deep bow from Don Vigilio who, pale and silent, did not seem to recognise him.

A surprise awaited the young priest. He had expected such a



lying-in-state as is seen in France and elsewhere, all windows closed so as to steep the room in night, and hundreds of candles burning round a /catafalco/, whilst from ceiling to floor the walls were hung with black drapery. He had been told that the bodies would lie in the throne-room because the antique chapel on the ground floor of the palazzo had been shut up for half a century and was in no condition to be used, whilst the Cardinal's little private chapel was altogether too small for any such ceremony. And thus it had been necessary to improvise an altar in the throne-room, an altar at which masses had been said ever since dawn. Masses and other religious services were moreover to be celebrated all day long in the private chapel; and two additional altars had even been set up, one in a small room adjoining the /anticamera nobile/ and the other in a sort of alcove communicating with the second anteroom: and in this wise priests, Franciscans, and members of other Orders bound by the vow of poverty, would simultaneously and without intermission celebrate the divine sacrifice on those four altars. The Cardinal, indeed, had desired that the Divine Blood should flow without pause under his roof for the redemption of those two dear souls which had flown away together. And thus in that mourning mansion, through those funeral halls the bells scarcely stopped tinkling for the elevation of the host, whilst the quivering murmur of Latin words ever continued, and consecrated wafers were continually broken and chalices drained, in such wise that the Divine Presence could not for a moment quit the heavy atmosphere all redolent of death.

On the other hand, however, Pierre, to his great astonishment, found the throne-room much as it had been on the day of his first visit. The curtains of the four large windows had not even been drawn, and the grey, cold, subdued light of the gloomy winter morning freely entered. Under the ceiling of carved and gilded wood-work there were the customary red wall-hangings of /brocatelle/, worn away by long usage; and there was the old throne with the arm-chair turned to the wall, uselessly waiting for a visit from the Pope which would never more come. The principal changes in the aspect of the room were that its seats and tables had been removed, and that, in addition to the improvised altar arranged beside the throne, it now contained the state bed on which lay the bodies of Benedetta and Dario, amidst a profusion of flowers. The bed stood in the centre of the room on a low platform, and at its head were two lighted candles, one on either side. There was nothing else, nothing but that wealth of flowers, such a harvest of white roses that one wondered in what fairy garden they had been culled, sheaves of them on the bed, sheaves of them toppling from the bed, sheaves of them covering the step of the platform, and falling from that step on to the magnificent marble paving of the room.

Pierre drew near to the bed, his heart faint with emotion. Those tapers whose little yellow flamelets scarcely showed in the pale daylight, that continuous low murmur of the mass being said at the altar, that penetrating perfume of roses which rendered the atmosphere so heavy, filled the antiquated, dusty room with a spirit of infinite woe, a lamentation of boundless mourning. And there was not a gesture, not a word spoken, save by the priest officiating at the altar, nothing but an occasional faint sound of stifled sobbing among the few persons present. Servants of the house constantly relieved one another, four always

standing erect and motionless at the head of the bed, like faithful, familiar guards. From time to time Consistorial-Advocate Morano who, since early morning had been attending to everything, crossed the room with a silent step and the air of a man in a hurry. And at the edge of the platform all who entered, knelt, prayed, and wept. Pierre perceived three ladies there, their faces hidden by their handkerchiefs; and there was also an old priest who trembled with grief and hung his head in such wise that his face could not be distinguished. However, the young man was most moved by the sight of a poorly clad girl, whom he took for a servant, and whom sorrow had utterly prostrated on the marble slabs.

Then in his turn he knelt down, and with the professional murmur of the lips sought to repeat the Latin prayers which, as a priest, he had so often said at the bedside of the departed. But his growing emotion confused his memory, and he became wrapt in contemplation of the lovers whom his eyes were unable to quit. Under the wealth of flowers which covered them the clasped bodies could scarcely be distinguished, but the two heads emerged from the silken shroud, and lying there on the same cushion, with their hair mingling, they were still beautiful, beautiful as with satisfied passion. Benedetta had kept her divinely gay, loving, and faithful face for eternity, transported with rapture at having rendered up her last breath in a kiss of love; whilst Dario retained a more dolorous expression amidst his final joy. And their eyes were still wide open, gazing at one another with a persistent and caressing sweetness which nothing would ever more disturb.

Oh! God, was it true that yonder lay that Benedetta whom he, Pierre, had loved with such pure, brotherly affection? He was stirred to the very depths of his soul by the recollection of the delightful hours which he had spent with her. She had been so beautiful, so sensible, yet so full of passion! And he had indulged in so beautiful a dream, that of animating with his own liberating fraternal feelings that admirable creature with soul of fire and indolent air, in whom he had pictured all ancient Rome, and whom he would have liked to awaken and win over to the Italy of to-morrow. He had dreamt of enlarging her brain and heart by filling her with love for the lowly and the poor, with all present-day compassion for things and beings. How he would now have smiled at such a dream had not his tears been flowing! Yet how charming she had shown herself in striving to content him despite the invincible obstacles of race, education, and environment. She had been a docile pupil, but was incapable of any real progress. One day she had certainly seemed to draw nearer to him, as though her own sufferings had opened her soul to every charity; but the illusion of happiness had come back, and then she had lost all understanding of the woes of others, and had gone off in the egotism of her own hope and joy. Did that mean then that this Roman race must finish in that fashion, beautiful as it still often is, and fondly adored but so closed to all love for others, to those laws of charity and justice which, by regulating labour, can henceforth alone save this world of ours?

Then there came another great sorrow to Pierre which left him stammering, unable to speak any precise prayer. He thought of the overwhelming reassertion of Nature's powers which had attended the death of those two

poor children. Was it not awful? To have taken that vow to the Virgin, to have endured torment throughout life, and to end by plunging into death, on the loved one's neck, distracted by vain regret and eager for self-bestowal! The brutal fact of impending separation had sufficed for Benedetta to realise how she had duped herself, and to revert to the universal instinct of love. And therein, again once more, was the Church vanquished; therein again appeared the great god Pan, mating the sexes and scattering life around! If in the days of the Renaissance the Church did not fall beneath the assault of the Venuses and Hercules then exhumed from the old soil of Rome, the struggle at all events continued as bitterly as ever; and at each and every hour new nations, overflowing with sap, hungering for life, and warring against a religion which was nothing more than an appetite for death, threatened to sweep away that old Holy Apostolic Roman and Catholic edifice whose walls were already tottering on all sides.

And at that moment Pierre felt that the death of that adorable Benedetta was for him the supreme disaster. He was still looking at her and tears were scorching his eyes. She was carrying off his chimera. This time 'twas really the end. Rome the Catholic and the Princely was dead, lying there like marble on that funeral bed. She had been unable to go to the humble, the suffering ones of the world, and had just expired amidst the impotent cry of her egotistical passion when it was too late either to love or to create. Never more would children be born of her, the old Roman house was henceforth empty, sterile, beyond possibility of awakening. Pierre whose soul mourned such a splendid dream, was so grieved at seeing her thus motionless and frigid, that he felt himself fainting. He feared lest he might fall upon the step beside the bed, and so struggled to his feet and drew aside.

Then, as he sought refuge in a window recess in order that he might try to recover self-possession, he was astonished to perceive Victorine seated there on a bench which the hangings half concealed. She had come thither by Donna Serafina's orders, and sat watching her two dear children as she called them, whilst keeping an eye upon all who came in and went out. And, on seeing the young priest so pale and nearly swooning, she at once made room for him to sit down beside her. "Ah!" he murmured after drawing a long breath, "may they at least have the joy of being together elsewhere, of living a new life in another world."

Victorine, however, shrugged her shoulders, and in an equally low voice responded, "Oh! live again, Monsieur l'Abbe, why? When one's dead the best is to remain so and to sleep. Those poor children had enough torments on earth, one mustn't wish that they should begin again elsewhere."

This naive yet deep remark on the part of an ignorant unbelieving woman sent a shudder through Pierre's very bones. To think that his own teeth had chattered with fear at night time at the sudden thought of annihilation. He deemed her heroic at remaining so undisturbed by any ideas of eternity and the infinite. And she, as she felt he was quivering, went on: "What can you suppose there should be after death? We've deserved a right to sleep, and nothing to my thinking can be more

desirable and consoling."

"But those two did not live," murmured Pierre, "so why not allow oneself the joy of believing that they now live elsewhere, recompensed for all their torments?"

Victorine, however, again shook her head; "No, no," she replied. "Ah! I was quite right in saying that my poor Benedetta did wrong in torturing herself with all those superstitious ideas of hers when she was really so fond of her lover. Yes, happiness is rarely found, and how one regrets having missed it when it's too late to turn back! That's the whole story of those poor little ones. It's too late for them, they are dead." Then in her turn she broke down and began to sob. "Poor little ones! poor little ones! Look how white they are, and think what they will be when only the bones of their heads lie side by side on the cushion, and only the bones of their arms still clasp one another. Ah! may they sleep, may they sleep; at least they know nothing and feel nothing now."

A long interval of silence followed. Pierre, amidst the quiver of his own doubts, the anxious desire which in common with most men he felt for a new life beyond the grave, gazed at this woman who did not find priests to her fancy, and who retained all her Beauceronne frankness of speech, with the tranquil, contented air of one who has ever done her duty in her humble station as a servant, lost though she had been for five and twenty years in a land of wolves, whose language she had not even been able to learn. Ah! yes, tortured as the young man was by his doubts, he would have liked to be as she was, a well-balanced, healthy, ignorant creature who was quite content with what the world offered, and who, when she had accomplished her daily task, went fully satisfied to bed, careless as to whether she might never wake again!

However, as Pierre's eyes once more sought the state bed, he suddenly recognised the old priest, who was kneeling on the step of the platform, and whose features he had hitherto been unable to distinguish. "Isn't that Abbe Pisoni, the priest of Santa Brigida, where I sometimes said mass?" he inquired. "The poor old man, how he weeps!"

In her quiet yet desolate voice Victorine replied, "He has good reason to weep. He did a fine thing when he took it into his head to marry my poor Benedetta to Count Prada. All those abominations would never have happened if the poor child had been given her Dario at once. But in this idiotic city they are all mad with their politics; and that old priest, who is none the less a very worthy man, thought he had accomplished a real miracle and saved the world by marrying the Pope and the King as he said with a soft laugh, poor old /savant/ that he is, who for his part has never been in love with anything but old stones--you know, all that antiquated rubbish of theirs of a hundred thousand years ago. And now, you see, he can't keep from weeping. The other one too came not twenty minutes ago, Father Lorenza, the Jesuit who became the Contessina's confessor after Abbe Pisoni, and who undid what the other had done. Yes, a handsome man he is, but a fine bungler all the same, a perfect killjoy with all the crafty hindrances which he brought into that divorce affair. I wish you had been here to see what a big sign of the cross he made

after he had knelt down. He didn't cry, he didn't: he seemed to be saying that as things had ended so badly it was evident that God had withdrawn from all share in the business. So much the worse for the dead!"

Victorine spoke gently and without a pause, as it relieved her, to empty her heart after the terrible hours of bustle and suffocation which she had spent since the previous day. "And that one yonder," she resumed in a lower voice, "don't you recognise her?"

She glanced towards the poorly clad girl whom Pierre had taken for a servant, and whom intensity of grief had prostrated beside the bed. With a gesture of awful suffering this girl had just thrown back her head, a head of extraordinary beauty, enveloped by superb black hair.

"La Pierina!" said Pierre. "Ah! poor girl."

Victorine made a gesture of compassion and tolerance.

"What would you have?" said she, "I let her come up. I don't know how she heard of the trouble, but it's true that she is always prowling round the house. She sent and asked me to come down to her, and you should have heard her sob and entreat me to let her see her Prince once more! Well, she does no harm to anybody there on the floor, looking at them both with her beautiful loving eyes full of tears. She's been there for half an hour already, and I had made up my mind to turn her out if she didn't behave properly. But since she's so quiet and doesn't even move, she may well stop and fill her heart with the sight of them for her whole life long."

It was really sublime to see that ignorant, passionate, beautiful Pierina thus overwhelmed below the nuptial couch on which the lovers slept for all eternity. She had sunk down on her heels, her arms hanging heavily beside her, and her hands open. And with raised face, motionless as in an ecstasy of suffering, she did not take her eyes from that adorable and tragic pair. Never had human face displayed such beauty, such a dazzling splendour of suffering and love; never had there been such a portrayal of ancient Grief, not however cold like marble but quivering with life. What was she thinking of, what were her sufferings, as she thus fixedly gazed at her Prince now and for ever locked in her rival's arms? Was it some jealousy which could have no end that chilled the blood of her veins? Or was it mere suffering at having lost him, at realising that she was looking at him for the last time, without thought of hatred for that other woman who vainly sought to warm him with her arms as icy cold as his own? There was still a soft gleam in the poor girl's blurred eyes, and her lips were still lips of love though curved in bitterness by grief. She found the lovers so pure and beautiful as they lay there amidst that profusion of flowers! And beautiful herself, beautiful like a queen, ignorant of her own charms, she remained there breathless, a humble servant, a loving slave as it were, whose heart had been wrenched away and carried off by her dying master.

People were now constantly entering the room, slowly approaching with mournful faces, then kneeling and praying for a few minutes, and

afterwards retiring with the same mute, desolate mien. A pang came to Pierre's heart when he saw Dario's mother, the ever beautiful Flavia, enter, accompanied by her husband, the handsome Jules Laporte, that ex-sergeant of the Swiss Guard whom she had turned into a Marquis Montefiori. Warned of the tragedy directly it had happened, she had already come to the mansion on the previous evening; but now she returned in grand ceremony and full mourning, looking superb in her black garments which were well suited to her massive, Juno-like style of beauty. When she had approached the bed with a queenly step, she remained for a moment standing with two tears at the edges of her eyelids, tears which did not fall. Then, at the moment of kneeling, she made sure that Jules was beside her, and glanced at him as if to order him to kneel as well. They both sank down beside the platform and remained in prayer for the proper interval, she very dignified in her grief and he even surpassing her, with the perfect sorrow-stricken bearing of a man who knew how to conduct himself in every circumstance of life, even the gravest. And afterwards they rose together, and slowly betook themselves to the entrance of the private apartments where the Cardinal and Donna Serafina were receiving their relatives and friends.

Five ladies then came in one after the other, while two Capuchins and the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See went off. And Victorine, who for a few minutes had remained silent, suddenly resumed. "Ah! there's the little Princess, she's much afflicted too, and, no wonder, she was so fond of our Benedetta."

Pierre himself had just noticed Celia coming in. She also had attired herself in full mourning for this abominable visit of farewell. Behind her was a maid, who carried on either arm a huge sheaf of white roses.

"The dear girl!" murmured Victorine, "she wanted her wedding with her Attilio to take place on the same day as that of the poor lovers who lie there. And they, alas! have forestalled her, their wedding's over; there they sleep in their bridal bed."

Celia had at once crossed herself and knelt down beside the bed, but it was evident that she was not praying. She was indeed looking at the lovers with desolate stupefaction at finding them so white and cold with a beauty as of marble. What! had a few hours sufficed, had life departed, would those lips never more exchange a kiss! She could again see them at the ball of that other night, so resplendent and triumphant with their living love. And a feeling of furious protest rose from her young heart, so open to life, so eager for joy and sunlight, so angry with the hateful idiocy of death. And her anger and affright and grief, as she thus found herself face to face with the annihilation which chills every passion, could be read on her ingenuous, candid, lily-like face. She herself stood on the threshold of a life of passion of which she yet knew nothing, and behold! on that very threshold she encountered the corpses of those dearly loved ones, the loss of whom racked her soul with grief.

She gently closed her eyes and tried to pray, whilst big tears fell from under her lowered eyelids. Some time went by amidst the quivering silence, which only the murmur of the mass near by disturbed. At last she

rose and took the sheaves of flowers from her maid; and standing on the platform she hesitated for a moment, then placed the roses to the right and left of the cushion on which the lovers' heads were resting, as if she wished to crown them with those blossoms, perfume their young brows with that sweet and powerful aroma. Then, though her hands remained empty she did not retire, but remained there leaning over the dead ones, trembling and seeking what she might yet say to them, what she might leave them of herself for ever more. An inspiration came to her, and she stooped forward, and with her whole, deep, loving soul set a long, long kiss on the brow of either spouse.

"Ah! the dear girl!" said Victorine, whose tears were again flowing. "You saw that she kissed them, and nobody had yet thought of that, not even the poor young Prince's mother. Ah! the dear little heart, she surely thought of her Attilio."

However, as Celia turned to descend from the platform she perceived La Pierina, whose figure was still thrown back in an attitude of mute and dolorous adoration. And she recognised the girl and melted with pity on seeing such a fit of sobbing come over her that her whole body, her goddess-like hips and bosom, shook as with frightful anguish. That agony of love quite upset the little Princess, and she could be heard murmuring in a tone of infinite compassion, "Calm yourself, my dear, calm yourself. Be reasonable, my dear, I beg you."

Then as La Pierina, thunderstruck at thus being pitied and succoured, began to sob yet more loudly so as to create quite a stir in the room, Celia raised her and held her up with both arms, for fear lest she should fall again. And she led her away in a sisterly clasp, like a sister of affection and despair, lavishing the most gentle, consoling words upon her as they went.

"Follow them, go and see what becomes of them," Victorine said to Pierre. "I do not want to stir from here, it quiets me to watch over my two poor children."

A Capuchin was just beginning a fresh mass at the improvised altar, and the low Latin psalmody went on again, while in the adjoining ante-chamber, where another mass was being celebrated, a bell was heard tinkling for the elevation of the host. The perfume of the flowers was becoming more violent and oppressive amidst the motionless and mournful atmosphere of the spacious throne-room. The four servants standing at the head of the bed, as for a /gala/ reception, did not stir, and the procession of visitors ever continued, men and women entering in silence, suffocating there for a moment, and then withdrawing, carrying away with them the never-to-be-forgotten vision of the two tragic lovers sleeping their eternal sleep.

Pierre joined Celia and La Pierina in the /anticamera nobile/, where stood Don Vigilio. The few seats belonging to the throne-room had there been placed in a corner, and the little Princess had just compelled the work-girl to sit down in an arm-chair, in order that she might recover self-possession. Celia was in ecstasy before her, enraptured at finding

her so beautiful, more beautiful than any other, as she said. Then she spoke of the two dead ones, who also had seemed to her very beautiful, endowed with an extraordinary beauty, at once superb and sweet; and despite all her tears, she still remained in a transport of admiration. On speaking with La Pierina, Pierre learnt that her brother Tito was at the hospital in great danger from the effects of a terrible knife thrust dealt him in the side; and since the beginning of the winter, said the girl, the misery in the district of the castle fields had become frightful. It was a source of great suffering to every one, and those whom death carried off had reason to rejoice.

Celia, however, with a gesture of invincible hopefulness, brushed all idea of suffering, even of death, aside. "No, no, we must live," she said. "And beauty is sufficient for life. Come, my dear, do not remain here, do not weep any more; live for the delight of being beautiful."

Then she led La Pierina away, and Pierre remained seated in one of the arm-chairs, overcome by such sorrow and weariness that he would have liked to remain there for ever. Don Vigilio was still bowing to each fresh visitor that arrived. A severe attack of fever had come on him during the night, and he was shivering from it, with his face very yellow, and his eyes ablaze and haggard. He constantly glanced at Pierre, as if anxious to speak to him, but his dread lest he should be seen by Abbe Paparelli, who stood in the next ante-room, the door of which was wide open, doubtless restrained him, for he did not cease to watch the train-bearer. At last the latter was compelled to absent himself for a moment, and the secretary thereupon approached the young Frenchman.

"You saw his Holiness last night," he said; and as Pierre gazed at him in stupefaction he added: "Oh! everything gets known, I told you so before. Well, and you purely and simply withdrew your book, did you not?" The young priest's increasing stupor was sufficient answer, and without leaving him time to reply, Don Vigilio went on: "I suspected it, but I wished to make certain. Ah! that's just the way they work! Do you believe me now, have you realised that they stifle those whom they don't poison?"

He was no doubt referring to the Jesuits. However, after glancing into the adjoining room to make sure that Abbe Paparelli had not returned thither, he resumed: "And what has Monsignor Nani just told you?"

"But I have not yet seen Monsignor Nani," was Pierre's reply.

"Oh! I thought you had. He passed through before you arrived. If you did not see him in the throne-room he must have gone to pay his respects to Donna Serafina and his Eminence. However, he will certainly pass this way again; you will see him by and by." Then with the bitterness of one who was weak, ever terror-smitten and vanquished, Don Vigilio added: "I told you that you would end by doing what Monsignor Nani desired."

With these words, fancying that he heard the light footfall of Abbe Paparelli, he hastily returned to his place and bowed to two old ladies who just then walked in. And Pierre, still seated, overcome, his eyes wearily closing, at last saw the figure of Nani arise before him in all



its reality so typical of sovereign intelligence and address. He remembered what Don Vigilio, on the famous night of his revelations, had told him of this man who was far too shrewd to have labelled himself, so to say, with an unpopular robe, and who, withal, was a charming prelate with thorough knowledge of the world, acquired by long experience at different nunciatures and at the Holy Office, mixed up in everything, informed with regard to everything, one of the heads, one of the chief minds in fact of that modern black army, which by dint of Opportunism hopes to bring this century back to the Church. And all at once, full enlightenment fell on Pierre, he realised by what supple, clever strategy that man had led him to the act which he desired of him, the pure and simple withdrawal of his book, accomplished with every appearance of free will. First there had been great annoyance on Nani's part on learning that the book was being prosecuted, for he feared lest its excitable author might be prompted to some dangerous revolt; then plans had at once been formed, information had been collected concerning this young priest who seemed so capable of schism, he had been urged to come to Rome, invited to stay in an ancient mansion whose very walls would chill and enlighten him. And afterwards had come the ever recurring obstacles, the system of prolonging his sojourn in Rome by preventing him from seeing the Pope, but promising him the much-desired interview when the proper time should come, that is after he had been sent hither and thither and brought into collision with one and all. And finally, when every one and everything had shaken, wearied, and disgusted him, and he was restored once more to his old doubts, there had come the audience for which he had undergone all this preparation, that visit to the Pope which was destined to shatter whatever remained to him of his dream. Pierre could picture Nani smiling at him and speaking to him, declaring that the repeated delays were a favour of Providence, which would enable him to visit Rome, study and understand things, reflect, and avoid blunders. How delicate and how profound had been the prelate's diplomacy in thus crushing his feelings beneath his reason, appealing to his intelligence to suppress his work without any scandalous struggle as soon as his knowledge of the real Rome should have shown him how supremely ridiculous it was to dream of a new one!

At that moment Pierre perceived Nani in person just coming from the throne-room, and did not feel the irritation and rancour which he had anticipated. On the contrary he was glad when the prelate, in his turn seeing him, drew near and held out his hand. Nani, however, did not wear his wonted smile, but looked very grave, quite grief-stricken. "Ah! my dear son," he said, "what a frightful catastrophe! I have just left his Eminence, he is in tears. It is horrible, horrible!"

He seated himself on one of the chairs, inviting the young priest, who had risen, to do the same; and for a moment he remained silent, weary with emotion no doubt, and needing a brief rest to free himself of the weight of thoughts which visibly darkened his usually bright face. Then, with a gesture, he strove to dismiss that gloom, and recover his amiable cordiality. "Well, my dear son," he began, "you saw his Holiness?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, yesterday evening; and I thank you for your great kindness in satisfying my desire."

Nani looked at him fixedly, and his invincible smile again returned to his lips. "You thank me. . . . I can well see that you behaved sensibly and laid your full submission at his Holiness's feet. I was certain of it, I did not expect less of your fine intelligence. But, all the same, you render me very happy, for I am delighted to find that I was not mistaken concerning you." And then, setting aside his reserve, the prelate went on: "I never discussed things with you. What would have been the good of it, since facts were there to convince you? And now that you have withdrawn your book a discussion would be still more futile. However, just reflect that if it were possible for you to bring the Church back to her early period, to that Christian community which you have sketched so delightfully, she could only again follow the same evolutions as those in which God the first time guided her; so that, at the end of a similar number of centuries, she would find herself exactly in the position which she occupies to-day. No, what God has done has been well done, the Church such as she is must govern the world, such as it is; it is for her alone to know how she will end by firmly establishing her reign here below. And this is why your attack upon the temporal power was an unpardonable fault, a crime even, for by dispossessing the papacy of her domains you hand her over to the mercy of the nations. Your new religion is but the final downfall of all religion, moral anarchy, the liberty of schism, in a word, the destruction of the divine edifice, that ancient Catholicism which has shown such prodigious wisdom and solidity, which has sufficed for the salvation of mankind till now, and will alone be able to save it to-morrow and always."

Pierre felt that Nani was sincere, pious even, and really unshakable in his faith, loving the Church like a grateful son, and convinced that she was the only social organisation which could render mankind happy. And if he were bent on governing the world, it was doubtless for the pleasure of governing, but also in the conviction that no one could do so better than himself.

"Oh! certainly," said he, "methods are open to discussion. I desire them to be as affable and humane as possible, as conciliatory as can be with this present century, which seems to be escaping us, precisely because there is a misunderstanding between us. But we shall bring it back, I am sure of it. And that is why, my dear son, I am so pleased to see you return to the fold, thinking as we think, and ready to battle on our side, is that not so?"

In Nani's words the young priest once more found the arguments of Leo XIII. Desiring to avoid a direct reply, for although he now felt no anger the wrenching away of his dream had left him a smarting wound, he bowed, and replied slowly in order to conceal the bitter tremble of his voice: "I repeat, Monseigneur, that I deeply thank you for having amputated my vain illusions with the skill of an accomplished surgeon. A little later, when I shall have ceased to suffer, I shall think of you with eternal gratitude."

Monsignor Nani still looked at him with a smile. He fully understood that this young priest would remain on one side, that as an element of

strength he was lost to the Church. What would he do now? Something foolish no doubt. However, the prelate had to content himself with having helped him to repair his first folly; he could not foresee the future. And he gracefully waved his hand as if to say that sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof.

"Will you allow me to conclude, my dear son?" he at last exclaimed. "Be sensible, your happiness as a priest and a man lies in humility. You will be terribly unhappy if you use the great intelligence which God has given you against Him."

Then with another gesture he dismissed this affair, which was all over, and with which he need busy himself no more. And thereupon the other affair came back to make him gloomy, that other affair which also was drawing to a close, but so tragically, with those two poor children slumbering in the adjoining room. "Ah!" he resumed, "that poor Princess and that poor Cardinal quite upset my heart! Never did catastrophe fall so cruelly on a house. No, no, it is indeed too much, misfortune goes too far--it revolts one's soul!"

Just as he finished a sound of voices came from the second ante-room, and Pierre was thunderstruck to see Cardinal Sanguinetti go by, escorted with the greatest obsequiousness by Abbe Paparelli.

"If your most Reverend Eminence will have the extreme kindness to follow me," the train-bearer was saying, "I will conduct your most Reverend Eminence myself."

"Yes," replied Sanguinetti, "I arrived yesterday evening from Frascati, and when I heard the sad news, I at once desired to express my sorrow and offer consolation."

"Your Eminence will perhaps condescend to remain for a moment near the bodies. I will afterwards escort your Eminence to the private apartments."

"Yes, by all means. I desire every one to know how greatly I participate in the sorrow which has fallen on this illustrious house."

Then Sanguinetti entered the throne-room, leaving Pierre quite aghast at his quiet audacity. The young priest certainly did not accuse him of direct complicity with Santobono, he did not even dare to measure how far his moral complicity might go. But on seeing him pass by like that, his brow so lofty, his speech so clear, he had suddenly felt convinced that he knew the truth. How or through whom, he could not have told; but doubtless crimes become known in those shady spheres by those whose interest it is to know of them. And Pierre remained quite chilled by the haughty fashion in which that man presented himself, perhaps to stifle suspicion and certainly to accomplish an act of good policy by giving his rival a public mark of esteem and affection.

"The Cardinal! Here!" Pierre murmured despite himself.

Nani, who followed the young man's thoughts in his childish eyes, in which all could be read, pretended to mistake the sense of his exclamation. "Yes," said he, "I learnt that the Cardinal returned to Rome yesterday evening. He did not wish to remain away any longer; the Holy Father being so much better that he might perhaps have need of him."

Although these words were spoken with an air of perfect innocence, Pierre was not for a moment deceived by them. And having in his turn glanced at the prelate, he was convinced that the latter also knew the truth. Then, all at once, the whole affair appeared to him in its intricacy, in the ferocity which fate had imparted to it. Nani, an old intimate of the Palazzo Boccanera, was not heartless, he had surely loved Benedetta with affection, charmed by so much grace and beauty. One could thus explain the victorious manner in which he had at last caused her marriage to be annulled. But if Don Vigilio were to be believed, that divorce, obtained by pecuniary outlay, and under pressure of the most notorious influences, was simply a scandal which he, Nani, had in the first instance spun out, and then precipitated towards a resounding finish with the sole object of discrediting the Cardinal and destroying his chances of the tiara on the eve of the Conclave which everybody thought imminent. It seemed certain, too, that the Cardinal, uncompromising as he was, could not be the candidate of Nani, who was so desirous of universal agreement, and so the latter's long labour in that house, whilst conducing to the happiness of the Contessina, had been designed to frustrate Donna Serafina and Cardinal Pio in their burning ambition, that third triumphant elevation to the papacy which they sought to secure for their ancient family. However, if Nani had always desired to balk this ambition, and had even at one moment placed his hopes in Sanguinetti and fought for him, he had never imagined that Boccanera's foes would go to the point of crime, to such an abomination as poison which missed its mark and killed the innocent. No, no, as he himself said, that was too much, and made one's soul rebel. He employed more gentle weapons; such brutality filled him with indignation; and his face, so pinky and carefully tended, still wore the grave expression of his revolt in presence of the tearful Cardinal and those poor lovers stricken in his stead.

Believing that Sanguinetti was still the prelate's secret candidate, Pierre was worried to know how far their moral complicity in this baleful affair might go. So he resumed the conversation by saying: "It is asserted that his Holiness is on bad terms with his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Of course the reigning pope cannot look on the future pope with a very kindly eye."

At this, Nani for a moment became quite gay in all frankness. "Oh," said he, "the Cardinal has quarrelled and made things up with the Vatican three or four times already. And, in any event, the Holy Father has no motive for posthumous jealousy; he knows very well that he can give his Eminence a good greeting." Then, regretting that he had thus expressed a certainty, he added: "I am joking, his Eminence is altogether worthy of the high fortune which perhaps awaits him."

Pierre knew what to think however; Sanguinetti was certainly Nani's candidate no longer. It was doubtless considered that he had used himself

up too much by his impatient ambition, and was too dangerous by reason of the equivocal alliances which in his feverishness he had concluded with every party, even that of patriotic young Italy. And thus the situation became clearer. Cardinals Sanguinetti and Boccanera devoured and suppressed one another; the first, ever intriguing, accepting every compromise, dreaming of winning Rome back by electoral methods; and the other, erect and motionless in his stern maintenance of the past, excommunicating the century, and awaiting from God alone the miracle which would save the Church. And, indeed, why not leave the two theories, thus placed face to face, to destroy one another, including all the extreme, disquieting views which they respectively embodied? If Boccanera had escaped the poison, he had none the less become an impossible candidate, killed by all the stories which had set Rome buzzing; while if Sanguinetti could say that he was rid of a rival, he had at the same time dealt a mortal blow to his own candidature, by displaying such passion for power, and such unscrupulousness with regard to the methods he employed, as to be a danger for every one. Monsignor Nani was visibly delighted with this result; neither candidate was left, it was like the legendary story of the two wolves who fought and devoured one another so completely that nothing of either of them was found left, not even their tails! And in the depths of the prelate's pale eyes, in the whole of his discreet person, there remained nothing but redoubtable mystery: the mystery of the yet unknown, but definitely selected candidate who would be patronised by the all-powerful army of which he was one of the most skilful leaders. A man like him always had a solution ready. Who, then, who would be the next pope?

However, he now rose and cordially took leave of the young priest. "I doubt if I shall see you again, my dear son," he said; "I wish you a good journey."

Still he did not go off, but continued to look at Pierre with his penetrating eyes, and finally made him sit down again and did the same himself. "I feel sure," he said, "that you will go to pay your respects to Cardinal Bergerot as soon as you have returned to France. Kindly tell him that I respectfully desired to be reminded to him. I knew him a little at the time when he came here for his hat. He is one of the great luminaries of the French clergy. Ah! a man of such intelligence would only work for a good understanding in our holy Church. Unfortunately I fear that race and environment have instilled prejudices into him, for he does not always help us."

Pierre, who was surprised to hear Nani speak of the Cardinal for the first time at this moment of farewell, listened with curiosity. Then in all frankness he replied: "Yes, his Eminence has very decided ideas about our old Church of France. For instance, he professes perfect horror of the Jesuits."

With a light exclamation Nani stopped the young man. And he wore the most sincerely, frankly astonished air that could be imagined. "What! horror of the Jesuits! In what way can the Jesuits disquiet him? The Jesuits, there are none, that's all over! Have you seen any in Rome? Have they troubled you in any way, those poor Jesuits who haven't even a stone of

their own left here on which to lay their heads? No, no, that bogey mustn't be brought up again, it's childish."

Pierre in his turn looked at him, marvelling at his perfect ease, his quiet courage in dealing with this burning subject. He did not avert his eyes, but displayed an open face like a book of truth. "Ah!" he continued, "if by Jesuits you mean the sensible priests who, instead of entering into sterile and dangerous struggles with modern society, seek by human methods to bring it back to the Church, why, then of course we are all of us more or less Jesuits, for it would be madness not to take into account the times in which one lives. And besides, I won't haggle over words; they are of no consequence! Jesuits, well, yes, if you like, Jesuits!" He was again smiling with that shrewd smile of his in which there was so much raillery and so much intelligence. "Well, when you see Cardinal Bergerot tell him that it is unreasonable to track the Jesuits and treat them as enemies of the nation. The contrary is the truth. The Jesuits are for France, because they are for wealth, strength, and courage. France is the only great Catholic country which has yet remained erect and sovereign, the only one on which the papacy can some day lean. Thus the Holy Father, after momentarily dreaming of obtaining support from victorious Germany, has allied himself with France, the vanquished, because he has understood that apart from France there can be no salvation for the Church. And in this he has only followed the policy of the Jesuits, those frightful Jesuits, whom your Parisians execrate. And tell Cardinal Bergerot also that it would be grand of him to work for pacification by making people understand how wrong it is for your Republic to help the Holy Father so little in his conciliatory efforts. It pretends to regard him as an element in the world's affairs that may be neglected; and that is dangerous, for although he may seem to have no political means of action he remains an immense moral force, and can at any moment raise consciences in rebellion and provoke a religious agitation of the most far-reaching consequences. It is still he who disposes of the nations, since he disposes of their souls, and the Republic acts most inconsiderately, from the standpoint of its own interests, in showing that it no longer even suspects it. And tell the Cardinal too, that it is really pitiful to see in what a wretched way your Republic selects its bishops, as though it intentionally desired to weaken its episcopacy. Leaving out a few fortunate exceptions, your bishops are men of small brains, and as a result your cardinals, likewise mere mediocrities, have no influence, play no part here in Rome. Ah! what a sorry figure you Frenchmen will cut at the next Conclave! And so why do you show such blind and foolish hatred of those Jesuits, who, politically, are your friends? Why don't you employ their intelligent zeal, which is ready to serve you, so that you may assure yourselves the help of the next, the coming pope? It is necessary for you that he should be on your side, that he should continue the work of Leo XIII, which is so badly judged and so much opposed, but which cares little for the petty results of to-day, since its purpose lies in the future, in the union of all the nations under their holy mother the Church. Tell Cardinal Bergerot, tell him plainly that he ought to be with us, that he ought to work for his country by working for us. The coming pope, why the whole question lies in that, and woe to France if in him she does not find a continuator of Leo XIII!"

Nani had again risen, and this time he was going off. Never before had he unbosomed himself at such length. But most assuredly he had only said what he desired to say, for a purpose that he alone knew of, and in a firm, gentle, and deliberate voice by which one could tell that each word had been weighed and determined beforehand. "Farewell, my dear son," he said, "and once again think over all you have seen and heard in Rome. Be as sensible as you can, and do not spoil your life."

Pierre bowed, and pressed the small, plump, supple hand which the prelate offered him. "Monseigneur," he replied, "I again thank you for all your kindness; you may be sure that I shall forget nothing of my journey."

Then he watched Nani as he went off, with a light and conquering step as if marching to all the victories of the future. No, no, he, Pierre, would forget nothing of his journey! He well knew that union of all the nations under their holy mother the Church, that temporal bondage in which the law of Christ would become the dictatorship of Augustus, master of the world! And as for those Jesuits, he had no doubt that they did love France, the eldest daughter of the Church, and the only daughter that could yet help her mother to reconquer universal sovereignty, but they loved her even as the black swarms of locusts love the harvests which they swoop upon and devour. Infinite sadness had returned to the young man's heart as he dimly realised that in that sorely-stricken mansion, in all that mourning and downfall, it was they, they again, who must have been the artisans of grief and disaster.

As this thought came to him he turned round and perceived Don Vigilio leaning against the credence in front of the large portrait of the Cardinal. Holding his hands to his face as if he desired to annihilate himself, the secretary was shivering in every limb as much with fear as with fever. At a moment when no fresh visitors were arriving he had succumbed to an attack of terrified despair.

"/Mon Dieu!/ What is the matter with you?" asked Pierre stepping forward, "are you ill, can I help you?"

But Don Vigilio, suffocating and still hiding his face, could only gasp between his close-pressed hands "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!"

"What is it? What has he done to you?" asked the other astonished.

Then the secretary disclosed his face, and again yielded to his quivering desire to confide in some one. "Eh? what he has done to me? Can't you feel anything, can't you see anything then? Didn't you notice the manner in which he took possession of Cardinal Sanguinetti so as to conduct him to his Eminence? To impose that suspected, hateful rival on his Eminence at such a moment as this, what insolent audacity! And a few minutes previously did you notice with what wicked cunning he bowed out an old lady, a very old family friend, who only desired to kiss his Eminence's hand and show a little real affection which would have made his Eminence so happy! Ah! I tell you that he's the master here, he opens or closes the door as he pleases, and holds us all between his fingers like a pinch

of dust which one throws to the wind!"

Pierre became anxious, seeing how yellow and feverish Don Vigilio was: "Come, come, my dear fellow," he said, "you are exaggerating!"

"Exaggerating? Do you know what happened last night, what I myself unwillingly witnessed? No, you don't know it; well, I will tell you."

Thereupon he related that Donna Serafina, on returning home on the previous day to face the terrible catastrophe awaiting her, had already been overcome by the bad news which she had learnt when calling on the Cardinal Secretary and various prelates of her acquaintance. She had then acquired a certainty that her brother's position was becoming extremely bad, for he had made so many fresh enemies among his colleagues of the Sacred College, that his election to the pontifical throne, which a year previously had seemed probable, now appeared an impossibility. Thus, all at once, the dream of her life collapsed, the ambition which she had so long nourished lay in dust at her feet. On despairingly seeking the why and wherefore of this change, she had been told of all sorts of blunders committed by the Cardinal, acts of rough sternness, unseasonable manifestations of opinion, inconsiderate words or actions which had sufficed to wound people, in fact such provoking demeanour that one might have thought it adopted with the express intention of spoiling everything. And the worst was that in each of the blunders she had recognised errors of judgment which she herself had blamed, but which her brother had obstinately insisted on perpetrating under the unacknowledged influence of Abbe Paparelli, that humble and insignificant train-bearer, in whom she detected a baneful and powerful adviser who destroyed her own vigilant and devoted influence. And so, in spite of the mourning in which the house was plunged, she did not wish to delay the punishment of the traitor, particularly as his old friendship with that terrible Santobono, and the story of that basket of figs which had passed from the hands of the one to those of the other, chilled her blood with a suspicion which she even recoiled from elucidating. However, at the first words she spoke, directly she made a formal request that the traitor should be immediately turned out of the house, she was confronted by invincible resistance on her brother's part. He would not listen to her, but flew into one of those hurricane-like passions which swept everything away, reproaching her for laying blame on so modest, pious, and saintly a man, and accusing her of playing into the hands of his enemies, who, after killing Monsignor Gallo, were seeking to poison his sole remaining affection for that poor, insignificant priest. He treated all the stories he was told as abominable inventions, and swore that he would keep the train-bearer in his service if only to show his disdain for calumny. And she was thereupon obliged to hold her peace.

However, Don Vigilio's shuddering fit had again come back; he carried his hands to his face stammering: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!" And muttered invectives followed: the train-bearer was an artful hypocrite who feigned modesty and humility, a vile spy appointed to pry into everything, listen to everything, and pervert everything that went on in the palace; he was a loathsome, destructive insect, feeding on the most noble prey, devouring the lion's mane, a Jesuit--the Jesuit who is at once lackey and



tyrant, in all his base horror as he accomplishes the work of vermin.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," repeated Pierre, who whilst allowing for foolish exaggeration on the secretary's part could not help shivering at thought of all the threatening things which he himself could divine astir in the gloom.

However, since Don Vigilio had so narrowly escaped eating those horrible figs, his fright was such that nothing could calm it. Even when he was alone at night, in bed, with his door locked and bolted, sudden terror fell on him and made him hide his head under the sheet and vent stifled cries as if he thought that men were coming through the wall to strangle him. In a faint, breathless voice, as if just emerging from a struggle, he now resumed: "I told you what would happen on the evening when we had a talk together in your room. Although all the doors were securely shut, I did wrong to speak of them to you, I did wrong to ease my heart by telling you all that they were capable of. I was sure they would learn it, and you see they did learn it, since they tried to kill me. . . . Why it's even wrong of me to tell you this, for it will reach their ears and they won't miss me the next time. Ah! it's all over, I'm as good as dead; this house which I thought so safe will be my tomb."

Pierre began to feel deep compassion for this ailing man, whose feverish brain was haunted by nightmares, and whose life was being finally wrecked by the anguish of persecution mania. "But you must run away in that case!" he said. "Don't stop here; come to France."

Don Vigilio looked at him, momentarily calmed by surprise. "Run away, why? Go to France? Why, they are there! No matter where I might go, they would be there. They are everywhere, I should always be surrounded by them! No, no, I prefer to stay here and would rather die at once if his Eminence can no longer defend me." With an expression of ardent entreaty in which a last gleam of hope tried to assert itself, he raised his eyes to the large painting in which the Cardinal stood forth resplendent in his cassock of red moire; but his attack came back again and overwhelmed him with increased intensity of fever. "Leave me, I beg you, leave me," he gasped. "Don't make me talk any more. Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli! If he should come back and see us and hear me speak. . . . Oh! I'll never say anything again. I'll tie up my tongue, I'll cut it off. Leave me, you are killing me, I tell you, he'll be coming back and that will mean my death. Go away, oh! for mercy's sake, go away!"

Thereupon Don Vigilio turned towards the wall as if to flatten his face against it, and immure his lips in tomb-like silence; and Pierre resolved to leave him to himself, fearing lest he should provoke a yet more serious attack if he went on endeavouring to succour him.

On returning to the throne-room the young priest again found himself amidst all the frightful mourning. Mass was following mass; without cessation murmured prayers entreated the divine mercy to receive the two dear departed souls with loving kindness. And amidst the dying perfume of the fading roses, in front of the pale stars of the lighted candles, Pierre thought of that supreme downfall of the Boccaneras. Dario was the

last of the name, and one could well understand that the Cardinal, whose only sin was family pride, should have loved that one remaining scion by whom alone the old stock might yet blossom afresh. And indeed, if he and Donna Serafina had desired the divorce, and then the marriage of the cousins, it had been less with the view of putting an end to scandal than with the hope of seeing a new line of Boccaneras spring up. But the lovers were dead, and the last remains of a long series of dazzling princes of sword and of gown lay there on that bed, soon to rot in the grave. It was all over; that old maid and that aged Cardinal could leave no posterity. They remained face to face like two withered oaks, sole remnants of a vanished forest, and their fall would soon leave the plain quite clear. And how terrible the grief of surviving in impotence, what anguish to have to tell oneself that one is the end of everything, that with oneself all life, all hope for the morrow will depart! Amidst the murmur of the prayers, the dying perfume of the roses, the pale gleams of the two candles, Pierre realised what a downfall was that bereavement, how heavy was the gravestone which fell for ever on an extinct house, a vanished world.

He well understood that as one of the familiars of the mansion he must pay his respects to Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, and he at once sought admission to the neighbouring room where the Princess was receiving her friends. He found her robed in black, very slim and very erect in her arm-chair, whence she rose with slow dignity to respond to the bow of each person that entered. She listened to the condolences but answered never a word, overcoming her physical pain by rigidity of bearing. Pierre, who had learnt to know her, could divine, however, by the hollowness of her cheeks, the emptiness of her eyes, and the bitter twinge of her mouth, how frightful was the collapse within her. Not only was her race ended, but her brother would never be pope, never secure the elevation which she had so long fancied she was winning for him by dint of devotion, dint of feminine renunciation, giving brain and heart, care and money, foregoing even wifehood and motherhood, spoiling her whole life, in order to realise that dream. And amidst all the ruin of hope, it was perhaps the nonfulfilment of that ambition which most made her heart bleed. She rose for the young priest, her guest, as she rose for the other persons who presented themselves; but she contrived to introduce shades of meaning into the manner in which she quitted her chair, and Pierre fully realised that he had remained in her eyes a mere petty French priest, an insignificant domestic of the Divinity who had not known how to acquire even the title of prelate. When she had again seated herself after acknowledging his compliment with a slight inclination of the head, he remained for a moment standing, out of politeness. Not a word, not a sound disturbed the mournful quiescence of the room, for although there were four or five lady visitors seated there they remained motionless and silent as with grief. Pierre was most struck, however, by the sight of Cardinal Sarno, who was lying back in an arm-chair with his eyes closed. The poor puny lopsided old man had lingered there forgetfully after expressing his condolences, and, overcome by the heavy silence and close atmosphere, had just fallen asleep. And everybody respected his slumber. Was he dreaming as he dozed of that map of Christendom which he carried behind his low obtuse-looking brow? Was he continuing in dreamland his terrible work of conquest, that task of

subjecting and governing the earth which he directed from his dark room at the Propaganda? The ladies glanced at him affectionately and deferentially; he was gently scolded at times for over-working himself, the sleepiness which nowadays frequently overtook him in all sorts of places being attributed to excess of genius and zeal. And of this all-powerful Eminence Pierre was destined to carry off only this last impression: an exhausted old man, resting amidst the emotion of a mourning-gathering, sleeping there like a candid child, without any one knowing whether this were due to the approach of senile imbecility, or to the fatigues of a night spent in organising the reign of God over some distant continent.

Two ladies went off and three more arrived. Donna Serafina rose, bowed, and then reseated herself, reverting to her rigid attitude, her bust erect, her face stern and full of despair. Cardinal Sarno was still asleep. Then Pierre felt as if he would stifle, a kind of vertigo came on him, and his heart beat violently. So he bowed and withdrew: and on passing through the dining-room on his way to the little study where Cardinal Boccanera received his visitors, he found himself in the presence of Paparelli who was jealously guarding the door. When the train-bearer had sniffed at the young man, he seemed to realise that he could not refuse him admittance. Moreover, as this intruder was going away the very next day, defeated and covered with shame, there was nothing to be feared from him.

"You wish to see his Eminence?" said Paparelli. "Good, good. By and by, wait." And opining that Pierre was too near the door, he pushed him back to the other end of the room, for fear no doubt lest he should overhear anything. "His Eminence is still engaged with his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Wait, wait there!"

Sanguinetti indeed had made a point of kneeling for a long time in front of the bodies in the throne-room, and had then spun out his visit to Donna Serafina in order to mark how largely he shared the family sorrow. And for more than ten minutes now he had been closeted with Cardinal Boccanera, nothing but an occasional murmur of their voices being heard through the closed door.

Pierre, however, on finding Paparelli there, was again haunted by all that Don Vigilio had told him. He looked at the train-bearer, so fat and short, puffed out with bad fat in his dirty cassock, his face flabby and wrinkled, and his whole person at forty years of age suggestive of that of a very old maid: and he felt astonished. How was it that Cardinal Boccanera, that superb prince who carried his head so high, and who was so supremely proud of his name, had allowed himself to be captured and swayed by such a frightful creature reeking of baseness and abomination? Was it not the man's very physical degradation and profound humility that had struck him, disturbed him, and finally fascinated him, as wondrous gifts conducing to salvation, which he himself lacked? Paparelli's person and disposition were like blows dealt to his own handsome presence and his own pride. He, who could not be so deformed, he who could not vanquish his passion for glory, must, by an effort of faith, have grown jealous of that man who was so extremely ugly and so extremely

insignificant, he must have come to admire him as a superior force of penitence and human abasement which threw the portals of heaven wide open. Who can ever tell what ascendancy is exercised by the monster over the hero; by the horrid-looking saint covered with vermin over the powerful of this world in their terror at having to endure everlasting flames in payment of their terrestrial joys? And 'twas indeed the lion devoured by the insect, vast strength and splendour destroyed by the invisible. Ah! to have that fine soul which was so certain of paradise, which for its welfare was enclosed in such a disgusting body, to possess the happy humility of that wide intelligence, that remarkable theologian, who scourged himself with rods each morning on rising, and was content to be the lowest of servants.

Standing there a heap of livid fat, Paparelli on his side watched Pierre with his little grey eyes blinking amidst the myriad wrinkles of his face. And the young priest began to feel uneasy, wondering what their Eminences could be saying to one another, shut up together like that for so long a time. And what an interview it must be if Boccanera suspected Sanguinetti of counting Santobono among his clients. What serene audacity it was on Sanguinetti's part to have dared to present himself in that house, and what strength of soul there must be on Boccanera's part, what empire over himself, to prevent all scandal by remaining silent and accepting the visit as a simple mark of esteem and affection! What could they be saying to one another, however? How interesting it would have been to have seen them face to face, and have heard them exchange the diplomatic phrases suited to such an interview, whilst their souls were raging with furious hatred!

All at once the door opened and Cardinal Sanguinetti appeared with calm face, no ruddier than usual, indeed a trifle paler, and retaining the fitting measure of sorrow which he had thought it right to assume. His restless eyes alone revealed his delight at being rid of a difficult task. And he was going off, all hope, in the conviction that he was the only eligible candidate to the papacy that remained.

Abbe Paparelli had darted forward: "If your Eminence will kindly follow me--I will escort your Eminence to the door." Then, turning towards Pierre, he added: "You may go in now."

Pierre watched them walk away, the one so humble behind the other, who was so triumphant. Then he entered the little work-room, furnished simply with a table and three chairs, and in the centre of it he at once perceived Cardinal Boccanera still standing in the lofty, noble attitude which he had assumed to take leave of Sanguinetti, his hated rival to the pontifical throne. And, visibly, Boccanera also believed himself the only possible pope, the one whom the coming Conclave would elect.

However, when the door had been closed, and the Cardinal beheld that young priest, his guest, who had witnessed the death of those two dear children lying in the adjoining room, he was again mastered by emotion, an unexpected attack of weakness in which all his energy collapsed. His human feelings were taking their revenge now that his rival was no longer there to see him. He staggered like an old tree smitten with the axe, and

sank upon a chair, stifling with sobs.

And as Pierre, according to usage, was about to stoop and kiss his ring, he raised him and at once made him sit down, stammering in a halting voice: "No, no, my dear son! Seat yourself there, wait--Excuse me, leave me to myself for a moment, my heart is bursting."

He sobbed with his hands to his face, unable to master himself, unable to drive back his grief with those yet vigorous fingers which were pressed to his cheeks and temples.

Tears came into Pierre's eyes, for he also lived through all that woe afresh, and was much upset by the weeping of that tall old man, that saint and prince, usually so haughty, so fully master of himself, but now only a poor, suffering, agonising man, as weak and as lost as a child. However, although the young priest was likewise stifling with grief, he desired to present his condolences, and sought for kindly words by which he might soothe the other's despair. "I beg your Eminence to believe in my profound grief," he said. "I have been overwhelmed with kindness here, and desired at once to tell your Eminence how much that irreparable loss--"

But with a brave gesture the Cardinal silenced him. "No, no, say nothing, for mercy's sake say nothing!"

And silence reigned while he continued weeping, shaken by the struggle he was waging, his efforts to regain sufficient strength to overcome himself. At last he mastered his quiver and slowly uncovered his face, which had again become calm, like that of a believer strong in his faith, and submissive to the will of God. In refusing a miracle, in dealing so hard a blow to that house, God had doubtless had His reasons, and he, the Cardinal, one of God's ministers, one of the high dignitaries of His terrestrial court, was in duty bound to bow to it. The silence lasted for another moment, and then, in a voice which he managed to render natural and cordial, Boccanera said: "You are leaving us, you are going back to France to-morrow, are you not, my dear son?"

"Yes, I shall have the honour to take leave of your Eminence to-morrow, again thanking your Eminence for your inexhaustible kindness."

"And you have learnt that the Congregation of the Index has condemned your book, as was inevitable?"

"Yes, I obtained the signal favour of being received by his Holiness, and in his presence made my submission and reprobated my book."

The Cardinal's moist eyes again began to sparkle. "Ah! you did that, ah! you did well, my dear son," he said. "It was only your strict duty as a priest, but there are so many nowadays who do not even do their duty! As a member of the Congregation I kept the promise I gave you to read your book, particularly the incriminated pages. And if I afterwards remained neutral, to such a point even as to miss the sitting in which judgment was pronounced, it was only to please my poor, dear niece, who was so

fond of you, and who pleaded your cause to me."

Tears were coming into his eyes again, and he paused, feeling that he would once more be overcome if he evoked the memory of that adored and lamented Benedetta. And so it was with a pugnacious bitterness that he resumed: "But what an execrable book it was, my dear son, allow me to tell you so. You told me that you had shown respect for dogma, and I still wonder what aberration can have come over you that you should have been so blind to all consciousness of your offences. Respect for dogma--good Lord! when the entire work is the negation of our holy religion! Did you not realise that by asking for a new religion you absolutely condemned the old one, the only true one, the only good one, the only one that can be eternal? And that sufficed to make your book the most deadly of poisons, one of those infamous books which in former times were burnt by the hangman, and which one is nowadays compelled to leave in circulation after interdicting them and thereby designating them to evil curiosity, which explains the contagious rottenness of the century. Ah! I well recognised there some of the ideas of our distinguished and poetical relative, that dear Viscount Philibert de la Choue. A man of letters, yes! a man of letters! Literature, mere literature! I beg God to forgive him, for he most surely does not know what he is doing, or whither he is going with his elegiac Christianity for talkative working men and young persons of either sex, to whom scientific notions have given vagueness of soul. And I only feel angry with his Eminence Cardinal Bergerot, for he at any rate knows what he does, and does as he pleases. No, say nothing, do not defend him. He personifies Revolution in the Church, and is against God."

Although Pierre had resolved that he would not reply or argue, he had allowed a gesture of protest to escape him on hearing this furious attack upon the man whom he most respected in the whole world. However, he yielded to Cardinal Boccanera's injunction and again bowed.

"I cannot sufficiently express my horror," the Cardinal roughly continued; "yes, my horror for all that hollow dream of a new religion! That appeal to the most hideous passions which stir up the poor against the rich, by promising them I know not what division of wealth, what community of possession which is nowadays impossible! That base flattery shown to the lower orders to whom equality and justice are promised but never given, for these can come from God alone, it is only He who can finally make them reign on the day appointed by His almighty power! And there is even that interested charity which people abuse of to rail against Heaven itself and accuse it of iniquity and indifference, that lackadaisical weakening charity and compassion, unworthy of strong firm hearts, for it is as if human suffering were not necessary for salvation, as if we did not become more pure, greater and nearer to the supreme happiness, the more and more we suffer!"

He was growing excited, full of anguish, and superb. It was his bereavement, his heart wound, which thus exasperated him, the great blow which had felled him for a moment, but against which he again rose erect, defying grief, and stubborn in his stoic belief in an omnipotent God, who was the master of mankind, and reserved felicity to those whom He

selected. Again, however, he made an effort to calm himself, and resumed in a more gentle voice: "At all events the fold is always open, my dear son, and here you are back in it since you have repented. You cannot imagine how happy it makes me."

In his turn Pierre strove to show himself conciliatory in order that he might not further ulcerate that violent, grief-stricken soul: "Your Eminence," said he, "may be sure that I shall endeavour to remember every one of the kind words which your Eminence has spoken to me, in the same way as I shall remember the fatherly greeting of his Holiness Leo XIII."

This sentence seemed to throw Boccanera into agitation again. At first only murmured, restrained words came from him, as if he were struggling against a desire to question the, young priest. "Ah yes! you saw his Holiness, you spoke to him, and he told you I suppose, as he tells all the foreigners who go to pay their respects to him, that he desires conciliation and peace. For my part I now only see him when it is absolutely necessary; for more than a year I have not been received in private audience."

This proof of disfavour, of the covert struggle which as in the days of Pius IX kept the Holy Father and the /Camerlingo/ at variance, filled the latter with bitterness. He was unable to restrain himself and spoke out, reflecting no doubt that he had a familiar before him, one whose discretion was certain, and who moreover was leaving Rome on the morrow. "One may go a long way," said he, "with those fine words, peace and conciliation, which are so often void of real wisdom and courage. The terrible truth is that Leo XIII's eighteen years of concessions have shaken everything in the Church, and should he long continue to reign Catholicism would topple over and crumble into dust like a building whose pillars have been undermined."

Interested by this remark, Pierre in his desire for knowledge began to raise objections. "But hasn't his Holiness shown himself very prudent?" he asked; "has he not placed dogma on one side in an impregnable fortress? If he seems to have made concessions on many points, have they not always been concessions in mere matters of form?"

"Matters of form; ah, yes!" the Cardinal resumed with increasing passion. "He told you, no doubt, as he tells others, that whilst in substance he will make no surrender, he will readily yield in matters of form! It's a deplorable axiom, an equivocal form of diplomacy even when it isn't so much low hypocrisy! My soul revolts at the thought of that Opportunism, that Jesuitism which makes artifice its weapon, and only serves to cast doubt among true believers, the confusion of a /sauve-qui-peut/, which by and by must lead to inevitable defeat. It is cowardice, the worst form of cowardice, abandonment of one's weapons in order that one may retreat the more speedily, shame of oneself, assumption of a mask in the hope of deceiving the enemy, penetrating into his camp, and overcoming him by treachery! No, no, form is everything in a traditional and immutable religion, which for eighteen hundred years has been, is now, and till the end of time will be the very law of God!"

The Cardinal's feelings so stirred him that he was unable to remain seated, and began to walk about the little room. And it was the whole reign, the whole policy of Leo XIII which he discussed and condemned. "Unity too," he continued, "that famous unity of the Christian Church which his Holiness talks of bringing about, and his desire for which people turn to his great glory, why, it is only the blind ambition of a conqueror enlarging his empire without asking himself if the new nations that he subjects may not disorganise, adulterate, and impregnate his old and hitherto faithful people with every error. What if all the schismatical nations on returning to the Catholic Church should so transform it as to kill it and make it a new Church? There is only one wise course, which is to be what one is, and that firmly. Again, isn't there both shame and danger in that pretended alliance with the democracy which in itself gives the lie to the ancient spirit of the papacy? The right of kings is divine, and to abandon the monarchical principle is to set oneself against God, to compound with revolution, and harbour a monstrous scheme of utilising the madness of men the better to establish one's power over them. All republics are forms of anarchy, and there can be no more criminal act, one which must for ever shake the principle of authority, order, and religion itself, than that of recognising a republic as legitimate for the sole purpose of indulging a dream of impossible conciliation. And observe how this bears on the question of the temporal power. He continues to claim it, he makes a point of no surrender on that question of the restoration of Rome; but in reality, has he not made the loss irreparable, has he not definitively renounced Rome, by admitting that nations have the right to drive away their kings and live like wild beasts in the depths of the forest?"

All at once the Cardinal stopped short and raised his arms to Heaven in a burst of holy anger. "Ah! that man, ah! that man who by his vanity and craving for success will have proved the ruin of the Church, that man who has never ceased corrupting everything, dissolving everything, crumbling everything in order to reign over the world which he fancies he will reconquer by those means, why, Almighty God, why hast Thou not already called him to Thee?"

So sincere was the accent in which that appeal to Death was raised, to such a point was hatred magnified by a real desire to save the Deity imperilled here below, that a great shudder swept through Pierre also. He now understood that Cardinal Boccanera who religiously and passionately hated Leo XIII; he saw him in the depths of his black palace, waiting and watching for the Pope's death, that death which as /Camerlingo/ he must officially certify. How feverishly he must wait, how impatiently he must desire the advent of the hour, when with his little silver hammer he would deal the three symbolic taps on the skull of Leo XIII, while the latter lay cold and rigid on his bed surrounded by his pontifical Court. Ah! to strike that wall of the brain, to make sure that nothing more would answer from within, that nothing beyond night and silence was left there. And the three calls would ring out: "Gioachino! Gioachino! Gioachino!" And, the corpse making no answer, the /Camerlingo/ after waiting for a few seconds would turn and say: "The Pope is dead!"

"Conciliation, however, is the weapon of the times," remarked Pierre,



wishing to bring the Cardinal back to the present, "and it is in order to make sure of conquering that the Holy Father yields in matters of form."

"He will not conquer, he will be conquered," cried Boccanera. "Never has the Church been victorious save in stubbornly clinging to its integrity, the immutable eternity of its divine essence. And it would for a certainty fall on the day when it should allow a single stone of its edifice to be touched. Remember the terrible period through which it passed at the time of the Council of Trent. The Reformation had just deeply shaken it, laxity of discipline and morals was everywhere increasing, there was a rising tide of novelties, ideas suggested by the spirit of evil, unhealthy projects born of the pride of man, running riot in full license. And at the Council itself many members were disturbed, poisoned, ready to vote for the wildest changes, a fresh schism added to all the others. Well, if Catholicism was saved at that critical period, under the threat of such great danger, it was because the majority, enlightened by God, maintained the old edifice intact, it was because with divinely inspired obstinacy it kept itself within the narrow limits of dogma, it was because it made no concession, none, whether in substance or in form! Nowadays the situation is certainly not worse than it was at the time of the Council of Trent. Let us suppose it to be much the same, and tell me if it is not nobler, braver, and safer for the Church to show the courage which she showed before and declare aloud what she is, what she has been, and what she will be. There is no salvation for her otherwise than in her complete, indisputable sovereignty; and since she has always conquered by non-surrender, all attempts to conciliate her with the century are tantamount to killing her!"

The Cardinal had again begun to walk to and fro with thoughtful step. "No, no," said he, "no compounding, no surrender, no weakness! Rather the wall of steel which bars the road, the block of granite which marks the limit of a world! As I told you, my dear son, on the day of your arrival, to try to accommodate Catholicism to the new times is to hasten its end, if really it be threatened, as atheists pretend. And in that way it would die basely and shamefully instead of dying erect, proud, and dignified in its old glorious royalty! Ah! to die standing, denying nought of the past, braving the future and confessing one's whole faith!"

That old man of seventy seemed to grow yet loftier as he spoke, free from all dread of final annihilation, and making the gesture of a hero who defies futurity. Faith had given him serenity of peace; he believed, he knew, he had neither doubt nor fear of the morrow of death. Still his voice was tinged with haughty sadness as he resumed, "God can do all, even destroy His own work should it seem evil in His eyes. But though all should crumble to-morrow, though the Holy Church should disappear among the ruins, though the most venerated sanctuaries should be crushed by the falling stars, it would still be necessary for us to bow and adore God, who after creating the world might thus annihilate it for His own glory. And I wait, submissive to His will, for nothing happens unless He wills it. If really the temples be shaken, if Catholicism be fated to fall to-morrow into dust, I shall be here to act as the minister of death, even as I have been the minister of life! It is certain, I confess it, that there are hours when terrible signs appear to me. Perhaps, indeed,

the end of time is nigh, and we shall witness that fall of the old world with which others threaten us. The worthiest, the loftiest are struck down as if Heaven erred, and in them punished the crimes of the world. Have I not myself felt the blast from the abyss into which all must sink, since my house, for transgressions that I am ignorant of, has been stricken with that frightful bereavement which precipitates it into the gulf which casts it back into night everlasting!"

He again evoked those two dear dead ones who were always present in his mind. Sobs were once more rising in his throat, his hands trembled, his lofty figure quivered with the last revolt of grief. Yes, if God had stricken him so severely by suppressing his race, if the greatest and most faithful were thus punished, it must be that the world was definitely condemned. Did not the end of his house mean the approaching end of all? And in his sovereign pride as priest and as prince, he found a cry of supreme resignation, once more raising his hands on high: "Almighty God, Thy will be done! May all die, all fall, all return to the night of chaos! I shall remain standing in this ruined palace, waiting to be buried beneath its fragments. And if Thy will should summon me to bury Thy holy religion, be without fear, I shall do nothing unworthy to prolong its life for a few days! I will maintain it erect, like myself, as proud, as uncompromising as in the days of all its power. I will yield nothing, whether in discipline, or in rite, or in dogma. And when the day shall come I will bury it with myself, carrying it whole into the grave rather than yielding aught of it, encompassing it with my cold arms to restore it to Thee, even as Thou didst commit it to the keeping of Thy Church. O mighty God and sovereign Master, dispose of me, make me if such be Thy good pleasure the pontiff of destruction, the pontiff of the death of the world."

Pierre, who was thunderstruck, quivered with fear and admiration at the extraordinary vision this evoked: the last of the popes interring Catholicism. He understood that Boccanera must at times have made that dream; he could see him in the Vatican, in St. Peter's which the thunderbolts had riven asunder, he could see him erect and alone in the spacious halls whence his terrified, cowardly pontifical Court had fled. Clad in his white cassock, thus wearing white mourning for the Church, he once more descended to the sanctuary, there to wait for heaven to fall on the evening of Time's accomplishment and annihilate the earth. Thrice he raised the large crucifix, overthrown by the supreme convulsions of the soil. Then, when the final crack rent the steps apart, he caught it in his arms and was annihilated with it beneath the falling vaults. And nothing could be more instinct with fierce and kingly grandeur.

Voiceless, but without weakness, his lofty stature invincible and erect in spite of all, Cardinal Boccanera made a gesture dismissing Pierre, who yielding to his passion for truth and beauty found that he alone was great and right, and respectfully kissed his hand.

It was in the throne-room, with closed doors, at nightfall, after the visits had ceased, that the two bodies were laid in their coffin. The religious services had come to an end, and in the close silent atmosphere there only lingered the dying perfume of the roses and the warm odour of

the candles. As the latter's pale stars scarcely lighted the spacious room, some lamps had been brought, and servants held them in their hands like torches. According to custom, all the servants of the house were present to bid a last farewell to the departed.

There was a little delay. Morano, who had been giving himself no end of trouble ever since morning, was forced to run off again as the triple coffin did not arrive. At last it came, some servants brought it up, and then they were able to begin. The Cardinal and Donna Serafina stood side by side near the bed. Pierre also was present, as well as Don Vigilio. It was Victorine who sewed the lovers up in the white silk shroud, which seemed like a bridal robe, the gay pure robe of their union. Then two servants came forward and helped Pierre and Don Vigilio to lay the bodies in the first coffin, of pine wood lined with pink satin. It was scarcely broader than an ordinary coffin, so young and slim were the lovers and so tightly were they clasped in their last embrace. When they were stretched inside they there continued their eternal slumber, their heads half hidden by their odorous, mingling hair. And when this first coffin had been placed in the second one, a leaden shell, and the second had been enclosed in the third, of stout oak, and when the three lids had been soldered and screwed down, the lovers' faces could still be seen through the circular opening, covered with thick glass, which in accordance with the Roman custom had been left in each of the coffins. And then, for ever parted from the living, alone together, they still gazed at one another with their eyes obstinately open, having all eternity before them wherein to exhaust their infinite love.

## XVI

ON the following day, on his return from the funeral Pierre lunched alone in his room, having decided to take leave of the Cardinal and Donna Serafina during the afternoon. He was quitting Rome that evening by the train which started at seventeen minutes past ten. There was nothing to detain him any longer; there was only one visit which he desired to make, a visit to old Orlando, with whom he had promised to have a long chat prior to his departure. And so a little before two o'clock he sent for a cab which took him to the Via Venti Settembre. A fine rain had fallen all night, its moisture steeping the city in grey vapour; and though this rain had now ceased the sky remained very dark, and the huge new mansions of the Via Venti Settembre were quite livid, interminably mournful with their balconies ever of the same pattern and their regular and endless rows of windows. The Ministry of Finances, that colossal pile of masonry and sculpture, looked in particular like a dead town, a huge bloodless body whence all life had withdrawn. On the other hand, although all was so gloomy the rain had made the atmosphere milder, in fact it was almost warm, damply and feverishly warm.

In the hall of Prada's little palazzo Pierre was surprised to find four or five gentlemen taking off their overcoats; however he learnt from a servant that Count Luigi had a meeting that day with some contractors. As he, Pierre, wished to see the Count's father he had only to ascend to the

third floor, added the servant. He must knock at the little door on the right-hand side of the landing there.

On the very first landing, however, the priest found himself face to face with the young Count who was there receiving the contractors, and who on recognising him became frightfully pale. They had not met since the tragedy at the Boccanera mansion, and Pierre well realised how greatly his glance disturbed that man, what a troublesome recollection of moral complicity it evoked, and what mortal dread lest he should have guessed the truth.

"Have you come to see me, have you something to tell me?" the Count inquired.

"No, I am leaving Rome, I have come to wish your father good-bye."

Prada's pallor increased at this, and his whole face quivered: "Ah! it is to see my father. He is not very well, be gentle with him," he replied, and as he spoke, his look of anguish clearly proclaimed what he feared from Pierre, some imprudent word, perhaps even a final mission, the malediction of that man and woman whom he had killed. And surely if his father knew, he would die as well. "Ah! how annoying it is," he resumed, "I can't go up with you! There are gentlemen waiting for me. Yes, how annoyed I am. As soon as possible, however, I will join you, yes, as soon as possible."

He knew not how to stop the young priest, whom he must evidently allow to remain with his father, whilst he himself stayed down below, kept there by his pecuniary worries. But how distressful were the eyes with which he watched Pierre climb the stairs, how he seemed to supplicate him with his whole quivering form. His father, good Lord, the only true love, the one great, pure, faithful passion of his life!

"Don't make him talk too much, brighten him, won't you?" were his parting words.

Up above it was not Batista, the devoted ex-soldier, who opened the door, but a very young fellow to whom Pierre did not at first pay any attention. The little room was bare and light as on previous occasions, and from the broad curtainless window there was the superb view of Rome, Rome crushed that day beneath a leaden sky and steeped in shade of infinite mournfulness. Old Orlando, however, had in no wise changed, but still displayed the superb head of an old blanched lion, a powerful muzzle and youthful eyes, which yet sparkled with the passions which had growled in a soul of fire. Pierre found the stricken hero in the same arm-chair as previously, near the same table littered with newspapers, and with his legs buried in the same black wrapper, as if he were there immobilised in a sheath of stone, to such a point that after months and years one was sure to perceive him quite unchanged, with living bust, and face glowing with strength and intelligence.

That grey day, however, he seemed gloomy, low in spirits. "Ah! so here you are, my dear Monsieur Froment," he exclaimed, "I have been thinking

of you these three days past, living the awful days which you must have lived in that tragic Palazzo Boccanera. Ah, God! What a frightful bereavement! My heart is quite overwhelmed, these newspapers have again just upset me with the fresh details they give!" He pointed as he spoke to the papers scattered over the table. Then with a gesture he strove to brush aside the gloomy story, and banish that vision of Benedetta dead, which had been haunting him. "Well, and yourself?" he inquired.

"I am leaving this evening," replied Pierre, "but I did not wish to quit Rome without pressing your brave hands."

"You are leaving? But your book?"

"My book--I have been received by the Holy Father, I have made my submission and reprobated my book."

Orlando looked fixedly at the priest. There was a short interval of silence, during which their eyes told one another all that they had to tell respecting the affair. Neither felt the necessity of any longer explanation. The old man merely spoke these concluding words: "You have done well, your book was a chimera."

"Yes, a chimera, a piece of childishness, and I have condemned it myself in the name of truth and reason."

A smile appeared on the dolorous lips of the impotent hero. "Then you have seen things, you understand and know them now?"

"Yes, I know them; and that is why I did not wish to go off without having that frank conversation with you which we agreed upon."

Orlando was delighted, but all at once he seemed to remember the young fellow who had opened the door to Pierre, and who had afterwards modestly resumed his seat on a chair near the window. This young fellow was a youth of twenty, still beardless, of a blonde handsomeness such as occasionally flowers at Naples, with long curly hair, a lily-like complexion, a rosy mouth, and soft eyes full of a dreamy languor. The old man presented him in fatherly fashion, Angiolo Mascara his name was, and he was the grandson of an old comrade in arms, the epic Mascara of the Thousand, who had died like a hero, his body pierced by a hundred wounds.

"I sent for him to scold him," continued Orlando with a smile. "Do you know that this fine fellow with his girlish airs goes in for the new ideas? He is an Anarchist, one of the three or four dozen Anarchists that we have in Italy. He's a good little lad at bottom, he has only his mother left him, and supports her, thanks to the little berth which he holds, but which he'll lose one of these fine days if he is not careful. Come, come, my child, you must promise me to be reasonable."

Thereupon Angiolo, whose clean but well-worn garments bespoke decent poverty, made answer in a grave and musical voice: "I am reasonable, it is the others, all the others who are not. When all men are reasonable and desire truth and justice, the world will be happy."

"Ah! if you fancy that he'll give way!" cried Orlando. "But, my poor child, just ask Monsieur l'Abbe if one ever knows where truth and justice are. Well, well, one must leave you the time to live, and see, and understand things."

Then, paying no more attention to the young man, he returned to Pierre, while Angiolo, remaining very quiet in his corner, kept his eyes ardently fixed on them, and with open, quivering ears lost not a word they said.

"I told you, my dear Monsieur Froment," resumed Orlando, "that your ideas would change, and that acquaintance with Rome would bring you to accurate views far more readily than any fine speeches I could make to you. So I never doubted but what you would of your own free will withdraw your book as soon as men and things should have enlightened you respecting the Vatican at the present day. But let us leave the Vatican on one side, there is nothing to be done but to let it continue falling slowly and inevitably into ruin. What interests me is our Italian Rome, which you treated as an element to be neglected, but which you have now seen and studied, so that we can both speak of it with the necessary knowledge!"

He thereupon at once granted a great many things, acknowledged that blunders had been committed, that the finances were in a deplorable state, and that there were serious difficulties of all kinds. They, the Italians, had sinned by excess of legitimate pride, they had proceeded too hastily with their attempt to improvise a great nation, to change ancient Rome into a great modern capital as by the mere touch of a wand. And thence had come that mania for erecting new districts, that mad speculation in land and shares, which had brought the country within a hair's breadth of bankruptcy.

At this Pierre gently interrupted him to tell him of the view which he himself had arrived at after his peregrinations and studies through Rome. "That fever of the first hour, that financial /debacle/," said he, "is after all nothing. All pecuniary sores can be healed. But the grave point is that your Italy still remains to be created. There is no aristocracy left, and as yet there is no people, nothing but a devouring middle class, dating from yesterday, which preys on the rich harvest of the future before it is ripe."

Silence fell. Orlando sadly wagged his old leonine head. The cutting harshness of Pierre's formula struck him in the heart. "Yes, yes," he said at last, "that is so, you have seen things plainly; and why say no when facts are there, patent to everybody? I myself had already spoken to you of that middle class which hungers so ravenously for place and office, distinctions and plumes, and which at the same time is so avaricious, so suspicious with regard to its money which it invests in banks, never risking it in agriculture or manufactures or commerce, having indeed the one desire to enjoy life without doing anything, and so unintelligent that it cannot see it is killing its country by its loathing for labour, its contempt for the poor, its one ambition to live in a petty way with the barren glory of belonging to some official administration. And, as you say, the aristocracy is dying, discrowned,

ruined, sunk into the degeneracy which overtakes races towards their close, most of its members reduced to beggary, the others, the few who have clung to their money, crushed by heavy imposts, possessing nought but dead fortunes which constant sharing diminishes and which must soon disappear with the princes themselves. And then there is the people, which has suffered so much and suffers still, but is so used to suffering that it can seemingly conceive no idea of emerging from it, blind and deaf as it is, almost regretting its ancient bondage, and so ignorant, so abominably ignorant, which is the one cause of its hopeless, morrowless misery, for it has not even the consolation of understanding that if we have conquered and are trying to resuscitate Rome and Italy in their ancient glory, it is for itself, the people, alone. Yes, yes, no aristocracy left, no people as yet, and a middle class which really alarms one. How can one therefore help yielding at times to the terrors of the pessimists, who pretend that our misfortunes are as yet nothing, that we are going forward to yet more awful catastrophes, as though, indeed, what we now behold were but the first symptoms of our race's end, the premonitory signs of final annihilation!"

As he spoke he raised his long quivering arms towards the window, towards the light, and Pierre, deeply moved, remembered how Cardinal Boccanera on the previous day had made a similar gesture of supplicant distress when appealing to the divine power. And both men, Cardinal and patriot, so hostile in their beliefs, were instinct with the same fierce and despairing grandeur.

"As I told you, however, on the first day," continued Orlando, "we only sought to accomplish logical and inevitable things. As for Rome, with her past history of splendour and domination which weighs so heavily upon us, we could not do otherwise than take her for capital, for she alone was the bond, the living symbol of our unity at the same time as the promise of eternity, the renewal offered to our great dream of resurrection and glory."

He went on, recognising the disastrous conditions under which Rome laboured as a capital. She was a purely decorative city with exhausted soil, she had remained apart from modern life, she was unhealthy, she offered no possibility of commerce or industry, she was invincibly preyed upon by death, standing as she did amidst that sterile desert of the Campagna. Then he compared her with the other cities which are jealous of her; first Florence, which, however, has become so indifferent and so sceptical, impregnated with a happy heedlessness which seems inexplicable when one remembers the frantic passions, and the torrents of blood rolling through her history; next Naples, which yet remains content with her bright sun, and whose childish people enjoy their ignorance and wretchedness so indolently that one knows not whether one ought to pity them; next Venice, which has resigned herself to remaining a marvel of ancient art, which one ought to put under glass so as to preserve her intact, slumbering amid the sovereign pomp of her annals; next Genoa, which is absorbed in trade, still active and bustling, one of the last queens of that Mediterranean, that insignificant lake which was once the opulent central sea, whose waters carried the wealth of the world; and then particularly Turin and Milan, those industrial and commercial

centres, which are so full of life and so modernised that tourists disdain them as not being "Italian" cities, both of them having saved themselves from ruin by entering into that Western evolution which is preparing the next century. Ah! that old land of Italy, ought one to leave it all as a dusty museum for the pleasure of artistic souls, leave it to crumble away, even as its little towns of Magna Graecia, Umbria, and Tuscany are already crumbling, like exquisite /bibelots/ which one dares not repair for fear that one might spoil their character. At all events, there must either be death, death soon and inevitable, or else the pick of the demolisher, the tottering walls thrown to the ground, and cities of labour, science, and health created on all sides; in one word, a new Italy really rising from the ashes of the old one, and adapted to the new civilisation into which humanity is entering.

"However, why despair?" Orlando continued energetically. "Rome may weigh heavily on our shoulders, but she is none the less the summit we coveted. We are here, and we shall stay here awaiting events. Even if the population does not increase it at least remains stationary at a figure of some 400,000 souls, and the movement of increase may set in again when the causes which stopped it shall have ceased. Our blunder was to think that Rome would become a Paris or Berlin; but, so far, all sorts of social, historical, even ethnical considerations seem opposed to it; yet who can tell what may be the surprises of to-morrow? Are we forbidden to hope, to put faith in the blood which courses in our veins, the blood of the old conquerors of the world? I, who no longer stir from this room, impotent as I am, even I at times feel my madness come back, believe in the invincibility and immortality of Rome, and wait for the two millions of people who must come to populate those dolorous new districts which you have seen so empty and already falling into ruins! And certainly they will come! Why not? You will see, you will see, everything will be populated, and even more houses will have to be built. Moreover, can you call a nation poor, when it possesses Lombardy? Is there not also inexhaustible wealth in our southern provinces? Let peace settle down, let the South and the North mingle together, and a new generation of workers grow up. Since we have the soil, such a fertile soil, the great harvest which is awaited will surely some day sprout and ripen under the burning sun!"

Enthusiasm was upbuoying him, all the /furia/ of youth inflamed his eyes. Pierre smiled, won over; and as soon as he was able to speak, he said: "The problem must be tackled down below, among the people. You must make men!"

"Exactly!" cried Orlando. "I don't cease repeating it, one must make Italy. It is as if a wind from the East had blown the seed of humanity, the seed which makes vigorous and powerful nations, elsewhere. Our people is not like yours in France, a reservoir of men and money from which one can draw as plentifully as one pleases. It is such another inexhaustible reservoir that I wish to see created among us. And one must begin at the bottom. There must be schools everywhere, ignorance must be stamped out, brutishness and idleness must be fought with books, intellectual and moral instruction must give us the industrious people which we need if we are not to disappear from among the great nations. And once again for



whom, if not for the democracy of to-morrow, have we worked in taking possession of Rome? And how easily one can understand that all should collapse here, and nothing grow up vigorously since such a democracy is absolutely absent. Yes, yes, the solution of the problem does not lie elsewhere; we must make a people, make an Italian democracy."

Pierre had grown calm again, feeling somewhat anxious yet not daring to say that it is by no means easy to modify a nation, that Italy is such as soil, history, and race have made her, and that to seek to transform her so radically and all at once might be a dangerous enterprise. Do not nations like beings have an active youth, a resplendent prime, and a more or less prolonged old age ending in death? A modern democratic Rome, good heavens! The modern Romes are named Paris, London, Chicago. So he contented himself with saying: "But pending this great renovation of the people, don't you think that you ought to be prudent? Your finances are in such a bad condition, you are passing through such great social and economic difficulties, that you run the risk of the worst catastrophes before you secure either men or money. Ah! how prudent would that minister be who should say in your Chamber: 'Our pride has made a mistake, it was wrong of us to try to make ourselves a great nation in one day; more time, labour, and patience are needed; and we consent to remain for the present a young nation, which will quietly reflect and labour at self-formation, without, for a long time yet, seeking to play a dominant part. So we intend to disarm, to strike out the war and naval estimates, all the estimates intended for display abroad, in order to devote ourselves to our internal prosperity, and to build up by education, physically and morally, the great nation which we swear we will be fifty years hence!' Yes, yes, strike out all needless expenditure, your salvation lies in that!"

But Orlando, while listening, had become gloomy again, and with a vague, weary gesture he replied in an undertone: "No, no, the minister who should use such language would be hooted. It would be too hard a confession, such as one cannot ask a nation to make. Every heart would bound, leap forth at the idea. And, besides, would not the danger perhaps be even greater if all that has been done were allowed to crumble? How many wrecked hopes, how much discarded, useless material there would be! No, we can now only save ourselves by patience and courage--and forward, ever forward! We are a very young nation, and in fifty years we desired to effect the unity which others have required two hundred years to arrive at. Well, we must pay for our haste, we must wait for the harvest to ripen, and fill our barns." Then, with another and more sweeping wave of the arm, he stubbornly strengthened himself in his hopes. "You know," said he, "that I was always against the alliance with Germany. As I predicted, it has ruined us. We were not big enough to march side by side with such a wealthy and powerful person, and it is in view of a war, always near at hand and inevitable, that we now suffer so cruelly from having to support the budgets of a great nation. Ah! that war which has never come, it is that which has exhausted the best part of our blood and sap and money without the slightest profit. To-day we have nothing before us but the necessity of breaking with our ally, who speculated on our pride, who has never helped us in any way, who has never given us anything but bad advice, and treated us otherwise than with suspicion.

But it was all inevitable, and that's what people won't admit in France. I can speak freely of it all, for I am a declared friend of France, and people even feel some spite against me on that account. However, explain to your compatriots, that on the morrow of our conquest of Rome, in our frantic desire to resume our ancient rank, it was absolutely necessary that we should play our part in Europe and show that we were a power with whom the others must henceforth count. And hesitation was not allowable, all our interests impelled us toward Germany, the evidence was so binding as to impose itself. The stern law of the struggle for life weighs as heavily on nations as on individuals, and this it is which explains and justifies the rupture between the two sisters, France and Italy, the forgetting of so many ties, race, commercial intercourse, and, if you like, services also. The two sisters, ah! they now pursue each other with so much hatred that all common sense even seems at an end. My poor old heart bleeds when I read the articles which your newspapers and ours exchange like poisoned darts. When will this fratricidal massacre cease, which of the two will first realise the necessity of peace, the necessity of the alliance of the Latin races, if they are to remain alive amidst those torrents of other races which more and more invade the world?" Then gaily, with the *bonhomie* of a hero disarmed by old age, and seeking a refuge in his dreams, Orlando added: "Come, you must promise to help me as soon as you are in Paris. However small your field of action may be, promise me you will do all you can to promote peace between France and Italy; there can be no more holy task. Relate all you have seen here, all you have heard, oh! as frankly as possible. If we have faults, you certainly have faults as well. And, come, family quarrels can't last for ever!"

"No doubt," Pierre answered in some embarrassment. "Unfortunately they are the most tenacious. In families, when blood becomes exasperated with blood, hate goes as far as poison and the knife. And pardon becomes impossible."

He dared not fully express his thoughts. Since he had been in Rome, listening, and considering things, the quarrel between Italy and France had resumed itself in his mind in a fine tragic story. Once upon a time there were two princesses, daughters of a powerful queen, the mistress of the world. The elder one, who had inherited her mother's kingdom, was secretly grieved to see her sister, who had established herself in a neighbouring land, gradually increase in wealth, strength, and brilliancy, whilst she herself declined as if weakened by age, dismembered, so exhausted, and so sore, that she already felt defeated on the day when she attempted a supreme effort to regain universal power. And so how bitter were her feelings, how hurt she always felt on seeing her sister recover from the most frightful shocks, resume her dazzling *gala*, and continue to reign over the world by dint of strength and grace and wit. Never would she forgive it, however well that envied and detested sister might act towards her. Therein lay an incurable wound, the life of one poisoned by that of the other, the hatred of old blood for young blood, which could only be quieted by death. And even if peace, as was possible, should soon be restored between them in presence of the younger sister's evident triumph, the other would always harbour deep within her heart an endless grief at being the elder yet the vassal.

"However, you may rely on me," Pierre affectionately resumed. "This quarrel between the two countries is certainly a great source of grief and a great peril. And assuredly I will only say what I think to be the truth about you. At the same time I fear that you hardly like the truth, for temperament and custom have hardly prepared you for it. The poets of every nation who at various times have written on Rome have intoxicated you with so much praise that you are scarcely fitted to hear the real truth about your Rome of to-day. No matter how superb a share of praise one may accord you, one must all the same look at the reality of things, and this reality is just what you won't admit, lovers of the beautiful as you ever are, susceptible too like women, whom the slightest hint of a wrinkle sends into despair."

Orlando began to laugh. "Well, certainly, one must always beautify things a little," said he. "Why speak of ugly faces at all? We in our theatres only care for pretty music, pretty dancing, pretty pieces which please one. As for the rest, whatever is disagreeable let us hide it, for mercy's sake!"

"On the other hand," the priest continued, "I will cheerfully confess the great error of my book. The Italian Rome which I neglected and sacrificed to papal Rome not only exists but is already so powerful and triumphant that it is surely the other one which is bound to disappear in course of time. However much the Pope may strive to remain immutable within his Vatican, a steady evolution goes on around him, and the black world, by mingling with the white, has already become a grey world. I never realised that more acutely than at the /fete/ given by Prince Buongiovanni for the betrothal of his daughter to your grand-nephew. I came away quite enchanted, won over to the cause of your resurrection."

The old man's eyes sparkled. "Ah! you were present?" said he, "and you witnessed a never-to-be-forgotten scene, did you not, and you no longer doubt our vitality, our growth into a great people when the difficulties of to-day are overcome? What does a quarter of a century, what does even a century matter! Italy will again rise to her old glory, as soon as the great people of to-morrow shall have sprung from the soil. And if I detest that man Sacco it is because to my mind he is the incarnation of all the enjoyers and intriguers whose appetite for the spoils of our conquest has retarded everything. But I live again in my dear grand-nephew Attilio, who represents the future, the generation of brave and worthy men who will purify and educate the country. Ah! may some of the great ones of to-morrow spring from him and that adorable little Princess Celia, whom my niece Stefana, a sensible woman at bottom, brought to see me the other day. If you had seen that child fling her arms about me, call me endearing names, and tell me that I should be godfather to her first son, so that he might bear my name and once again save Italy! Yes, yes, may peace be concluded around that coming cradle; may the union of those dear children be the indissoluble marriage of Rome and the whole nation, and may all be repaired, and all blossom anew in their love!"

Tears came to his eyes, and Pierre, touched by his inextinguishable

patriotism, sought to please him. "I myself," said he, "expressed to your son much the same wish on the evening of the betrothal /fete/, when I told him I trusted that their nuptials might be definitive and fruitful, and that from them and all the others there might arise the great nation which, now that I begin to know you, I hope you will soon become!"

"You said that!" exclaimed Orlando. "Well, I forgive your book, for you have understood at last; and new Rome, there she is, the Rome which is ours, which we wish to make worthy of her glorious past, and for the third time the queen of the world."

With one of those broad gestures into which he put all his remaining life, he pointed to the curtainless window where Rome spread out in solemn majesty from one horizon to the other. But, suddenly he turned his head and in a fit of paternal indignation began to apostrophise young Angiolo Mascara. "You young rascal!" said he, "it's our Rome which you dream of destroying with your bombs, which you talk of razing like a rotten, tottering house, so as to rid the world of it for ever!"

Angiolo had hitherto remained silent, passionately listening to the others. His pretty, girlish, beardless face reflected the slightest emotion in sudden flashes; and his big blue eyes also had glowed on hearing what had been said of the people, the new people which it was necessary to create. "Yes!" he slowly replied in his pure and musical voice, "we mean to raze it and not leave a stone of it, but raze it in order to build it up again."

Orlando interrupted him with a soft, bantering laugh: "Oh! you would build it up again; that's fortunate!" he said.

"I would build it up again," the young man replied, in the trembling voice of an inspired prophet. "I would build it up again oh, so vast, so beautiful, and so noble! Will not the universal democracy of to-morrow, humanity when it is at last freed, need an unique city, which shall be the ark of alliance, the very centre of the world? And is not Rome designated, Rome which the prophecies have marked as eternal and immortal, where the destinies of the nations are to be accomplished? But in order that it may become the final definitive sanctuary, the capital of the destroyed kingdoms, where the wise men of all countries shall meet once every year, one must first of all purify it by fire, leave nothing of its old stains remaining. Then, when the sun shall have absorbed all the pestilence of the old soil, we will rebuild the city ten times more beautiful and ten times larger than it has ever been. And what a city of truth and justice it will at last be, the Rome that has been announced and awaited for three thousand years, all in gold and all in marble, filling the Campagna from the sea to the Sabine and the Alban mountains, and so prosperous and so sensible that its twenty millions of inhabitants after regulating the law of labour will live with the unique joy of being. Yes, yes, Rome the Mother, Rome the Queen, alone on the face of the earth and for all eternity!"

Pierre listened to him, aghast. What! did the blood of Augustus go to such a point as this? The popes had not become masters of Rome without

feeling impelled to rebuild it in their passion to rule over the world; young Italy, likewise yielding to the hereditary madness of universal domination, had in its turn sought to make the city larger than any other, erecting whole districts for people who had never come, and now even the Anarchists were possessed by the same stubborn dream of the race, a dream beyond all measure this time, a fourth and monstrous Rome, whose suburbs would invade continents in order that liberated humanity, united in one family, might find sufficient lodging! This was the climax. Never could more extravagant proof be given of the blood of pride and sovereignty which had scorched the veins of that race ever since Augustus had bequeathed it the inheritance of his absolute empire, with the furious instinct that the world legally belonged to it, and that its mission was to conquer it again. This idea had intoxicated all the children of that historic soil, impelling all of them to make their city The City, the one which had reigned and which would reign again in splendour when the days predicted by the oracles should arrive. And Pierre remembered the four fatidical letters, the S.P.Q.R. of old and glorious Rome, which like an order of final triumph given to Destiny he had everywhere found in present-day Rome, on all the walls, on all the insignia, even on the municipal dust-carts! And he understood the prodigious vanity of these people, haunted by the glory of their ancestors, spellbound by the past of their city, declaring that she contains everything, that they themselves cannot know her thoroughly, that she is the sphinx who will some day explain the riddle of the universe, that she is so great and noble that all within her acquires increase of greatness and nobility, in such wise that they demand for her the idolatrous respect of the entire world, so vivacious in their minds is the illusive legend which clings to her, so incapable are they of realising that what was once great may be so no longer.

"But I know your fourth Rome," resumed Orlando, again enlivened. "It's the Rome of the people, the capital of the Universal Republic, which Mazzini dreamt of. Only he left the pope in it. Do you know, my lad, that if we old Republicans rallied to the monarchy, it was because we feared that in the event of revolution the country might fall into the hands of dangerous madmen such as those who have upset your brain? Yes, that was why we resigned ourselves to our monarchy, which is not much different from a parliamentary republic. And now, goodbye and be sensible, remember that your poor mother would die of it if any misfortune should befall you. Come, let me embrace you all the same."

On receiving the hero's affectionate kiss Angiolo coloured like a girl. Then he went off with his gentle, dreamy air, never adding a word but politely inclining his head to the priest. Silence continued till Orlando's eyes encountered the newspapers scattered on the table, when he once more spoke of the terrible bereavement of the Boccaneras. He had loved Benedetta like a dear daughter during the sad days when she had dwelt near him; and finding the newspaper accounts of her death somewhat singular, worried in fact by the obscure points which he could divine in the tragedy, he was asking Pierre for particulars, when his son Luigi suddenly entered the room, breathless from having climbed the stairs so quickly and with his face full of anxious fear. He had just dismissed his contractors with impatient roughness, giving no thought to his serious

financial position, the jeopardy in which his fortune was now placed, so anxious was he to be up above beside his father. And when he was there his first uneasy glance was for the old man, to make sure whether the priest by some imprudent word had not dealt him his death blow.

He shuddered on noticing how Orlando quivered, moved to tears by the terrible affair of which he was speaking; and for a moment he thought he had arrived too late, that the harm was done. "Good heavens, father!" he exclaimed, "what is the matter with you, why are you crying?" And as he spoke he knelt at the old man's feet, taking hold of his hands and giving him such a passionate, loving glance that he seemed to be offering all the blood of his heart to spare him the slightest grief.

"It is about the death of that poor woman," Orlando sadly answered. "I was telling Monsieur Froment how it grieved me, and I added that I could not yet understand it all. The papers talk of a sudden death which is always so extraordinary."

The young Count rose again looking very pale. The priest had not yet spoken. But what a frightful moment was this! What if he should reply, what if he should speak out?

"You were present, were you not?" continued the old man addressing Pierre. "You saw everything. Tell me then how the thing happened."

Luigi Prada looked at Pierre. Their eyes met fixedly, plunging into one another's souls. All began afresh in their minds, Destiny on the march, Santobono encountered with his little basket, the drive across the melancholy Campagna, the conversation about poison while the little basket was gently rocked on the priest's knees; then, in particular, the sleepy /osteria/, and the little black hen, so suddenly killed, lying on the ground with a tiny streamlet of violet blood trickling from her beak. And next there was that splendid ball at the Buongiovanni mansion, with all its /odore di femina/ and its triumph of love: and finally, before the Palazzo Boccanera, so black under the silvery moon, there was the man who lighted a cigar and went off without once turning his head, allowing dim Destiny to accomplish its work of death. Both of them, Pierre and Prada, knew that story and lived it over again, having no need to recall it aloud in order to make certain that they had fully penetrated one another's soul.

Pierre did not immediately answer the old man. "Oh!" he murmured at last, "there were frightful things, yes, frightful things."

"No doubt--that is what I suspected," resumed Orlando. "You can tell us all. In presence of death my son has freely forgiven."

The young Count's gaze again sought that of Pierre with such weight, such ardent entreaty that the priest felt deeply stirred. He had just remembered that man's anguish during the ball, the atrocious torture of jealousy which he had undergone before allowing Destiny to avenge him. And he pictured also what must have been his feelings after the terrible outcome of it all: at first stupefaction at Destiny's harshness, at this

full vengeance which he had never desired so ferocious; then icy calmness like that of the cool gambler who awaits events, reading the newspapers, and feeling no other remorse than that of the general whose victory has cost him too many men. He must have immediately realised that the Cardinal would stifle the affair for the sake of the Church's honour; and only retained one weight on his heart, regret possibly for that woman whom he had never won, with perhaps a last horrible jealousy which he did not confess to himself but from which he would always suffer, jealousy at knowing that she lay in another's arms in the grave, for all eternity. But behold, after that victorious effort to remain calm, after that cold and remorseless waiting, Punishment arose, the fear that Destiny, travelling on with its poisoned figs, might have not yet ceased its march, and might by a rebound strike down his own father. Yet another thunderbolt, yet another victim, the most unexpected, the being he most adored! At that thought all his strength of resistance had in one moment collapsed, and he was there, in terror of Destiny, more at a loss, more trembling than a child.

"The newspapers, however," slowly said Pierre as if he were seeking his words, "the newspapers must have told you that the Prince succumbed first, and that the Contessina died of grief whilst embracing him for the last time. . . . As for the cause of death, /mon Dieu/, you know that doctors themselves in sudden cases scarcely dare to pronounce an exact opinion--"

He stopped short, for within him he had suddenly heard the voice of Benedetta giving him just before she died that terrible order: "You, who will see his father, I charge you to tell him that I cursed his son. I wish that he should know, it is necessary that he should know, for the sake of truth and justice." And was he, oh! Lord, about to obey that order, was it one of those divine commands which must be executed even if the result be a torrent of blood and tears? For a few seconds Pierre suffered from a heart-rending combat within him, hesitating between the act of truth and justice which the dead woman had called for and his own personal desire for forgiveness, and the horror he would feel should he kill that poor old man by fulfilling his implacable mission which could benefit nobody. And certainly the other one, the son, must have understood what a supreme struggle was going on in the priest's mind, a struggle which would decide his own father's fate, for his glance became yet more suppliant than ever.

"One first thought that it was merely indigestion," continued Pierre, "but the Prince became so much worse, that one was alarmed, and the doctor was sent for--"

Ah! Prada's eyes, they had become so despairing, so full of the most touching and weightiest things, that the priest could read in them all the decisive reasons which were about to stay his tongue. No, no, he would not strike an innocent old man, he had promised nothing, and to obey the last expression of the dead woman's hatred would have seemed to him like charging her memory with a crime. The young Count, too, during those few minutes of anguish, had suffered a whole life of such abominable torture, that after all some little justice was done.

"And then," Pierre concluded, "when the doctor arrived he at once recognised that it was a case of infectious fever. There can be no doubt of it. This morning I attended the funeral, it was very splendid and very touching."

Orlando did not insist, but contented himself with saying that he also had felt much emotion all the morning on thinking of that funeral. Then, as he turned to set the papers on the table in order with his trembling hands, his son, icy cold with perspiration, staggering and clinging to the back of a chair in order that he might not fall, again gave Pierre a long glance, but a very soft one, full of distracted gratitude.

"I am leaving this evening," resumed Pierre, who felt exhausted and wished to break off the conversation, "and I must now bid you farewell. Have you any commission to give me for Paris?"

"No, none," replied Orlando; and then, with sudden recollection, he added, "Yes, I have, though! You remember that book written by my old comrade in arms, Theophile Morin, one of Garibaldi's Thousand, that manual for the bachelor's degree which he desired to see translated and adopted here. Well, I am pleased to say that I have a promise that it shall be used in our schools, but on condition that he makes some alterations in it. Luigi, give me the book, it is there on that shelf."

Then, when his son had handed him the volume, he showed Pierre some notes which he had pencilled on the margins, and explained to him the modifications which were desired in the general scheme of the work. "Will you be kind enough," he continued, "to take this copy to Morin himself? His address is written inside the cover. If you can do so you will spare me the trouble of writing him a very long letter; in ten minutes you can explain matters to him more clearly and completely than I could do in ten pages. . . . And you must embrace Morin for me, and tell him that I still love him, oh! with all my heart of the bygone days, when I could still use my legs and we two fought like devils side by side under a hail of bullets."

A short silence followed, that pause, that embarrassment tinged with emotion which precedes the moment of farewell. "Come, good-bye," said Orlando, "embrace me for him and for yourself, embrace me affectionately like that lad did just now. I am so old and so near my end, my dear Monsieur Froment, that you will allow me to call you my child and to kiss you like a grandfather, wishing you all courage and peace, and that faith in life which alone helps one to live."

Pierre was so touched that tears rose to his eyes, and when with all his soul he kissed the stricken hero on either cheek, he felt that he likewise was weeping. With a hand yet as vigorous as a vice, Orlando detained him for a moment beside his arm-chair, whilst with his other hand waving in a supreme gesture, he for the last time showed him Rome, so immense and mournful under the ashen sky. And his voice came low, quivering and suppliant. "For mercy's sake swear to me that you will love her all the same, in spite of all, for she is the cradle, the mother!



Love her for all that she no longer is, love her for all that she desires to be! Do not say that her end has come, love her, love her so that she may live again, that she may live for ever!"

Pierre again embraced him, unable to find any other response, upset as he was by all the passion displayed by that old warrior, who spoke of his city as a man of thirty might speak of the woman he adores. And he found him so handsome and so lofty with his old blanched, leonine mane and his stubborn belief in approaching resurrection, that once more the other old Roman, Cardinal Boccanera, arose before him, equally stubborn in his faith and relinquishing nought of his dream, even though he might be crushed on the spot by the fall of the heavens. These twain ever stood face to face, at either end of their city, alone rearing their lofty figures above the horizon, whilst awaiting the future.

Then, when Pierre had bowed to Count Luigi, and found himself outside again in the Via Venti Settembre he was all eagerness to get back to the Boccanera mansion so as to pack up his things and depart. His farewell visits were made, and he now only had to take leave of Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, and to thank them for all their kind hospitality. For him alone did their doors open, for they had shut themselves up on returning from the funeral, resolved to see nobody. At twilight, therefore, Pierre had no one but Victorine to keep him company in the vast, black mansion, for when he expressed a desire to take supper with Don Vigilio she told him that the latter had also shut himself in his room. Desirous as he was of at least shaking hands with the secretary for the last time, Pierre went to knock at the door, which was so near his own, but could obtain no reply, and divined that the poor fellow, overcome by a fresh attack of fever and suspicion, desired not to see him again, in terror at the idea that he might compromise himself yet more than he had done already. Thereupon, it was settled that as the train only started at seventeen minutes past ten Victorine should serve Pierre his supper on the little table in his sitting-room at eight o'clock. She brought him a lamp and spoke of putting his linen in order, but he absolutely declined her help, and she had to leave him to pack up quietly by himself.

He had purchased a little box, since his valise could not possibly hold all the linen and winter clothing which had been sent to him from Paris as his stay in Rome became more and more protracted. However, the packing was soon accomplished; the wardrobe was emptied, the drawers were visited, the box and valise filled and securely locked by seven o'clock. An hour remained to him before supper and he sat there resting, when his eyes whilst travelling round the walls to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, encountered that old painting by some unknown master, which had so often filled him with emotion. The lamplight now shone full upon it; and this time again as he gazed at it he felt a blow in the heart, a blow which was all the deeper, as now, at his parting hour, he found a symbol of his defeat at Rome in that dolent, tragic, half-naked woman, draped in a shred of linen, and weeping between her clasped hands whilst seated on the threshold of the palace whence she had been driven. Did not that rejected one, that stubborn victim of love, who sobbed so bitterly, and of whom one knew nothing, neither what her face was like, nor whence she had come, nor what her fault had been--did she not personify all man's

useless efforts to force the doors of truth, and all the frightful abandonment into which he falls as soon as he collides with the wall which shuts the unknown off from him? For a long while did Pierre look at her, again worried at being obliged to depart without having seen her face behind her streaming golden hair, that face of dolorous beauty which he pictured radiant with youth and delicious in its mystery. And as he gazed he was just fancying that he could see it, that it was becoming his at last, when there was a knock at the door and Narcisse Habert entered.

Pierre was surprised to see the young /attache/, for three days previously he had started for Florence, impelled thither by one of the sudden whims of his artistic fancy. However, he at once apologised for his unceremonious intrusion. "Ah! there is your luggage!" he said; "I heard that you were going away this evening, and I was unwilling to let you leave Rome without coming to shake hands with you. But what frightful things have happened since we met! I only returned this afternoon, so that I could not attend the funeral. However, you may well imagine how thunderstruck I was by the news of those frightful deaths."

Then, suspecting some unacknowledged tragedy, like a man well acquainted with the legendary dark side of Rome, he put some questions to Pierre but did not insist on them, being at bottom far too prudent to burden himself uselessly with redoubtable secrets. And after Pierre had given him such particulars as he thought fit, the conversation changed and they spoke at length of Italy, Rome, Naples, and Florence. "Ah! Florence, Florence!" Narcisse repeated languorously. He had lighted a cigarette and his words fell more slowly, as he glanced round the room. "You were very well lodged here," he said, "it is very quiet. I had never come up to this floor before."

His eyes continued wandering over the walls until they were at last arrested by the old painting which the lamp illumined, and thereupon he remained for a moment blinking as if surprised. And all at once he rose and approached the picture. "Dear me, dear me," said he, "but that's very good, that's very fine."

"Isn't it?" rejoined Pierre. "I know nothing about painting but I was stirred by that picture on the very day of my arrival, and over and over again it has kept me here with my heart beating and full of indescribable feelings."

Narcisse no longer spoke but examined the painting with the care of a connoisseur, an expert, whose keen glance decides the question of authenticity, and appraises commercial value. And the most extraordinary delight appeared upon the young man's fair, rapturous face, whilst his fingers began to quiver. "But it's a Botticelli, it's a Botticelli! There can be no doubt about it," he exclaimed. "Just look at the hands, and look at the folds of the drapery! And the colour of the hair, and the technique, the flow of the whole composition. A Botticelli, ah! /mon Dieu/, a Botticelli."

He became quite faint, overflowing with increasing admiration as he penetrated more and more deeply into the subject, at once so simple and

so poignant. Was it not acutely modern? The artist had foreseen our pain-fraught century, our anxiety in presence of the invisible, our distress at being unable to cross the portal of mystery which was for ever closed. And what an eternal symbol of the world's wretchedness was that woman, whose face one could not see, and who sobbed so distractedly without it being possible for one to wipe away her tears. Yes, a Botticelli, unknown, uncatalogued, what a discovery! Then he paused to inquire of Pierre: "Did you know it was a Botticelli?"

"Oh no! I spoke to Don Vigilio about it one day, but he seemed to think it of no account. And Victorine, when I spoke to her, replied that all those old things only served to harbour dust."

Narcisse protested, quite stupefied: "What! they have a Botticelli here and don't know it! Ah! how well I recognise in that the Roman princes who, unless their masterpieces have been labelled, are for the most part utterly at sea among them! No doubt this one has suffered a little, but a simple cleaning would make a marvel, a famous picture of it, for which a museum would at least give--"

He abruptly stopped, completing his sentence with a wave of the hand and not mentioning the figure which was on his lips. And then, as Victorine came in followed by Giacomo to lay the little table for Pierre's supper, he turned his back upon the Botticelli and said no more about it. The young priest's attention was aroused, however, and he could well divine what was passing in the other's mind. Under that make-believe Florentine, all angelicalness, there was an experienced business man, who well knew how to look after his pecuniary interests and was even reported to be somewhat avaricious. Pierre, who was aware of it, could not help smiling therefore when he saw him take his stand before another picture--a frightful Virgin, badly copied from some eighteenth-century canvas--and exclaim: "Dear me! that's not at all bad! I've a friend, I remember, who asked me to buy him some old paintings. I say, Victorine, now that Donna Serafina and the Cardinal are left alone do you think they would like to rid themselves of a few valueless pictures?"

The servant raised her arms as if to say that if it depended on her, everything might be carried away. Then she replied: "Not to a dealer, sir, on account of the nasty rumours which would at once spread about, but I'm sure they would be happy to please a friend. The house costs a lot to keep up, and money would be welcome."

Pierre then vainly endeavoured to persuade Narcisse to stay and sup with him, but the young man gave his word of honour that he was expected elsewhere and was even late. And thereupon he ran off, after pressing the priest's hands and affectionately wishing him a good journey.

Eight o'clock was striking, and Pierre seated himself at the little table, Victorine remaining to serve him after dismissing Giacomo, who had brought the supper things upstairs in a basket. "The people here make me wild," said the worthy woman after the other had gone, "they are so slow. And besides, it's a pleasure for me to serve you your last meal, Monsieur l'Abbe. I've had a little French dinner cooked for you, a /sole au

gratin/ and a roast fowl."

Pierre was touched by this attention, and pleased to have the company of a compatriot whilst he partook of his final meal amidst the deep silence of the old, black, deserted mansion. The buxom figure of Victorine was still instinct with mourning, with grief for the loss of her dear Contessina, but her daily toil was already setting her erect again, restoring her quick activity; and she spoke almost cheerfully whilst passing plates and dishes to Pierre. "And to think Monsieur l'Abbe," said she, "that you'll be in Paris on the morning of the day after to-morrow! As for me, you know, it seems as if I only left Auneau yesterday. Ah! what fine soil there is there; rich soil yellow like gold, not like their poor stuff here which smells of sulphur! And the pretty fresh willows beside our stream, too, and the little wood so full of moss! They've no moss here, their trees look like tin under that stupid sun of theirs which burns up the grass. /Mon Dieu!/ in the early times I would have given I don't know what for a good fall of rain to soak me and wash away all the dust. Ah! I shall never get used to their awful Rome. What a country and what people!"

Pierre was quite enlivened by her stubborn fidelity to her own nook, which after five and twenty years of absence still left her horrified with that city of crude light and black vegetation, true daughter as she was of a smiling and temperate clime which of a morning was steeped in rosy mist. "But now that your young mistress is dead," said he, "what keeps you here? Why don't you take the train with me?"

She looked at him in surprise: "Go off with you, go back to Auneau! Oh! it's impossible, Monsieur l'Abbe. It would be too ungrateful to begin with, for Donna Serafina is accustomed to me, and it would be bad on my part to forsake her and his Eminence now that they are in trouble. And besides, what could I do elsewhere? No, my little hole is here now."

"So you will never see Auneau again?"

"No, never, that's certain."

"And you don't mind being buried here, in their ground which smells of sulphur?"

She burst into a frank laugh. "Oh!" she said, "I don't mind where I am when I'm dead. One sleeps well everywhere. And it's funny that you should be so anxious as to what there may be when one's dead. There's nothing, I'm sure. That's what tranquillises me, to feel that it will be all over and that I shall have a rest. The good God owes us that after we've worked so hard. You know that I'm not devout, oh! dear no. Still that doesn't prevent me from behaving properly, and, true as I stand here, I've never had a lover. It seems foolish to say such a thing at my age, still I say it because it's the sober truth."

She continued laughing like the worthy woman she was, having no belief in priests and yet without a sin upon her conscience. And Pierre once more marvelled at the simple courage and great practical common sense of this

laborious and devoted creature, who for him personified the whole unbelieving lowly class of France, those who no longer believe and will believe never more. Ah! to be as she was, to do one's work and lie down for the eternal sleep without any revolt of pride, satisfied with the one joy of having accomplished one's share of toil!

When Pierre had finished his supper Victorine summoned Giacomo to clear the things away. And as it was only half-past eight she advised the priest to spend another quiet hour in his room. Why go and catch a chill by waiting at the station? She could send for a cab at half-past nine, and as soon as it arrived she would send word to him and have his luggage carried down. He might be easy as to that, and need trouble himself about nothing.

When she had gone off Pierre soon sank into a deep reverie. It seemed to him, indeed, as if he had already quitted Rome, as if the city were far away and he could look back on it, and his experiences within it. His book, "New Rome," arose in his mind; and he remembered his first morning on the Janiculum, his view of Rome from the terrace of San Pietro in Montorio, a Rome such as he had dreamt of, so young and ethereal under the pure sky. It was then that he had asked himself the decisive question: Could Catholicism be renewed? Could it revert to the spirit of primitive Christianity, become the religion of the democracy, the faith which the distracted modern world, in danger of death, awaits in order that it may be pacified and live? His heart had then beaten with hope and enthusiasm. After his disaster at Lourdes from which he had scarcely recovered, he had come to attempt another and supreme experiment by asking Rome what her reply to his question would be. And now the experiment had failed, he knew what answer Rome had returned him through her ruins, her monuments, her very soil, her people, her prelates, her cardinals, her pope! No, Catholicism could not be renewed: no, it could not revert to the spirit of primitive Christianity; no, it could not become the religion of the democracy, the new faith which might save the old toppling societies in danger of death. Though it seemed to be of democratic origin, it was henceforth riveted to that Roman soil, it remained kingly in spite of everything, forced to cling to the principle of temporal power under penalty of suicide, bound by tradition, enchained by dogma, its evolutions mere simulations whilst in reality it was reduced to such immobility that, behind the bronze doors of the Vatican, the papacy was the prisoner, the ghost of eighteen centuries of atavism, indulging the ceaseless dream of universal dominion. There, where with priestly faith exalted by love of the suffering and the poor, he had come to seek life and a resurrection of the Christian communion, he had found death, the dust of a destroyed world in which nothing more could germinate, an exhausted soil whence now there could never grow aught but that despotic papacy, the master of bodies as it was of souls. To his distracted cry asking for a new religion, Rome had been content to reply by condemning his book as a work tainted with heresy, and he himself had withdrawn it amidst the bitter grief of his disillusion. He had seen, he had understood, and all had collapsed. And it was himself, his soul and his brain, which lay among the ruins.

Pierre was stifling. He rose, threw the window overlooking the Tiber wide

open, and leant out. The rain had begun to fall again at the approach of evening, but now it had once more ceased. The atmosphere was very mild, moist, even oppressive. The moon must have arisen in the ashen grey sky, for her presence could be divined behind the clouds which she illumined with a vague, yellow, mournful light. And under that slumberous glimmer the vast horizon showed blackly and phantom-like: the Janiculum in front with the close-packed houses of the Trastevere; the river flowing away yonder on the left towards the dim height of the Palatine; whilst on the right the dome of St. Peter's showed forth, round and domineering in the pale atmosphere. Pierre could not see the Quirinal but divined it to be behind him, and could picture its long facade shutting off part of the sky. And what a collapsing Rome, half-devoured by the gloom, was this, so different from the Rome all youth and dreamland which he had beheld and passionately loved on the day of his arrival! He remembered the three symbolic summits which had then summed up for him the whole long history of Rome, the ancient, the papal, and the Italian city. But if the Palatine had remained the same discrowned mount on which there only rose the phantom of the ancestor, Augustus, emperor and pontiff, master of the world, he now pictured St. Peter's and the Quirinal as strangely altered. To that royal palace which he had so neglected, and which had seemed to him like a flat, low barrack, to that new Government which had brought him the impression of some attempt at sacrilegious modernity, he now accorded the large, increasing space that they occupied in the panorama, the whole of which they would apparently soon fill; whilst, on the contrary, St. Peter's, that dome which he had found so triumphal, all azure, reigning over the city like a gigantic and unshakable monarch, at present seemed to him full of cracks and already shrinking, as if it were one of those huge old piles, which, through the secret, unsuspected decay of their timbers, at times fall to the ground in one mass.

A murmur, a growling plaint rose from the swollen Tiber, and Pierre shivered at the icy abysmal breath which swept past his face. And his thoughts of the three summits and their symbolic triangle aroused within him the memory of the sufferings of the great silent multitude of poor and lowly for whom pope and king had so long disputed. It all dated from long ago, from the day when, in dividing the inheritance of Augustus, the emperor had been obliged to content himself with men's bodies, leaving their souls to the pope, whose one idea had henceforth been to gain the temporal power of which God, in his person, was despoiled. All the middle ages had been disturbed and ensanguined by the quarrel, till at last the silent multitude weary of vexations and misery spoke out; threw off the papal yoke at the Reformation, and later on began to overthrow its kings. And then, as Pierre had written in his book, a new fortune had been offered to the pope, that of reverting to the ancient dream, by dissociating himself from the fallen thrones and placing himself on the side of the wretched in the hope that this time he would conquer the people, win it entirely for himself. Was it not prodigious to see that man, Leo XIII, despoiled of his kingdom and allowing himself to be called a socialist, assembling under his banner the great flock of the disinherited, and marching against the kings at the head of that fourth estate to whom the coming century will belong? The eternal struggle for possession of the people continued as bitterly as ever even in Rome itself, where pope and king, who could see each other from their windows,

contended together like falcon and hawk for the little birds of the woods. And in this for Pierre lay the reason why Catholicism was fatally condemned; for it was of monarchical essence to such a point that the Apostolic and Roman papacy could not renounce the temporal power under penalty of becoming something else and disappearing. In vain did it feign a return to the people, in vain did it seek to appear all soul; there was no room in the midst of the world's democracies for any such total and universal sovereignty as that which it claimed to hold from God. Pierre ever beheld the Emperor sprouting up afresh in the Pontifex Maximus, and it was this in particular which had killed his dream, destroyed his book, heaped up all those ruins before which he remained distracted without either strength or courage.

The sight of that ashen Rome, whose edifices faded away into the night, at last brought him such a heart-pang that he came back into the room and fell on a chair near his luggage. Never before had he experienced such distress of spirit, it seemed like the death of his soul. After his disaster at Lourdes he had not come to Rome in search of the candid and complete faith of a little child, but the superior faith of an intellectual being, rising above rites and symbols, and seeking to ensure the greatest possible happiness of mankind based on its need of certainty. And if this collapsed, if Catholicism could not be rejuvenated and become the religion and moral law of the new generations, if the Pope at Rome and with Rome could not be the Father, the arch of alliance, the spiritual leader whom all hearkened to and obeyed, why then, in Pierre's eyes, the last hope was wrecked, the supreme rending which must plunge present-day society into the abyss was near at hand. That scaffolding of Catholic socialism which had seemed to him so happily devised for the consolidation of the old Church, now appeared to him lying on the ground; and he judged it severely as a mere passing expedient which might perhaps for some years prop up the ruined edifice, but which was simply based on an intentional misunderstanding, on a skilful lie, on politics and diplomacy. No, no, that the people should once again, as so many times before, be duped and gained over, caressed in order that it might be enthralled--this was repugnant to one's reason, and the whole system appeared degenerate, dangerous, temporary, calculated to end in the worst catastrophes. So this then was the finish, nothing remained erect and stable, the old world was about to disappear amidst the frightful sanguinary crisis whose approach was announced by such indisputable signs. And he, before that chaos near at hand, had no soul left him, having once more lost his faith in that decisive experiment which, he had felt beforehand, would either strengthen him or strike him down for ever. The thunderbolt had fallen, and now, O God, what should he do?

To shake off his anguish he began to walk across the room. Aye, what should he do now that he was all doubt again, all dolorous negation, and that his cassock weighed more heavily than it had ever weighed upon his shoulders? He remembered having told Monsignor Nani that he would never submit, would never be able to resign himself and kill his hope in salvation by love, but would rather reply by a fresh book, in which he would say in what new soil the new religion would spring up. Yes, a flaming book against Rome, in which he would set down all he had seen, a book which would depict the real Rome, the Rome which knows neither

charity nor love, and is dying in the pride of its purple! He had spoken of returning to Paris, leaving the Church and going to the point of schism. Well, his luggage now lay there packed, he was going off and he would write that book, he would be the great schismatic who was awaited! Did not everything foretell approaching schism amidst that great movement of men's minds, weary of old mummified dogmas and yet hungering for the divine? Even Leo XIII must be conscious of it, for his whole policy, his whole effort towards Christian unity, his assumed affection for the democracy had no other object than that of grouping the whole family around the papacy, and consolidating it so as to render the Pope invincible in the approaching struggle. But the times had come, Catholicism would soon find that it could grant no more political concessions without perishing, that at Rome it was reduced to the immobility of an ancient hieratic idol, and that only in the lands of propaganda, where it was fighting against other religions, could further evolution take place. It was, indeed, for this reason that Rome was condemned, the more so as the abolition of the temporal power, by accustoming men's minds to the idea of a purely spiritual papacy, seemed likely to conduce to the rise of some anti-pope, far away, whilst the successor of St. Peter was compelled to cling stubbornly to his Apostolic and Roman fiction. A bishop, a priest would arise--where, who could tell? Perhaps yonder in that free America, where there are priests whom the struggle for life has turned into convinced socialists, into ardent democrats, who are ready to go forward with the coming century. And whilst Rome remains unable to relinquish aught of her past, aught of her mysteries and dogmas, that priest will relinquish all of those things which fall from one in dust. Ah! to be that priest, to be that great reformer, that saviour of modern society, what a vast dream, what a part, akin to that of a Messiah summoned by the nations in distress. For a moment Pierre was transported as by a breeze of hope and triumph. If that great change did not come in France, in Paris, it would come elsewhere, yonder across the ocean, or farther yet, wherever there might be a sufficiently fruitful soil for the new seed to spring from it in overflowing harvests. A new religion! a new religion! even as he had cried on returning from Lourdes, a religion which in particular should not be an appetite for death, a religion which should at last realise here below that Kingdom of God referred to in the Gospel, and which should equitably divide terrestrial wealth, and with the law of labour ensure the rule of truth and justice.

In the fever of this fresh dream Pierre already saw the pages of his new book flaring before him when his eyes fell on an object lying upon a chair, which at first surprised him. This also was a book, that work of Theophile Morin's which Orlando had commissioned him to hand to its author, and he felt annoyed with himself at having left it there, for he might have forgotten it altogether. Before putting it into his valise he retained it for a moment in his hand turning its pages over, his ideas changing as by a sudden mental revolution. The work was, however, a very modest one, one of those manuals for the bachelor's degree containing little beyond the first elements of the sciences; still all the sciences were represented in it, and it gave a fair summary of the present state of human knowledge. And it was indeed Science which thus burst upon Pierre's reverie with the energy of sovereign power. Not only was



Catholicism swept away from his mind, but all his religious conceptions, every hypothesis of the divine tottered and fell. Only that little school book, nothing but the universal desire for knowledge, that education which ever extends and penetrates the whole people, and behold the mysteries became absurdities, the dogmas crumbled, and nothing of ancient faith was left. A nation nourished upon Science, no longer believing in mysteries and dogmas, in a compensatory system of reward and punishment, is a nation whose faith is for ever dead: and without faith Catholicism cannot be. Therein is the blade of the knife, the knife which falls and severs. If one century, if two centuries be needed, Science will take them. She alone is eternal. It is pure /naivete/ to say that reason is not contrary to faith. The truth is, that now already in order to save mere fragments of the sacred writings, it has been necessary to accommodate them to the new certainties, by taking refuge in the assertion that they are simply symbolical! And what an extraordinary attitude is that of the Catholic Church, expressly forbidding all those who may discover a truth contrary to the sacred writings to pronounce upon it in definitive fashion, and ordering them to await events in the conviction that this truth will some day be proved an error! Only the Pope, says the Church, is infallible; Science is fallible, her constant groping is exploited against her, and divines remain on the watch striving to make it appear that her discoveries of to-day are in contradiction with her discoveries of yesterday. What do her sacrilegious assertions, what do her certainties rending dogma asunder, matter to a Catholic since it is certain that at the end of time, she, Science, will again join Faith, and become the latter's very humble slave! Voluntary blindness and impudent denial of things as evident as the sunlight, can no further go. But all the same the insignificant little book, the manual of truth travels on continuing its work, destroying error and building up the new world, even as the infinitesimal agents of life built up our present continents.

In the sudden great enlightenment which had come on him Pierre at last felt himself upon firm ground. Has Science ever retreated? It is Catholicism which has always retreated before her, and will always be forced to retreat. Never does Science stop, step by step she wrests truth from error, and to say that she is bankrupt because she cannot explain the world in one word and at one effort, is pure and simple nonsense. If she leaves, and no doubt will always leave a smaller and smaller domain to mystery, and if supposition may always strive to explain that mystery, it is none the less certain that she ruins, and with each successive hour will add to the ruin of the ancient hypotheses, those which crumble away before the acquired truths. And Catholicism is in the position of those ancient hypotheses, and will be in it yet more thoroughly to-morrow. Like all religions it is, at the bottom, but an explanation of the world, a superior social and political code, intended to bring about the greatest possible sum of peace and happiness on earth. This code which embraces the universality of things thenceforth becomes human, and mortal like everything that is human. One cannot put it on one side and say that it exists on one side by itself, whilst Science does the same on the other. Science is total and has already shown Catholicism that such is the case, and will show it again and again by compelling it to repair the breaches incessantly effected in its ramparts till the day of victory shall come

with the final assault of resplendent truth. Frankly, it makes one laugh to hear people assign a /role/ to Science, forbid her to enter such and such a domain, predict to her that she shall go no further, and declare that at this end of the century she is already so weary that she abdicates! Oh! you little men of shallow or distorted brains, you politicians planning expedients, you dogmatics at bay, you authoritarians so obstinately clinging to the ancient dreams, Science will pass on, and sweep you all away like withered leaves!

Pierre continued glancing through the humble little book, listening to all it told him of sovereign Science. She cannot become bankrupt, for she does not promise the absolute, she is simply the progressive conquest of truth. Never has she pretended that she could give the whole truth at one effort, that sort of edifice being precisely the work of metaphysics, of revelation, of faith. The /role/ of Science, on the contrary, is only to destroy error as she gradually advances and increases enlightenment. And thus, far from becoming bankrupt, in her march which nothing stops, she remains the only possible truth for well-balanced and healthy minds. As for those whom she does not satisfy, who crave for immediate and universal knowledge, they have the resource of seeking refuge in no matter what religious hypothesis, provided, if they wish to appear in the right, that they build their fancy upon acquired certainties. Everything which is raised on proven error falls. However, although religious feeling persists among mankind, although the need of religion may be eternal, it by no means follows that Catholicism is eternal, for it is, after all, but one form of religion, which other forms preceded and which others will follow. Religions may disappear, but religious feeling will create new ones even with the help of Science. Pierre thought of that alleged repulse of Science by the present-day awakening of mysticism, the causes of which he had indicated in his book: the discredit into which the idea of liberty has fallen among the people, duped in the last social reorganisation, and the uneasiness of the /elite/, in despair at the void in which their liberated minds and enlarged intelligences have left them. It is the anguish of the Unknown springing up again; but it is also only a natural and momentary reaction after so much labour, on finding that Science does not yet calm our thirst for justice, our desire for security, or our ancient idea of an eternal after-life of enjoyment. In order, however, that Catholicism might be born anew, as some seem to think it will be, the social soil would have to change, and it cannot change; it no longer possesses the sap needful for the renewal of a decaying formula which schools and laboratories destroy more and more each day. The ground is other than it once was, a different oak must spring from it. May Science therefore have her religion, for such a religion will soon be the only one possible for the coming democracies, for the nations, whose knowledge ever increases whilst their Catholic faith is already nought but dust.

And all at once, by way of conclusion, Pierre bethought himself of the idiocy of the Congregation of the Index. It had condemned his book, and would surely condemn the other one that he had thought of, should he ever write it. A fine piece of work truly! To fall tooth and nail on the poor books of an enthusiastic dreamer, in which chimera contended with chimera! Yet the Congregation was so foolish as not to interdict that

little book which he held in his hands, that humble book which alone was to be feared, which was the ever triumphant enemy that would surely overthrow the Church. Modest it was in its cheap "get up" as a school manual, but that did not matter: danger began with the very alphabet, increased as knowledge was acquired, and burst forth with those /resumes/ of the physical, chemical, and natural sciences which bring the very Creation, as described by Holy Writ, into question. However, the Index dared not attempt to suppress those humble volumes, those terrible soldiers of truth, those destroyers of faith. What was the use, then, of all the money which Leo XIII drew from his hidden treasure of the Peter's Pence to subvention Catholic schools, with the thought of forming the believing generations which the papacy needed to enable it to conquer? What was the use of that precious money if it was only to serve for the purchase of similar insignificant yet formidable volumes, which could never be sufficiently "cooked" and expurgated, but would always contain too much Science, that growing Science which one day would blow up both Vatican and St. Peter's? Ah! that idiotic and impotent Index, what wretchedness and what derision!

Then, when Pierre had placed Theophile Morin's book in his valise, he once more returned to the window, and while leaning out, beheld an extraordinary vision. Under the cloudy, coppery sky, in the mild and mournful night, patches of wavy mist had risen, hiding many of the house-roofs with trailing shreds which looked like shrouds. Entire edifices had disappeared, and he imagined that the times were at last accomplished, and that truth had at last destroyed St. Peter's dome. In a hundred or a thousand years, it would be like that, fallen, obliterated from the black sky. One day, already, he had felt it tottering and cracking beneath him, and had foreseen that this temple of Catholicism would fall even as Jove's temple had fallen on the Capitol. And it was over now, the dome had strewn the ground with fragments, and all that remained standing, in addition to a portion of the apse, where five columns of the central nave, still upholding a shred of entablature, and four cyclopean buttress-piers on which the dome had rested--piers which still arose, isolated and superb, looking indestructible among all the surrounding downfall. But a denser mist flowed past, another thousand years no doubt went by, and then nothing whatever remained. The apse, the last pillars, the giant piers themselves were felled! The wind had swept away their dust, and it would have been necessary to search the soil beneath the brambles and the nettles to find a few fragments of broken statues, marbles with mutilated inscriptions, on the sense of which learned men were unable to agree. And, as formerly, on the Capitol, among the buried remnants of Jupiter's temple, goats strayed and climbed through the solitude, browsing upon the bushes, amidst the deep silence of the oppressive summer sunlight, which only the buzzing flies disturbed.

Then, only then, did Pierre feel the supreme collapse within him. It was really all over, Science was victorious, nothing of the old world remained. What use would it be then to become the great schismatic, the reformer who was awaited? Would it not simply mean the building up of a new dream? Only the eternal struggle of Science against the Unknown, the searching, pursuing inquiry which incessantly moderated man's thirst for

the divine, now seemed to him of import, leaving him waiting to know if she would ever triumph so completely as to suffice mankind, by satisfying all its wants. And in the disaster which had overcome his apostolic enthusiasm, in presence of all those ruins, having lost his faith, and even his hope of utilising old Catholicism for social and moral salvation, there only remained reason that held him up. She had at one moment given way. If he had dreamt that book, and had just passed through that terrible crisis, it was because sentiment had once again overcome reason within him. It was his mother, so to say, who had wept in his heart, who had filled him with an irresistible desire to relieve the wretched and prevent the massacres which seemed near at hand; and his passion for charity had thus swept aside the scruples of his intelligence. But it was his father's voice that he now heard, lofty and bitter reason which, though it had fled, at present came back in all sovereignty. As he had done already after Lourdes, he protested against the glorification of the absurd and the downfall of common sense. Reason alone enabled him to walk erect and firm among the remnants of the old beliefs, even amidst the obscurities and failures of Science. Ah! Reason, it was through her alone that he suffered, through her alone that he could content himself, and he swore that he would now always seek to satisfy her, even if in doing so he should lose his happiness.

At that moment it would have been vain for him to ask what he ought to do. Everything remained in suspense, the world stretched before him still littered with the ruins of the past, of which, to-morrow, it would perhaps be rid. Yonder, in that dolorous faubourg of Paris, he would find good Abbe Rose, who but a few days previously had written begging him to return and tend, love, and save his poor, since Rome, so dazzling from afar, was dead to charity. And around the good and peaceful old priest he would find the ever growing flock of wretched ones; the little fledglings who had fallen from their nests, and whom he found pale with hunger and shivering with cold; the households of abominable misery in which the father drank and the mother became a prostitute, while the sons and the daughters sank into vice and crime; the dwellings, too, through which famine swept, where all was filth and shameful promiscuity, where there was neither furniture nor linen, nothing but purely animal life. And then there would also come the cold blasts of winter, the disasters of slack times, the hurricanes of consumption carrying off the weak, whilst the strong clenched their fists and dreamt of vengeance. One evening, too, perhaps, he might again enter some room of horror and find that another mother had killed herself and her five little ones, her last-born in her arms clinging to her drained breast, and the others scattered over the bare tiles, at last contented, feeling hunger no more, now that they were dead! But no, no, such awful things were no longer possible: such black misery conducting to suicide in the heart of that great city of Paris, which is brimful of wealth, intoxicated with enjoyment, and flings millions out of window for mere pleasure! The very foundations of the social edifice were rotten; all would soon collapse amidst mire and blood. Never before had Pierre so acutely realised the derisive futility of Charity. And all at once he became conscious that the long-awaited word, the word which was at last springing from the great silent multitude, the crushed and gagged people was /Justice!/ Aye, Justice not Charity! Charity had only served to perpetuate misery, Justice perhaps

would cure it. It was for Justice that the wretched hungered; an act of Justice alone could sweep away the olden world so that the new one might be reared. After all, the great silent multitude would belong neither to Vatican nor to Quirinal, neither to pope nor to king. If it had covertly growled through the ages in its long, sometimes mysterious, and sometimes open contest; if it had struggled betwixt pontiff and emperor who each had wished to retain it for himself alone, it had only done so in order that it might free itself, proclaim its resolve to belong to none on the day when it should cry Justice! Would to-morrow then at last prove that day of Justice and Truth? For his part, Pierre amidst his anguish--having on one hand that need of the divine which tortures man, and on the other sovereignty of reason which enables man to remain erect--was only sure of one thing, that he would keep his vows, continue a priest, watching over the belief of others though he could not himself believe, and would thus chastely and honestly follow his profession, amidst haughty sadness at having been unable to renounce his intelligence in the same way as he had renounced his flesh and his dream of saving the nations. And again, as after Lourdes, he would wait.

So deeply was he plunged in reflection at that window, face to face with the mist which seemed to be destroying the dark edifices of Rome, that he did not hear himself called. At last, however, he felt a tap on the shoulder: "Monsieur l'Abbe!" And then as he turned he saw Victorine, who said to him: "It is half-past nine; the cab is there. Giacomo has already taken your luggage down. You must come away, Monsieur l'Abbe."

Then seeing him blink, still dazed as it were, she smiled and added: "You were bidding Rome goodbye. What a frightful sky there is."

"Yes, frightful," was his reply.

Then they descended the stairs. He had handed her a hundred-franc note to be shared between herself and the other servants. And she apologised for going down before him with the lamp, explaining that the old palace was so dark that evening one could scarcely see.

Ah! that departure, that last descent through the black and empty mansion, it quite upset Pierre's heart. He gave his room that glance of farewell which always saddened him, even when he was leaving a spot where he had suffered. Then, on passing Don Vigilio's chamber, whence there only came a quivering silence, he pictured the secretary with his head buried in his pillows, holding his breath for fear lest he should speak and attract vengeance. But it was in particular on the second and first floor landings, on passing the closed doors of Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, that Pierre quivered with apprehension at hearing nothing but the silence of the grave. And as he followed Victorine, who, lamp in hand, was still descending, he thought of the brother and sister who were left alone in the ruined palace, last relics of a world which had half passed away. All hope of life had departed with Benedetta and Dario, no resurrection could come from that old maid and that priest who was bound to chastity. Ah! those interminable and lugubrious passages, that frigid and gigantic staircase which seemed to descend into nihilism, those huge halls with cracking walls where all was wretchedness and abandonment! And

that inner court, looking like a cemetery with its weeds and its damp porticus, where remnants of Apollos and Venuses were rotting! And the little deserted garden, fragrant with ripe oranges, whither nobody now would ever stray, where none would ever meet that adorable Contessina under the laurels near the sarcophagus! All was now annihilated in abominable mourning, in a death-like silence, amidst which the two last Boccaneras must wait, in savage grandeur, till their palace should fall about their heads. Pierre could only just detect a faint sound, the gnawing of a mouse perhaps, unless it were caused by Abbe Paparelli attacking the walls of some out-of-the-way rooms, preying on the old edifice down below, so as to hasten its fall.

The cab stood at the door, already laden with the luggage, the box beside the driver, the valise on the seat; and the priest at once got in.

"Oh! You have plenty of time," said Victorine, who had remained on the foot-pavement. "Nothing has been forgotten. I'm glad to see you go off comfortably."

And indeed at that last moment Pierre was comforted by the presence of that worthy woman, his compatriot, who had greeted him on his arrival and now attended his departure. "I won't say 'till we meet again,' Monsieur l'Abbe," she exclaimed, "for I don't fancy that you'll soon be back in this horrid city. Good-bye, Monsieur l'Abbe."

"Good-bye, Victorine, and thank you with all my heart."

The cab was already going off at a fast trot, turning into the narrow sinuous street which leads to the Corso Vittoria Emanuele. It was not raining and so the hood had not been raised, but although the damp atmosphere was comparatively mild, Pierre at once felt a chill. However, he was unwilling to stop the driver, a silent fellow whose only desire seemingly was to get rid of his fare as soon as possible. When the cab came out into the Corso Vittoria Emanuele, the young man was astonished to find it already quite deserted, the houses shut, the footways bare, and the electric lamps burning all alone in melancholy solitude. In truth, however, the temperature was far from warm and the fog seemed to be increasing, hiding the house-fronts more and more. When Pierre passed the Cancelleria, that stern colossal pile seemed to him to be receding, fading away; and farther on, upon the right, at the end of the Via di Ara Coeli, starred by a few smoky gas lamps, the Capitol had quite vanished in the gloom. Then the thoroughfare narrowed, and the cab went on between the dark heavy masses of the Gesu and the Altieri palace; and there in that contracted passage, where even on fine sunny days one found all the dampness of old times, the quivering priest yielded to a fresh train of thought. It was an idea which had sometimes made him feel anxious, the idea that mankind, starting from over yonder in Asia, had always marched onward with the sun. An east wind had always carried the human seed for future harvest towards the west. And for a long while now the cradle of humanity had been stricken with destruction and death, as if indeed the nations could only advance by stages, leaving exhausted soil, ruined cities, and degenerate populations behind, as they marched from orient to occident, towards their unknown goal. Nineveh and Babylon on the banks of

the Euphrates, Thebes and Memphis on the banks of the Nile, had been reduced to dust, sinking from old age and weariness into a deadly numbness beyond possibility of awakening. Then decrepitude had spread to the shores of the great Mediterranean lake, burying both Tyre and Sidon with dust, and afterwards striking Carthage with senility whilst it yet seemed in full splendour. In this wise as mankind marched on, carried by the hidden forces of civilisation from east to west, it marked each day's journey with ruins; and how frightful was the sterility nowadays displayed by the cradle of History, that Asia and that Egypt, which had once more lapsed into childhood, immobilised in ignorance and degeneracy amidst the ruins of ancient cities that once had been queens of the world!

It was thus Pierre reflected as the cab rolled on. Still he was not unconscious of his surroundings. As he passed the Palazzo di Venezia it seemed to him to be crumbling beneath some assault of the invisible, for the mist had already swept away its battlements, and the lofty, bare, fearsome walls looked as if they were staggering from the onslaught of the growing darkness. And after passing the deep gap of the Corso, which was also deserted amidst the pallid radiance of its electric lights, the Palazzo Torlonia appeared on the right-hand, with one wing ripped open by the picks of demolishers, whilst on the left, farther up, the Palazzo Colonna showed its long, mournful facade and closed windows, as if, now that it was deserted by its masters and void of its ancient pomp, it awaited the demolishers in its turn.

Then, as the cab at a slower pace began to climb the ascent of the Via Nazionale, Pierre's reverie continued. Was not Rome also stricken, had not the hour come for her to disappear amidst that destruction which the nations on the march invariably left behind them? Greece, Athens, and Sparta slumbered beneath their glorious memories, and were of no account in the world of to-day. Moreover, the growing paralysis had already invaded the lower portion of the Italic peninsula; and after Naples certainly came the turn of Rome. She was on the very margin of the death spot which ever extends over the old continent, that margin where agony begins, where the impoverished soil will no longer nourish and support cities, where men themselves seem stricken with old age as soon as they are born. For two centuries Rome had been declining, withdrawing little by little from modern life, having neither manufactures nor trade, and being incapable even of science, literature, or art. And in Pierre's thoughts it was no longer St. Peter's only that fell, but all Rome--basilicas, palaces, and entire districts--which collapsed amidst a supreme rending, and covered the seven hills with a chaos of ruins. Like Nineveh and Babylon, and like Thebes and Memphis, Rome became but a plain, bossy with remnants, amidst which one vainly sought to identify the sites of ancient edifices, whilst its sole denizens were coiling serpents and bands of rats.

The cab turned, and on the right, in a huge gap of darkness Pierre recognised Trajan's column, but it was no longer gilded by the sun as when he had first seen it; it now rose up blackly like the dead trunk of a giant tree whose branches have fallen from old age. And farther on, when he raised his eyes while crossing the little triangular piazza, and

perceived a real tree against the leaden sky, that parasol pine of the Villa Aldobrandini which rises there like a symbol of Rome's grace and pride, it seemed to him but a smear, a little cloud of soot ascending from the downfall of the whole city.

With the anxious, fraternal turn of his feelings, fear was coming over him as he reached the end of his tragic dream. When the numbness which spreads across the aged world should have passed Rome, when Lombardy should have yielded to it, and Genoa, Turin, and Milan should have fallen asleep as Venice has fallen already, then would come the turn of France. The Alps would be crossed, Marseilles, like Tyre and Sidon, would see its port choked up by sand, Lyons would sink into desolation and slumber, and at last Paris, invaded by the invincible torpor, and transformed into a sterile waste of stones bristling with nettles, would join Rome and Nineveh and Babylon in death, whilst the nations continued their march from orient to occident following the sun. A great cry sped through the gloom, the death cry of the Latin races! History, which seemed to have been born in the basin of the Mediterranean, was being transported elsewhere, and the ocean had now become the centre of the world. How many hours of the human day had gone by? Had mankind, starting from its cradle over yonder at daybreak, strewing its road with ruins from stage to stage, now accomplished one-half of its day and reached the dazzling hour of noon? If so, then the other half of the day allotted to it was beginning, the new world was following the old one, the new world of those American cities where democracy was forming and the religion of to-morrow was sprouting, those sovereign queens of the coming century, with yonder, across another ocean, on the other side of the globe, that motionless Far East, mysterious China and Japan, and all the threatening swarm of the yellow races.

However, while the cab climbed higher and higher up the Via Nazionale, Pierre felt his nightmare dissipating. There was here a lighter atmosphere, and he came back into a renewal of hope and courage. Yet the Banca d'Italia, with its brand-new ugliness, its chalky hugeness, looked to him like a phantom in a shroud; whilst above a dim expanse of gardens the Quirinal formed but a black streak barring the heavens. However, the street ever ascended and broadened, and on the summit of the Viminal, on the Piazza delle Terme, when he passed the ruins of Diocletian's baths, he could breathe as his lungs listed. No, no, the human day could not finish, it was eternal, and the stages of civilisation would follow and follow without end! What mattered that eastern wind which carried the nations towards the west, as if borne on by the power of the sun! If necessary, they would return across the other side of the globe, they would again and again make the circuit of the earth, until the day should come when they could establish themselves in peace, truth, and justice. After the next civilisation on the shores of the Atlantic, which would become the world's centre, skirted by queenly cities, there would spring up yet another civilisation, having the Pacific for its centre, with seaport capitals that could not be yet foreseen, whose germs yet slumbered on unknown shores. And in like way there would be still other civilisations and still others! And at that last moment, the inspiring thought came to Pierre that the great movement of the nations was the instinct, the need which impelled them to return to unity. Originating in



one sole family, afterwards parted and dispersed in tribes, thrown into collision by fratricidal hatred, their tendency was none the less to become one sole family again. The provinces united in nations, the nations would unite in races, and the races would end by uniting in one immortal mankind--mankind at last without frontiers, or possibility of wars, mankind living by just labour amidst an universal commonwealth. Was not this indeed the evolution, the object of the labour progressing everywhere, the finish reserved to History? Might Italy then become a strong and healthy nation, might concord be established between her and France, and might that fraternity of the Latin races become the beginning of universal fraternity! Ah! that one fatherland, the whole earth pacified and happy, in how many centuries would that come--and what a dream!

Then, on reaching the station the scramble prevented Pierre from thinking any further. He had to take his ticket and register his luggage, and afterwards he at once climbed into the train. At dawn on the next day but one, he would be back in Paris.

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