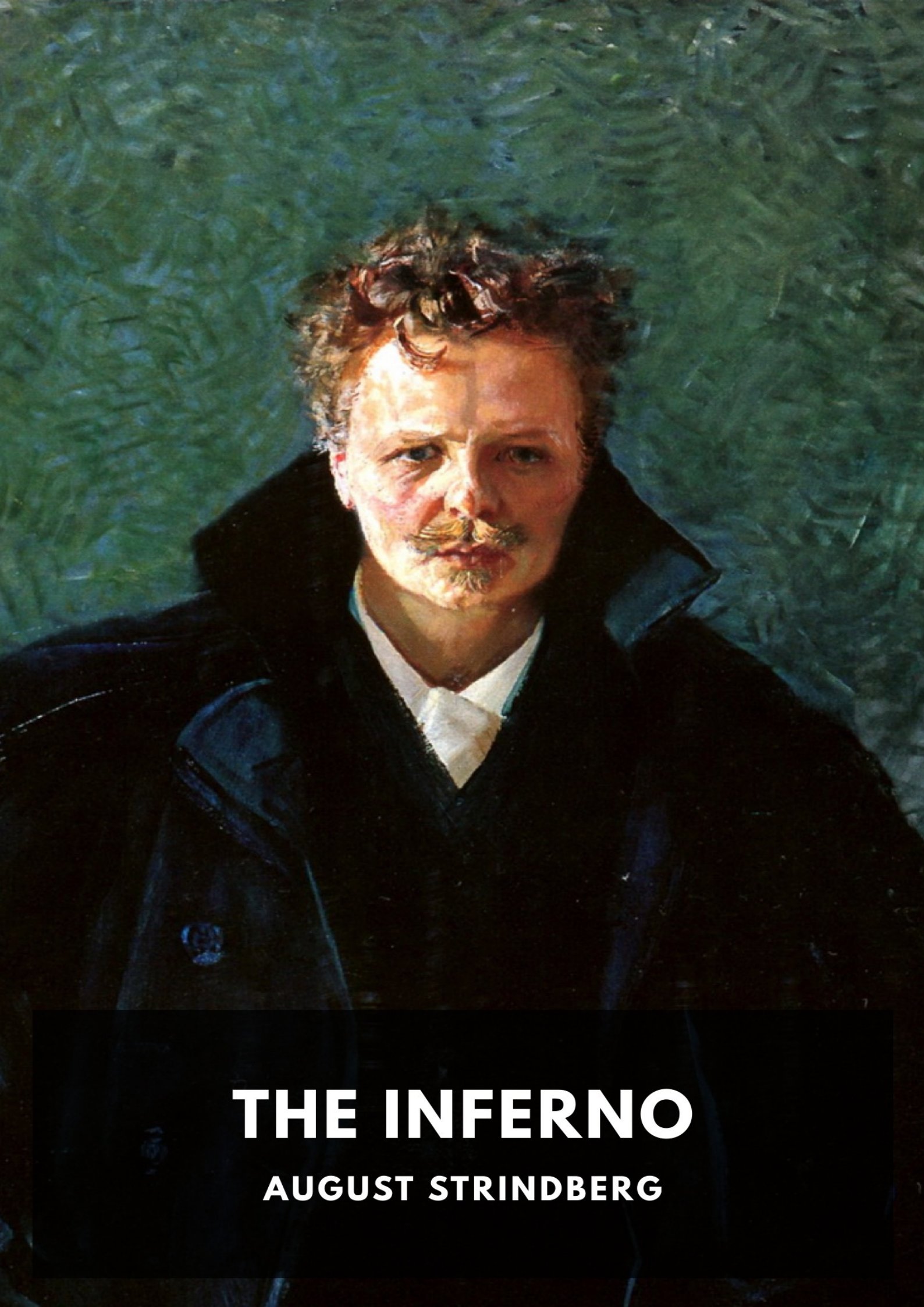

THE INFERNO

AUGUST STRINDBERG

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translated by
CLAUD FIELD

INTRODUCTION[1]

An American critic says “Strindberg is the greatest subjectivist of all time.” Certainly neither Augustine, Rousseau, nor Tolstoy have laid bare their souls to the finest fibre with more ruthless sincerity than the great Swedish realist. He fulfilled to the letter the saying of Robertson of Brighton, “Woman and God are two rocks on which a man must either anchor or be wrecked.” His four autobiographical works, *The Son of a Servant*, *The Confessions of a Fool*, *Inferno*, and *Legends*, are four segments of an immense curve tracing his progress from the childish pietism of his early years, through a period of atheism and rebellion, to the sombre faith in a “God that punishes” of the sexagenarian. In his spiritual wanderings he grazed the edge of madness, and madmen often see deeper into things than ordinary folk. At the close of the *Inferno* he thus sums up the lesson of his life’s pilgrimage: “Such then is my life: a sign, an example to serve for the improvement of others; a proverb, to show the nothingness of fame and popularity; a proverb, to show young men how they ought *not* to live; a proverb—because I who thought myself a prophet am now revealed as a braggart.”

It is strange that though the names of Ibsen and Nietzsche have long been familiar in England, Strindberg, whom Ibsen is reported to have called “One greater than I,” as he pointed to his portrait, and with whom Nietzsche corresponded, is only just beginning to attract attention, though for a long time past most of his works have been accessible in German. Even now not much more is known about him than that he was a pessimist, a misogynist, and writer of Zolaesque novels. To quote a Persian proverb, “They see the mountain, but not the mine within it.” No man admired a good wife and mother more than he did, but he certainly hated the Corybantic, “emancipated” women of the present time. No man had a keener appreciation of the gentle joys of domesticity, and the intensity of his misogyny was in strict proportion to the keenness of his disappointment. The *Inferno* relates how grateful and even reverential he was to the nurse who tended him in hospital, and to his mother-in-law. He felt profoundly the charm of innocent childhood, and paternal instincts were strong in him. All his life long he had to struggle with four terrible inner foes—doubt, suspicion, fear, sensuality. His doubts destroyed his early faith, his ceaseless suspicions made it impossible for him to be happy in friendship or love, his fear of the “invisible powers,” as he calls them, robbed him of all peace of mind, and his sensuality dragged him repeatedly into the mire. A “strange mixture of a man” indeed, whose soul was the scene of an internecine lifelong warfare between diametrically-opposed forces! Yet he never ceased to struggle blindly upwards, and Goethe’s words were verified in him:

> “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht
> Den Können wir erlösen.”[2]

He never relapsed into the stagnant cynicism of the outworn debauchee, nor did he with Nietzsche try to explain away conscience as an old wife’s tale. Conscience persistently tormented him, and finally drove him back to belief in God, not the collective Karma of the Theosophists, which he expressly repudiated, nor to any new god expounded in New Thought magazines, but to the transcendent God who judges and requites, though not at the end of

every week. It seems almost as if there were lurking an old Hebrew vein in him, so frequently in his later works does he express himself in the language of psalmists and prophets. “The psalms of David express my feelings best, and Jehovah is my God,” he says in the *Inferno*.

At one time he seems to have been nearly entering the Roman Catholic Church, but, even after he had recovered his belief, his inborn independence of spirit would not let him attach himself to any religious body. His fellow-countryman, Swedenborg, seems to have influenced him more deeply than anyone else, and to him he attributes his escape from madness.

His work *Inferno* may certainly serve a useful purpose in calling attention to the fact, that, whatever may be the case hereafter, there are certainly hells on earth, hells into which the persistently selfish inevitably come. Because our fathers dealt with exaggerated emphasis on unextinguishable fires and insatiable worms, in some remote future, some good folk seem to suppose that there is no such thing as retribution, or that we may sow thorns and reap wheat. Strindberg knew better. He had reaped the whirlwind, and we seem to feel it sometimes blowing through his pages.

In the *Blue Books*, or collections of thoughts which he wrote towards the end of his life, the storm has subsided. The sun shines and the sea is calm, though strewn with wreckage. He uses some very strong language towards his former comrades, the freethinkers, whom he calls “denizens of the dunghill.” One bitterness remains. He cannot forgive woman. She has injured him too deeply. All his life long she has been “a cleaving mischief in his way to virtue.” He married three times, and each marriage was a failure. His first wife was a baroness separated from her husband, whom he accuses of having repeatedly betrayed him. His second wife was an Austrian. In the *Inferno* he calls her “my beautiful jaileress who kept incessant watch over my secret thoughts.” His third was an actress from whom he parted by mutual consent. All his attempts to set up a home had failed, and he found himself finally relegated to solitude. One of his later works bears the title *Lonely*. His solitude was relieved by visits from his children, and he was especially fond of his younger daughter, giving her free use of his library. On May 14, 1912, he died in Stockholm, after a lingering illness, of cancer, an added touch of tragedy being the fact that his first wife died, not far away, shortly before him.

He was an enormous reader, and seems to have possessed a knowledge almost as encyclopaedic as Browning’s. While assistant librarian in the Royal Library at Stockholm he studied Chinese; he was a skilled chemist and botanist, and wrote treatises on both these sciences. He was a mystic, but had a certain dislike of occultism and theosophy. A German critic, comparing him with Ibsen, says that, whereas Ibsen is a spent force, Strindberg’s writings contain germs which are still undeveloped. He is a lurid and menacing planet in the literary sky, and some time must elapse before his true position is fixed. To the present writer his career seems best summed up in the words of Mrs. Browning:

> “He testified this solemn truth, by frenzy desolated,
> Nor man nor nature satisfies whom only God created”;

or in those of Augustine: “*Fecisti nos ad Te, Domine, et irrequietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.*”

C. F.

“Courbe la tête fier Segambre; adore ce qui tu as brûlé; brûle ce qui tu as adoré!”

THE INFERNO

I
The Hand of the Invisible

With a feeling of wild joy I returned from the northern railway station, where I had said goodbye to my wife. She was going to our child, who was ill in a distant place. The sacrifice of my heart was then fulfilled. Her last words, “When shall we meet again?” and my answer, “Soon!” echoed in my ears, like falsehoods which one is unwilling to confess. A foreboding said to me “Never!” And, as a matter of fact, these parting words which we exchanged in November, 1894, were our last, for to this present time, May, 1897, I have not seen my dear wife again.

As I entered the Café de la Régence, I placed myself at the table where I used to sit with my wife, my beautiful jail-keeper, who watched my soul day and night, guessed my secret thoughts, marked the course of my ideas, and was jealous of my investigations into the unknown.

My newly-won freedom gave me a feeling of expansion and elevation above the petty cares of life in the great capital. In this arena of intellectual warfare I had just gained a victory, which, although worthless in itself, signified a great deal to me. It was the fulfilment of a youthful dream which all my countrymen had dreamed, but which had been realised by me alone, to have a play of one’s own performed in a Paris theatre. *Now* the theatre repelled me, as everything does when one has reached it, and science attracted me. Obliged to choose between love and knowledge, I had decided to strive for the highest knowledge; and as I myself sacrificed my love, I forgot the other innocent sacrifice to my ambition or my mission.

As soon as I returned to my poor student’s room in the Latin Quarter, I rummaged in my chest and drew out of their hiding-place six saucepans of fine porcelain. I had bought them a long time ago, although they were too dear for my means. A pair of tongs and a packet of pure sulphur completed the apparatus of my laboratory. I kindled a smelting-furnace in the fireplace, closed the door, and drew down the blinds, for only three months after the execution of Caserio it was not prudent to make chemical experiments in Paris.

The night comes on, the sulphur burns luridly, and towards morning I have ascertained the presence of carbon in what has been before considered an elementary substance. With this I believe I have solved the great problem, upset the ruling chemical theories, and won the immortality grudged to mortals.

But the skin of my hands, nearly roasted by the strong fire, peels off: in scales, and the pain they cause me when undressing shows me what a price I have paid for my victory. But, as I lie alone in bed, I feel happy, and I am sorry I have no one whom I can thank for my deliverance from the marital fetters which have been broken without much ado. For in the course of years I have become an atheist, since the unknown powers have left the world to itself without giving a sign of themselves.

Someone to thank! There is no one there, and my involuntary ingratitude depresses me.

Feeling jealous about my discovery, I take no steps to make it known. In my modesty I turn neither to authorities nor to universities. While I continue my experiments, the cracked skin of my hands becomes worse, the fissures gape and become full of coal-dust; blood oozes

out, and the pains become so intolerable that I can undertake nothing more. I am inclined to attribute these pains which drive me wild to the unknown powers which have persecuted me for years, and frustrate my endeavours. I avoid people, neglect society, refuse invitations, and make myself inaccessible to friends. I am surrounded by silence and loneliness. It is the solemn and terrible silence of the desert in which I defiantly challenge the unknown, in order to wrestle with him, body with body, and soul with soul. I have proved that sulphur contains carbon; now I intend to discover hydrogen and oxygen in it, for they must be also present. But my apparatus is insufficient, I need money, my hands are black and bleeding, black as misery, bleeding as my heart. For, during this time, I continue to correspond with my wife. I tell her of my successes in chemical experiments; she answers with news about the illness of our child, and here and there drops hints that my science is futile, and that it is foolish to waste money on it.

In a fit of righteous pride, in the passionate desire to do myself an injury, I commit moral suicide by repudiating my wife and child in an unworthy, unpardonable letter. I give her to understand that I am involved in a new love-affair.

The blow goes home. My wife answers with a demand for separation.

Solitary, guilty of suicide and assassination, I forget my crime under the weight of sorrow and care. No one visits me, and I can see no one, since I have alienated all. I drift alone over the surface of the sea; I have hoisted my anchor, but have no sail.

Necessity, however, in the shape of an unpaid bill, interrupts my scientific tasks and metaphysical speculations, and calls me back to earth.

Christmas approaches. I have abruptly refused the invitation of a Scandinavian family, the atmosphere of which makes me uncomfortable because of their moral irregularities. But, when evening comes and I am alone, I repent, and go there all the same.

They sit down to table, and the evening meal begins with a great deal of noise and outbursts of hilarity, for the young artists who are present feel themselves at home here. A certain familiarity of gestures and attitudes, a tone which is anything but domestic, repels and depresses me indescribably. In the middle of the orgy my sadness calls up to my inner vision a picture of the peaceful home of my wife: the Christmas tree, the mistletoe, my little daughter, her deserted mother. Pangs of conscience seize me; I stand up, plead ill-health as an excuse, and depart.

I go down the dreadful Rue de la Gaieté in which the artificial mirth of the crowd annoys me; then down the gloomy silent Rue Delambre, which is more conducive to despair than any other street of the Quarter. I turn into the Boulevard Montparnasse, and let myself fall on a seat on the terrace of the Lilas brewery.

A glass of good absinthe comforts me for some minutes. Then there fall on me a set of cocottes and students who strike me on the face with switches. As though driven by furies, I leave my glass of absinthe standing, and hasten to seek for another in the Café François Premier on the Boulevard St. Michel. Out of the frying-pan into the fire! A second troop shouts at me, “There is the hermit!” Driven forth again I fly home, accompanied by the unnerving tones of the mirliton pipes.

The thought that it might be a chastisement, the result of a crime, does not occur to me. In my own mind I feel guiltless, and consider myself the object of an unjust persecution. The unknown powers have hindered me from continuing my great work. The hindrances must be broken through before I obtain the victor’s crown.

I have been wrong, and at the same time I am right, and will maintain it.

That Christmas night I slept badly. A cold draught several times blew on my face, and from time to time the sound of a jew’s-harp awoke me.

An increasing prostration comes over me. My black and bleeding hands prevent my dressing myself and taking care of my outer appearance. Anxiety about my unpaid hotel bill leaves me no peace, and I pace up and down my room like a wild beast in a cage. I eat no longer, and the hotel manager advises me to go to a hospital. But that is no help to me, for it is too dear, and I must pay my bill here first.

The veins in my arm begin to swell visibly; it is a sign of blood-poisoning. This is the finishing stroke. The news spreads among my countrymen, and one evening there comes the kindhearted woman, whose Christmas dinner I had so abruptly left, who was antipathetic to me, and whom I almost despised. She finds me out, asks how I am, and tells me with tears that the hospital is my only hope.

One can understand how helpless and humiliated I feel, as my eloquent silence shows her that I am penniless. She is seized with sympathy at seeing me so prostrate. Poor herself, and oppressed with daily anxieties, she resolves to make a collection among the Scandinavian colony, and to go to the pastor of the community.

A sinful woman has pity on the man who has deserted his lawful wife!

Once more a beggar, asking for alms by means of a woman, I begin to suspect that there is an invisible hand which guides the irresistible logic of events. I bow before the storm, determined to rise again at the first opportunity.

The carriage brings me to the hospital of St. Louis. On the way, in the Rue de Rennes, I get out in order to buy two white shirts. The winding-sheet for the last hour! I really expect a speedy death, without being able to say why.

In the hospital I am forbidden to go out without leave; besides, my hands are so wrapped up that all occupation is impossible to me; I feel therefore like a prisoner. My room is bare, contains only the most necessary things, and has nothing attractive about it. It lies near the public sitting-room, where from morning to evening they smoke and play cards. The bell rings for breakfast. As I sit down at the table I find myself in a frightful company of death's-heads. Here a nose is wanting, there an eye; there the lips hang down, here the cheek is ulcered. Two of them do not look sick, but show in their faces gloom and despair. These are "kleptomaniacs" of high social rank, who, because of their powerful connections, have escaped prison by being declared irresponsible.

An unpleasant smell of iodoform takes away my appetite. Since my hands are muffled I must ask the help of my neighbour for cutting bread and pouring out wine. Round this banquet of criminals and those condemned to death goes the good Mother, the Superintendent, in her severe black and white dress, and gives each of us his poisonous medicine. With a glass holding arsenic I drink to a death's-head who pledges me in digitalis. That is gruesome, and yet one must be thankful! That makes me wild. To have to be thankful for something so petty and unpleasant!

They dress me, and undress me, and look after me like a child. The kind sister takes a fancy to me, treats me like a baby, calls me "my child," while I call her "mother."

But it does me good to be able to say this word "mother," which has not passed my lips for thirty years. The old lady, an Augustine nun, who wears the garb of the dead, because she has never lived, is mild as resignation itself, and teaches us to smile at our sufferings as though they were joys, for she knows the beneficial effects of pain. She does not utter a word of reproof nor admonition nor sermonising.

She knows the regulations of the ordinary hospitals so well that she can allow small liberties to the patients, though not to herself. She permits me to smoke in my room, and offers to make my cigarettes herself; this, however, I decline. She procures for me permission to go out beyond the regulated limits of time. When she discovers that I am actively interested in chemistry, she takes me to the learned apothecary of the hospital. He lends me books, and invites me, when I acquaint him with my theory of the composite character of so-

called simple bodies, to work in his laboratory. This nun has had a great influence on my life. I begin to reconcile myself again to my lot, and value the happy mischance which has brought me under this kindly roof.

The first book which I take out of the apothecary's library opens of itself, and my glance fastens like a falcon's on a line in the chapter headed "Phosphorus." The author states briefly that the scientific chemist, Lockyer, has demonstrated by spectral analysis that phosphorus is not a simple body, and that his report of his experiments has been submitted to the Parisian Academy of Science, which has not been able to refute his proofs.

Encouraged by this unexpected support, I take my saucepans with the not completely consumed remains of sulphur, and submit them to a bureau for chemical analysis, which promises to give me their report the next morning.

It is my birthday. When I return to the hospital I find a letter from my wife. She laments my misfortune, and she wants to join me, to look after me and love me.

The happiness of feeling myself loved in spite of everything awakes in me the need of thankfulness. But to whom? To the Unknown, who has remained hidden for so many years?

My heart smites me, I confess the unworthy falsehood of my supposed infidelity, I ask for forgiveness, and before I am aware of it, I write again a love-letter to my wife. But I postpone our meeting to a more favourable time.

The next morning I hasten to my chemist on the Boulevard Magenta, and bring his analysis of my powder in a closed cover back to the hospital. When I come to the statue of St. Louis in the courtyard of the institution, I think of the Quinze-Vingt,[3] the Sorbonne, and the Sainte Chapelle, these three buildings founded by the Saint, which I interpret to mean—"From suffering, through knowledge, to repentance."

Arrived at my room, I shut the doors carefully, and at last open the paper which is to decide my destiny. The contents are as follows; "The powder submitted to our analysis has three properties—*Colour*: grey-blacky leaves marks on paper. *Density*: very great, greater than the average density of graphite; it seems to be a harder kind of graphite. The powder burns easily, releasing oxide of carbon and carbonic acid. It therefore contains carbon."

Pure sulphur contains carbon!

I am saved. From henceforth I can prove to my friends and relations that I am no fool. I can establish the theories which I propounded a year ago in my *Antibarbarus*, a work which the reviews treated as that of a charlatan or madman, making my family consequently thrust me out as a good-for-nothing, or Cagliostro. My opponents are pulverised! My heart beats in righteous pride; I will leave the hospital, shout in the streets, bellow before the Institute, pull down the Sorbonne!… But my hands remain wrapped up, and when I stand outside in the courtyard, the high encircling walls counsel me—patience.

When I tell the apothecary the result of the analysis, he proposes to me to summon a commission before whom I should demonstrate the solution of the problem by experiment publicly. I, however, from dislike to publicity, write instead an essay on the subject, and send it to the *Temps*, where it appears after two days.

The password is given. I am answered from all sides; I find adherents, am asked to contribute to a scientific paper, and am involved in a correspondence which necessitates the continuance of my experiments.

One Sunday, the last of my stay in the purgatory of St. Louis, I watch the courtyard from the window. The two thieves walk up and down with their wives and children, and embrace each other from time to time with joyful faces, like men whom misfortune draws together in closer bonds.

My loneliness depresses me; I curse my lot and regard it as unjust, without considering that my crime surpasses theirs in meanness. The postman brings a letter from my wife, which is of an icy coldness. My success has annoyed her, and she pretends that she will not believe it till I have consulted a chemical specialist. Moreover, she warns me against all illusions which may produce disturbance of the brain. And, after all, she asks, What do I gain by all this? Can I feed a family with my chemistry?

Here is the alternative again: Love or Science. Without hesitation I write a final crushing letter, and bid her goodbye, as pleased with myself as a murderer after his deed.

In the evening I roam about the gloomy Quarter, and cross the St. Martin's canal. It is as dark as the grave, and seems exactly made to drown oneself in. I remain standing at the corner of Rue Alibert. Why Alibert? Who is he? Was not the graphite which the chemist found in my sulphur called Alibert-graphite? Well, what of it? Strangely enough, an impression of something not yet explained remains in my mind. Then I enter Rue Dieu. Why "Dieu," when the Republic has washed its hands of God? Then Rue Beaurepaire—a fine resort of criminals. Rue de Vaudry—is the Devil conducting me? I take no more notice of the names of the streets, wander on, turn round, find I have lost my way, and recoil from a shed which exhales an odour of raw flesh and bad vegetables, especially sauerkraut. Suspicious-looking figures brush past me, muttering objurgations. I become nervous, turn to the right, then to the left, and get into a dark blind alley, the haunt of filth and crime. Street girls bar my way, street boys grin at me. The scene of Christmas night is repeated, *Væ soli*.[4] Who is it that plays me these treacherous tricks as soon as I seek for solitude? Someone has brought me into this plight. Where is he? I wish to fight with him!

As soon as I begin to run there comes down rain mixed with dirty snow. At the bottom of a little street a great, coal-black gate is outlined against the sky. It seems a Cyclopean work, a gate without a palace, which opens on a sea of light. I ask a gendarme where I am. He answers, "At St. Martin's gate."

A couple of steps bring me to the great Boulevard, which I go down. The theatre clock points to a quarter-past seven. Business hours are over, and my friends are waiting for me as usual in the Café Neapel. I go on hurriedly, forgetting the hospital, trouble, and poverty. As I pass the Café du Cardinal, I brush by a table where someone is sitting. I only know him by name, but he knows me, and at the same moment his eyes interrogate me: "You here? You are not in hospital then? Then it was all gossip?"

I feel that this man is one of my unknown benefactors, for he reminds me that I am a beggar, and have nothing to do in the café. Beggar! that is the right word, which echoes in my ears, and colours my cheek with a burning blush of shame, humiliation, and rage. Six weeks ago I sat here at this table. My theatre manager sat opposite me, and called me "Dear Sir"; journalists pestered me with their interviews; photographers asked for the honour of selling portraits of me—and, today—what am I today? A beggar, a marked man, an outcast from society!

Lashed, tormented, driven, like a night-tramp, I hurry down the Boulevard back to the plague-stricken hospital. There at last, and only there, in my cell, I feel at home. When I reflect on my lot, I recognise again that invisible Hand which scourges and chastises without my knowing its object. Does it grant me fame and at the same time deny me an honourable position in the world? Must I be humbled in order to be lifted up, made low in order to be raised high? The thought keeps on recurring: "Providence is planning something with thee, and this is the beginning of thy education."

In February I leave the hospital, uncured, but healed from the temptations of the world. At parting I wished to kiss the hand of the faithful Mother, who, without speaking many words, has taught me the way of the Cross, but a feeling of reverence, as if before something holy, kept me back. May she now in spirit receive this expression of thanks from a stranger, whose

traces have been lost in distant lands.

II
St. Louis Leads Me to Orfila

Through the whole winter I continue my chemical experiments in a modestly furnished room, remain all day at home, and go to my evening meal in a restaurant where artists of different nationalities meet. Afterwards I visit the family, whose society, through a momentary fit of puritanism, I had abjured. The whole noisy set of artists are there, and I am compelled to put up with what I would fain avoid—free and easy manners, loose morals, deliberate and fashionable irreligion. There is much talent and quickness of wit among these people, together with a flow of wild spirits which has won them a sinister reputation. At any rate, I am in a domestic circle; they are kind to me and I am grateful to them, although I shut my eyes and ears to their little affairs which, after all, have nothing to do with me. Had I avoided these people out of unjustifiable pride, it would have been logical to punish me for it, but as my avoidance of them sprang from a desire to purify myself and to deepen my spiritual life in self-communion, I do not understand the ways of Providence, for I am a man of such pliable character, that out of pure sociability and fear of being ungrateful, I accommodate myself to my surroundings whatever they are. But after I had been banished so long from society, through my misfortune and the shame of my poverty, I was glad to find a shelter for the long winter evenings, although the lubricous conversation annoyed me.

Now that the existence of the invisible Hand, which guides me over rough paths, has become a certainty to me, I no longer feel solitary, and keep a careful watch over my words and actions, although, it must be confessed, I am not always successful. But whenever I slip, I am at once arrested and punished with such punctuality and exactness, that I have no doubts left regarding the interposition of a judicial power. The Unknown has become for me a personal acquaintance with whom I speak, whom I thank, whom I consult. Very often I compare Him in my mind with the “demon” of Socrates, and the consciousness that the unknown powers are on my side lends me an energy and confidence which impel me to unwonted efforts of which I was formerly incapable.

A bankrupt as regards society, I am born into another world where no one can follow me. Things which before seemed insignificant attract my attention, my nightly dreams assume the form of premonitions, I regard myself as a departed spirit, and my life proceeds in a new sphere.

After having demonstrated the presence of carbon in sulphur, I have to demonstrate the presence of hydrogen and oxygen which, according to analogy, ought to be found in it.

Two months pass in calculations and surmises till the apparatus necessary for making the experiments is exhausted. A friend advises me to go to the Sorbonne laboratory, where strangers are admitted. But my timidity and shyness of crowds does not permit me to think of it; I suspend my experiments and take a rest.

One fine spring morning I wake up in good spirits. I walk through the Rue de la grande Chaumière to the Rue de Fleurs, which leads to the Jardin du Luxembourg. The small, pretty

street is quiet, the great avenue of chestnut trees is cheerful and green, broad and straight as a racecourse. Quite in the background the statue of David rises like a boundary mark, and high over all the dome of the Pantheon, surmounted by a golden cross, seems to touch the clouds. I remain standing, delighted with the significant spectacle, when accidentally on my right my eyes fall on a dyer's shield at the end of the Rue de Fleurs. Painted on the window of the dyeing-house stand over a silver cloud the initials of my name A. S., and over them is arched a rainbow.

Omen accipio! and am reminded of the passage in Genesis, "I have set my bow in the clouds to be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

I seem no longer to touch the ground, but to float in air, and with winged feet enter the garden, which is now quite empty. In this early morning hour I am the exclusive possessor of this park, with all its glory of roses, and I know all my flowers in their beds—chrysanthemums, verbenas, and begonias.

Going down the racecourse I reach the boundary mark, pass through the trellised gate to the Rue Soufflot, and turn to the Boulevard St. Michel, where Blanchard's antiquarian bookshop attracts my attention. Casually I take up an old chemical work by Orfila, open it at haphazard and read, "Sulphur has been classified among the simple bodies. Davy and Berthollet, however, have endeavoured to prove by their able experiments that it contains hydrogen, oxygen, and a third basal element which has not yet been distinguished."

One may imagine my almost religious ecstasy at this well-nigh miraculous discovery. Davy and Berthollet had demonstrated the presence of hydrogen and oxygen, and I of carbon. It rests, therefore, with me to lay down the formula for sulphur.

Two days later my name was entered on the list of the scientific faculty of the Sorbonne (founded by St. Louis!), and I received permission to work in the laboratory. The first morning I went there was for me a solemn occasion. I was under no illusions as regards the professors, who had received me with the cold politeness due even to a foreign intruder. I knew that I should never be able to convince them, but I felt simultaneously a calm still joy, and the courage of a martyr who faces a hostile crowd, because for me at my age youth was the natural enemy.

As I crossed over the square before the little church of the Sorbonne, I found the door of it open and entered it, without any definite reason; the Virgin Mother and Child smiled at me in a friendly way; the Cross left me, as always, cold and without comprehension of its meaning.

My new acquaintance, St. Louis, the friend of the poor and plague-stricken, receives the homage of young theologians. Can it be, after all, that he is my patron, my guardian angel, who drove me to the hospital, so that I, purified by the fire of mental suffering, should win again that glory which leads to dishonour and contempt? Was it he who directed me to Blanchard's bookshop and hither also? See how superstitious the atheist has become!

As I survey the memorial tablets which record successful experiments, I vow, in the case of my success, to receive no worldly honour.

The hour has struck, and I run the gauntlet of the young students who regard my undertaking with scorn and prejudice.

About fourteen days have passed, and I have discovered incontrovertible proofs that sulphur is a threefold combination of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen. I thank the Director of the laboratory, who, as it appears, takes no interest in my affairs, and leave this new purgatory full of deep, unspeakable joy.

In the mornings when I do walk in the churchyard of Montparnasse, I visit the park of the Palais Luxembourg. A few days after my departure from the Sorbonne I discover, in the centre of the churchyard, a monument of classical beauty. A white marble medallion shows the noble features of an old man of science, whom the inscription on the pedestal describes as "Orfila: Chemist and Physiologist." It was my friend and protector who, in later years, has so often guided me through the labyrinth of chemical experiments.

A week later, passing through the Rue d'Assas, I stop to admire a house which looks like a convent. A large shield on the wall informs me that it is "Hôtel Orfila."

Again and again Orfila!

III
Paradise Regained

The summer and autumn of the year 1895 I count, on the whole, among the happiest stages of my eventful life. All my attempts succeed; unknown friends bring me food as the ravens did to Elijah. Money flows in; I can buy books and scientific instruments; among them a microscope, which reveals to me the secrets of life.

Dead to the world, as I have renounced the vain delights of Paris, I remain in my quarter, where every morning I visit the dead in the churchyard of Montparnasse, and thence descend to the Luxembourg Garden to greet my flowers. Sometimes one of my fellow-countrymen on his way through Paris visits me in order to invite me to breakfast on the other side of the river, and to go to the theatre with him. I decline, because the right bank is forbidden to me; it is the so-called "world," the world of the living and of vanity.

Although I cannot formulate it distinctly, a kind of religion has been forming in me. It is rather a condition of the soul than a view of things based on dogmatic instruction; a chaos of sensations which condense themselves more or less into thoughts.

I have bought a Catholic prayer book, and read it with a collected mind; the Old Testament comforts and chastens me in a somewhat obscure fashion, while the New leaves me cold. This does not prevent a Buddhistic book having a stronger influence on me than all other sacred books, because it ranks positive suffering above mere abstinence. Buddha shows the courage when in full possession of vital energy and enjoyment of married happiness to renounce wife and child, while Christ avoids every contact with the permitted joys of this world.

For the rest, I do not brood much over the sensations which spring up in me; I keep myself indifferent and let them come and go, approving for myself the same freedom which I owe to others.

The great event of the Paris season was Brunetière's war-cry, "The bankruptcy of Science." Dedicated from my childhood to the natural sciences, and later on a disciple of Darwin, I had discovered how unsatisfactory the scientific method is, which accepts the mechanism of the universe without presupposing a Mechanician. The weakness of the system showed itself in the gradual degeneration of science; it had marked off a boundary line over which one was not to step. "We," it said, "have solved all problems; the world has no more riddles." This presumptuous lie had annoyed me already in 1880, and during the following fifteen years I occupied myself with a revision of the natural sciences. In 1884 I doubted the supposed composition of the atmosphere. The nitrogen of the air is not identical with the nitrogen obtained by analysis of a nitrogenous body. In 1891 I visited the Scientific Institute in Lund in order to compare the spectrum analyses of these two sorts of nitrogen whose difference I had discovered. Do I need to describe the reception which the learned scientists gave me? Now in this year, 1895, the discovery of argon has confirmed my former hypotheses, and given a fresh impulse to my investigations which had been interrupted by a foolish marriage. It is not Science which is bankrupt, only the antiquated, degenerate science, and Brunetière was right although he was wrong.

While all acknowledged the identity of matter and called themselves Monists, without being so really, I went further and drew the extreme logical inferences of the theory by obliterating the boundaries between matter and so-called spirit. Thus, in 1894, in my treatise *Antibarbarus*, I had dealt with the psychology of sulphur by explaining it through "ontogeny," that is, the embryonic development of sulphur.

Anyone who is interested in the subject may be referred to the work *Sylva Sylvarum*, which I composed in the summer and autumn of 1895, with a feeling of pride in my perspicuity at having divined the secrets of creation, especially in the vegetable and animal kingdoms. He may further consult my *Churchyard Studies*, which show how in loneliness and sorrow I was brought back to a wavering apprehension of God and immortality.

IV
The Fall and Paradise Lost

Guided into this new world in which no one can follow me, I conceived an aversion to social intercourse, and have an unconquerable desire to free myself from my surroundings. I therefore informed my friends that I wished to go to Meudon to write a book which required solitude and quiet.

At the same time insignificant disagreements led to a breach with the circle which met at the Restaurant, so that one day I found myself entirely isolated. The first result was an extraordinary expansion of my inner sense; a spiritual power which longed to realise itself. I believed myself in the possession of unlimited strength, and pride inspired me with the wild idea of seeing whether I could perform a miracle.

At an earlier period, in the great crisis of my life, I had observed that I could exercise a telepathic influence on absent friends. In popular legends writers have occupied themselves with the subjects of telepathy and witchcraft. I wish neither to do myself an injustice, nor altogether to acquit myself of wrongdoing, but I believe that my evil will was not so evil as the counterstroke which I received. A devouring curiosity, an outbreak of perverted love, caused by my frightful loneliness, inspired me with an intense longing to be reunited with my wife and child, both of whom I still loved. But how was this to be brought about, as divorce proceedings were already on foot? Some extraordinary event, a common misfortune, a thunderbolt, a conflagration… in brief, some catastrophe which unites two hearts, just as in novels two persons are reconciled at the sickbed of a third. Stop! there I have it! A sickbed! Children are always more or less ill; a mother's fear exaggerates the danger; a telegram follows, and all is said.

I had no idea of practising magic, but an unwholesome instinct suggested I must set to work with the picture of my dear little daughter, who later on was to be my only comfort in a cursed existence.

Further on in this work I will relate the results of my manoeuvre, in which my evil purpose seemed to work with the help of symbolical operations. Meantime the results had to be waited for, and I continued my work with a feeling of undefined uneasiness and a foreboding of fresh misfortune.

One evening, as I sat alone before my microscope, an occurrence happened which made all the deeper impression on me because I did not understand it. For four days I had let a nut germinate, and now detached the germ. This had the shape of a heart, not much larger than the core of a pear. Standing between two cotyledons it looked like a diminutive human brain. One may imagine my surprise when I saw on the glass-slide of the microscope two tiny hands, white as alabaster, folded as if in prayer. Was it a vision, an hallucination? Oh, no! It was a crushing reality which made me shudder. The little hands were stretched out towards me, immovable, as if adjuring me. I could count the five fingers, the thumb shorter than the others—real woman's or child's hands.

I made a friend, who surprised me watching this astonishing sight, witness it also. He required to be no clairvoyant in order to see two clasped hands which besought the sympathy of the beholder.

What was it? Nothing but the two first rudimentary leaves of a walnut tree, the *Juglans regia*—nothing else. Yet the fact was undeniable that ten human fingers were clasped in a beseeching gesture as if expressing, "*De profundis clamavi ad te.*" But as a still too incredulous empiric, I passed by the occurrence callously.

The fall has happened. I feel the mercilessness of the unknown powers weigh heavily upon me. The hand of the invisible is lifted and the blows fall thickly upon my head.

In the first place, my anonymous friend who has supported me hitherto, feels insulted and deserts me, because I had written him a presumptuous letter. So I am left without means.

Moreover, when I receive the proofs of my work *Sylva Sylvarum*, I find the text in complete confusion. Not only are the pages mixed and wrongly numbered, but the different parts are confused, so that in an ironical way they represent the great disorder which rules in nature. After endless hesitations and delays, the pamphlet is at last printed, but when the printer sends me the bill, I find that it amounts to more than double the sum originally agreed upon. I am obliged, to my regret, to pawn my microscope, my black suit, and some remaining ornaments, but, at any rate, my work is printed, and I have for the first time in my life the conviction that I have said something original, great, and beautiful. In a mood of exultation, easy to understand, I carry the packet to the post, and making a contemptuous gesture towards the hostile heavens, I throw it in the letter-box with the thought, "Listen, Sphinx, I have solved thy riddle, and defy thee!"

On my return to the house the hotel bill is handed to me. Irritated by this unexpected stroke, for I have already lived a year here, I begin to notice trifles which I had formerly overlooked. For instance, in three adjoining rooms pianos are being played. I am convinced it is a plot of some Scandinavian ladies whose company I have avoided.

Three pianos! and I cannot leave the hotel, for I have no money. Cursing heaven, these ladies, and my fate, I go to sleep. The next morning I am awoken by an unexpected noise. They are hammering nails in the room which is near my bed; then more hammering begins on the other side. A silly trick quite in keeping with the character of these female pianists, nothing more! But when after supper I lie down to sleep as usual, there ensues such a din overhead that some of the plaster falls from the ceiling on my head.

I go to the landlady and complain about the other lodgers. She declares that she has heard nothing, but, for the rest, is very polite, and promises to turn out anyone who dares to disturb me, for she is anxious to keep me in her hotel, which is not prospering very well.

Without attaching much credit to the word of a woman, I still believe she means to treat me well in her own interests. None the less the noises continue, and I come to the conclusion that these ladies—stupid people!—want to make me believe that there are "rapping spirits" in the house. At the same time my companions in the restaurant alter their behaviour towards me, and a concealed hostility shows itself in their envious looks and innuendoes. Weary of the struggle, I bid farewell to the hotel and restaurant, and depart, plundered to my last shirt, leaving behind my books and other things. On February 21, 1896, I entered the Hôtel Orfila.

V
PURGATORY

Hôtel Orfila has a monastic appearance, and is a boarding establishment for Catholic students. It is superintended by a quiet, amiable Abbé, and peace, order, and morality prevail here. What especially comforts me after so many annoyances is, that women are not admitted here. The house is old, the rooms are low, the passages dark, and the wooden staircases wind and twist hither and thither as if in a labyrinth. There is an air of mysteriousness about the whole building, which for a long time has attracted me. My room looks out on a cul-de-sac, so that standing in the middle of it, one sees nothing but a moss-grown wall with two small round windows in it. But when I sit at my table close to the window, I have an uncommonly pleasant lookout. Under me there is a circular wall overgrown with ivy surrounding a courtyard, where young girls walk under plane trees and acacias. In the centre there stands a charming Gothic chapel. Somewhat farther on one sees high walls with numerous little barred windows, which remind one of a convent. Still farther away are old, half-hidden houses crowned by a forest of chimneys, and in the extreme distance one sees the tower of Notre-Dame des Champs surmounted by a cross and weathercock. In my room there hangs a faded likeness of St. Vincent de Paul, and a picture of St. Peter looks down on my bed. St. Peter, the opener of the gates of heaven. What an ironical situation for me, who some years ago threw ridicule on the Apostle in a fantastic drama!

Quite contented with my room, I sleep well the first night. I edify myself by reading the book of Job, and arrive at an ever clearer conviction that the Eternal has handed me over to Satan to be tried. This thought comforts me again, and suffering seems to me a mark of confidence on the part of the Almighty.

Now things begin to happen which cannot be explained without the cooperation of the unknown powers. From this point I use the entries in my journal, which have gradually become very numerous, giving them in a condensed form.

For a long while my chemical studies have lain in abeyance. In order to revive my interest, and to make a decisive stroke, I resume the study of the problem of making gold. The starting-point of the investigation consists in the question: Why does sulphate of iron in a solution of choloro-aurate of sodium precipitate gold? The answer is, because iron and sulphur are essential constituents of gold. The proof is that all natural compounds of sulphur and iron contain more or less gold. So I begin to experiment with solutions of sulphate of iron.

One morning I awoke with the idea of making a trip into the country, though it is quite against my tastes and my habits. When I, more by accident than design, reach the station of Montparnasse, I take the train for Meudon. I go into the village itself, which I visit for the first time, traverse the main street, and turn to the right into a narrow alley confined by walls on both sides. Twenty steps before me I see half-buried in the ground the figure of a Roman knight in grey iron armour. It looks very well modelled, but, as I approach, I see that it is only

rough metal-smelting.

But I hold my illusion fast, since it pleases me. The knight looks towards the wall, and following the direction of his gaze I notice something written on the mortar with a piece of coal. It looks like the letters F and S interlaced, which are the initials of my wife's name. She loves me still! The next moment I see, as by a flash, that it is the chemical symbol for ferrum (iron) and sulphur, and the secret of gold lies revealed before my gaze. I search the ground and find two leaden seals fastened together by a string. One displays the initials V. P., the other, a king's crown. Without committing myself to a further interpretation of this adventure, I return to Paris with the lively impression of having experienced something bordering on the marvellous.

In my fireplace I burn coals which, because of their round and regular shape, are called "monks' heads." One day when the fire is nearly extinguished I take out a mass of coal of fantastic shape. It resembles a cock's head with a splendid comb joined to what looks like a human trunk with twisted limbs. It might have been a demon from some medieval witches' sabbath.

The second day I take out again a fine group of two gnomes or drunken dwarfs, who embrace each other while their clothes flutter in the wind. It is a masterpiece of primitive culture.

The third day it is a Madonna and Child in the Byzantine style, of incomparable beauty of outline. After I have drawn copies of all three in black chalk, I place them on my table. A friendly painter visits me; he regards the three statuettes with growing curiosity, and asks who has "made" them. In order to try him, I mention the name of a Norwegian sculptor. "No," he says, "I should rather be inclined to ascribe them to Kittelsen, the famous illustrator of the Swedish legends."

I do not believe in demons, and yet I wish to see the impression which my little figures make on the sparrows who generally take their crumbs from my windowsill. So I place them there. The sparrows are frightened and remain aloof. There is then some likeness in the figures which they can distinguish, and some reality in this conjunction of dead material and fire.

The sun, as it warms my little figures, makes the demon with the cock's head collapse. This reminds me of the country-people's saying that if the dwarfs wait too long till sunrise, they die.

Things happen in the hotel which disquiet me. The morning after my arrival I find on the board where the keys of the rooms are hung up, on the ground-floor, a letter addressed to a Mr. X., a student, who has the same name as my wife. The postmark is "Dornach," the name of the Austrian village where my wife and child live. But since I am certain that there is no post-office at Dornach, the matter remains mysterious. This letter, placed in such a conspicuous position as to challenge the eye, is followed by others. The second bears the postmark "Vienna," and is addressed to a Dr. Bitter; the third displays the Polish pseudonym, "Schmulachowsky."

The Devil certainly has a share in this game, for this name is a false one, and I understand well for whom the letter is intended—for a deadly enemy of mine who lives in Berlin. At last there arrives a letter with the postmark "Vienna," which, according to the printed envelope, comes from the chemical bureau of Dr. Eder. So they are trying to spy out my gold-making experiments! Without doubt a plot is on foot here, but the Devil has mixed these sharpers'

cards. These duffers do not consider that I keep my eyes open towards all quarters of the compass.

I have made inquiries of the waiter regarding Mr. X., but he gives me in all simplicity to understand that he is an Alsatian—nothing more. One fine morning I return from my work and see in the letter-rack quite close to my keys a post card. For a moment I feel tempted to solve the riddle by looking at the post card, but my good angel paralysed my hand, just as the young man came out of his hiding-place behind the door. I look him in the face and am startled; he is exactly like my wife. We greet each other silently, and each goes his way.

I have never been able to unravel this conspiracy, since I did not know the actors in this drama. Moreover, my wife has neither brothers nor cousins. This undefined threatening spectre of a continuous vengeance tortured me for half a year. I bore it like everything else as a punishment for known and unknown sins.

At the New Year a stranger turned up in our restaurant. He was an American artist, and came exactly at the right time to put new life into our depressed society. But though he was an active and bold spirit with cosmopolitan ideas and good company too, he inspired me with an undefined mistrust. In spite of his confident air his demeanour revealed to me his real position. The crash came quicker than one expected.

One evening the unfortunate man came into my room and asked for permission to remain there a short time. He looked like a lost man, and such in fact he was. His landlord had driven him out of his studio, his grisette had left him, he was head over ears in debt, and his creditors were dunning him; he was insulted in the streets by the supporters of his unpaid models. But what depressed him most of all was that the cruel landlord had retained his picture intended for the Champ de Mars Exhibition. The originality of its subject had given him good grounds to hope for its success. It displayed an “emancipated woman” crucified and cursed by the mob.

Since he was also heavily in debt to the restaurant, he had to go about the streets, hungry. Among other things he confessed that he had taken morphia enough to kill two people, but death apparently did not yet want him. After an earnest discussion, we agreed to go to another quarter, and there eat our meals in some obscure cook-shop. I said I would not desert him, and that he should pluck up new courage and begin a new picture for the exhibition of independent artists.

This man becomes now my sole companion, and his misfortunes cause me a double share of suffering, so closely do I identify myself with him. I do so in a spirit of defiance, but presently gain an interesting experience thereby.

He reveals to me his whole past. He is a German by birth, but partly because of family disagreements, partly because of a lampoon for which he had been brought into court, he has spent seven years in America. I discover in him intelligence above the average, a melancholy temperament, and unbridled sensuality. But behind this mask of a cosmopolitan I begin to divine another character which disquiets me, and the full discovery of which I postpone to a favourable opportunity.

Thus pass two months, while I live in union with this stranger and with him go through all the troubles of an unfortunate artist over again, without remembering that I am a made man, yes, and rank among the dramatic celebrities of Paris, though, as a chemical discoverer, I think little of it now. Moreover, my companion loves me only when I conceal my successes. If I am obliged to refer to them in passing, he is annoyed, and assumes the role of an

unfortunate nonentity, so that at last, out of sympathy, I put on the air of an old decayed wreck. This imperceptibly depresses me, while he, who has his future still before him, elevates himself again at my expense. I am like a corpse buried at the root of a tree which sucks nutriment out of the decomposing life, and grows upwards.

At this time I study Buddhist books, and wonder at the self-denial with which I mortify myself for another. But good works deserve a reward, and mine did not remain wanting.

One day the *Revue des Revues* comes with a likeness of the American prophet and empiric doctor, Francis Schlatter, who in the year 1895 cured five thousand sick persons and then disappeared without ever being seen again. Now this man's features resembled in a remarkable way those of my new companion. To confirm my supposition, I show the *Revue* to a Swedish sculptor with whom I have an appointment in the Café de Versailles. He notices the resemblance at once, and reminds me of a remarkable coincidence of circumstances. Both the doctor and my friend were Germans by birth, and worked in America. Still further, the disappearance of Schlatter coincided with the appearance of our friend in Paris. Since I am initiated a little into the use of occultist expressions, I start the hypothesis that Francis Schlatter is the "double" who leads an independent life, without being aware of it.

When I mentioned the word "double" my sculptor was startled, and drew my attention to the fact that our friend always occupied two houses, one on the right and the other on the left bank of the river. Moreover, I learn that my mysterious friend lives a double life in this sense, that, after he has spent the evening in half-philosophic, half-religious discussions with me, he is always seen late at night in Bullier's dancing-saloon.

There is a sure means of proving the identity of these two "doubles," as the *Revue des Revues* contains a facsimile letter of Francis Schlatter. "Come to dinner tonight," I suggested. "I will dictate to him Schlatter's letter; if the two handwritings, and especially the signatures, resemble each other, it will be a proof."

At dinner the same evening everything is confirmed, the handwriting and signatures are identical. A little surprised, the artist submits to our examination; at last he asks: "What is your object in this?"

"Do you know Francis Schlatter?"

"I have never heard the name."

"Don't you remember that doctor in America last year."

"Oh, yes! that quack!"

He remembers, and I show him the portrait and facsimile.

He laughs sceptically, and remains quite calm and indifferent. That is all.

Some days later I am sitting with my mysterious friend, with our glasses of absinthe, on the terrace of the Café de Versailles, when a fellow in workman's clothes, with a malicious aspect, suddenly stops before the café, then rushes through the customers, and bawls at my friend in his loudest voice: "At last I have you, you sharper, who fleeced me! What is the meaning of it? First of all, you order a cross for thirty francs, and then you disappear. Son of a dog! Do you think a cross like that makes itself?"

He continued to rage. The café waiters vainly attempted to remove him; he threatened to fetch the police, while the unfortunate accused, motionless, dumb, and prostrate, like a condemned man, remained exposed to the gaze of a circle of artists who all knew him more or less. When the commotion was over, I asked him with a bewildered mind, as if I had witnessed a witches' sabbath: "What cross worth thirty francs? I don't understand a word of the business?"

"It was a model of Joan of Arc's cross which I was going to use for my picture of the crucified woman."

“He certainly was a devil, that workman.”

After a pause, I continue: “It is odd, but one does not play unpunished either with the Cross or with Joan of Arc.”

“You believe in them?”

“I don’t know!—But the thirty pieces of silver!”

“Enough! Enough!” he exclaims in a tone of vexation.

From this evening a certain coldness ensues between us. Our acquaintance had now lasted four terrible months. My companion had studied in quite a new school, and had time to strike out new paths in his art, so that he could finally throw aside “the crucified woman” as an old toy. He had learned to regard suffering as the only real joy in life, and so had attained to resignation. He was a hero in his poverty. I admired him when twice in the same day he measured on foot the distance between Montrouge and the Market Halls with boots worn down at the heel, and without food. In the evening, when he had visited the offices of seventeen illustrated papers, and sold three drawings, without however being paid for them at once, he quickly swallowed two sous’ worth of bread and hurried to the Bal Bullier.

At last, in silent agreement, we dissolved the partnership we had entered on for mutual help. We both felt that it was enough, and that our destinies must go on to separate fulfilments. When we exchanged our last farewells, I knew that they were our last. I have never seen the man again, nor heard what has become of him.

In the course of the spring, while I was feeling depressed by my own and my friend’s untoward destiny, I received a letter from the children of my first marriage, informing me that they had been very ill in hospital. When I compared the time of their illness with my mischievous attempt at magic, I was alarmed. I had frivolously played with hidden forces, and now my evil purpose, guided by an unseen Hand, had reached its goal, and struck my heart. I do not excuse myself, and only ask the reader to remember this fact, in case he should ever feel inclined to practise magic, especially those forms of it called wizardry, or more properly witchcraft, and whose reality has been placed beyond all doubt by De Rochas.[5]

One Sunday before Easter I went very early through the Jardin de Luxembourg, crossed the street, and passed under the arcades of the Odeon; I stood still before an edition of Balzac in a blue binding, and by chance picked out his novel *Séraphita*. Why just that one? Perhaps it is an unconscious recollection of reading a criticism of my book, *Sylva Sylvarum*, in the periodical *Initiation*, in which I was called “a countryman of Swedenborg.” When I got home I opened the book, which was almost entirely unknown to me, for so many years had passed between my first acquaintance with it and this second reading. It was like a new work to me, and now my mind was prepared for it, I swallowed down the contents of this extraordinary book wholesale. I had never read anything of Swedenborg, for in his own native land and mine he passed for a charlatan, dreamer, and quack. But now I was seized with enthusiastic admiration, as I heard this heavenly giant of the last century speak by the mouth of such a genial French interpreter.

I read now with religious attention, and found on page 16 the 20th of March given as the day on which Swedenborg died. I stopped, considered, and consulted the almanac; it was exactly the 20th of March, and also Palm Sunday. It was then that Swedenborg entered into my life, in which he was to play such a great part as judge and master, and on the anniversary of his death he brought me the palm, whether of the victor or the martyr—who could say?

Séraphita became my gospel, and caused me to enter into such a close connection with the other world, that I felt sick of life, and an irresistible homesickness for heaven seized me. Doubtless, I was being prepared for a higher existence. I despised the earth, the impure earth,

its inhabitants and their doings. I felt like a perfectly righteous man, whom the Eternal was testing, and whom the purgatory of this world would soon make fit for deliverance. The courage produced by the consciousness of my confidential relation to the powers was always increased, when I saw my scientific experiments crowned with success. According to my computations and the observations of the metallurgists, I had succeeded in making gold, and I believed I could prove it. I sent my proofs to Rouen to a friendly chemist. He opposed me with counterarguments, and for eight days I could find no flaw in them. Then turning over by chance the *Chemistry* of my Master Orfila, I learned the secret of my mistake.

This old, forgotten, and despised chemical treatise of 1830 helped me at the critical moment, and became my oracle. My friends Orfila and Swedenborg protected, encouraged, and chastised me. They did not appear to me in dreams or waking visions, but in small daily occurrences showed me that they did not leave me alone in the vicissitudes of my life. The spirits had become naturalistic like the times, which were no longer content with visions.

The following, for instance, cannot be explained by the word, “coincidence.”

I had succeeded in producing spots of gold on paper, and I wished now to do the same on a large scale in the furnace. A couple of hundred experiments failed, and I laid the blowpipe aside in despair. One morning, I walked to the Observatory Avenue, where I often used to admire the group of the four quarters of the world, for the secret reason that the most graceful of the female figures resembled my wife. It stood under the armillary sphere and the sign Pisces, and a pair of sparrows had built their nest behind her back. At the foot of the monument I found two pieces of cardboard cut in an oval shape, one stamped with the number 207, the other with the number 28. These are the signs for the atomic weight of lead, and of silicium. I made a note of the discovery, and when I got home began a series of experiments with lead, leaving silicium for another time. As I was aware, from my knowledge of metallurgy, that lead refined in a furnace, fed with bone-ashes, always produces a recognisable amount of silver, and this silver, a little gold, I drew the conclusion that phosphate of lime, being the chief constituent of bone-ashes, must be an important element in the gold produced from lead.

And, as a matter of fact, molten lead poured upon a deposit of chalk containing phosphate of lime, also assumed on its underside a golden colour. The powers, being unpropitious, did not allow me to finish my experiments. A year later, in Lund, a sculptor, who made experiments in his own potteries, gave me some glaze composed of lead and silicium, by means of which I for the first time produced in the furnace mineralised gold of great beauty. Out of gratitude, I showed him the two pieces of cardboard numbered 207 and 28. Is one to call it “accident” or “coincidence,” this sign of an irrefragable logic?

I repeat that I have never been plagued by visions, but actual objects sometimes seem to me to assume a human shape in a grandiose style. Thus, one day the cushion which my head has been pressing during a midday siesta, looks like a marble head carved in the style of Michaelangelo. One evening when I return home in the company of the “double” of the American empiric doctor, I discover, in the half-shadow of the alcove where my bed is, what looks like a gigantic Zeus reposing on it. Before this unexpected sight my friend remains seized with an almost religious fear. His artistic eye comprehends at once the beauty of the outline. “There is a great forgotten art,” he says, “born again! That is where we ought to learn drawing!”

The more one looks at it, the more lifelike and terrible it appears. Obviously, the spirits have become realists like the rest of us mortals. It is no mere accident, for on certain days the cushion takes the shape of terrible monsters, such as Gothic dragons and serpents; and one night after I have spent a hilarious evening, I am greeted on my return by a medieval demon,

a devil with horned head and other appurtenances. I was not at all frightened; it looked so natural, but it also made on my mind the impression of something abnormal and unearthly.

When I invited my friend the sculptor to look at it, he was not at all astonished, and called me into his studio, where a pencil sketch hanging on the wall surprised me by its grace of outline.

"Where have you got that from?" I asked. "A Madonna, isn't it?

"Yes, a Madonna of Versailles, copied from the floating plants in a Swiss lake!"

A new-discovered art of nature! Naturalistic clairvoyance! Why blame naturalism when it introduces a new art full of capacities of growth and development. The old gods return, and the watchword of the poets and artists, "Back to Pan!" has roused such a strong echo that nature has awoken from her long sleep of centuries. Nothing can exist on earth without the concurrence of the powers. Now naturalism did once exist, therefore it ought to be, and what ought it obviously to be—a newborn harmony of matter and spirit.

The sculptor is a seer. He tells me that he has seen Orpheus and Christ side by side in a block of stone, and adds that he intends to return there and use them as models for a group for the Salon.

As I went down the Rue de Rennes one evening with the same seer, he drew my attention to a bookshop window where coloured lithographs were exhibited. They represented fantastic scenes with human bodies whose heads were replaced by pansies. In spite of my botanical observations, I had never before seen the likeness between the pansy and the human face. My friend seemed greatly surprised at it.

"Only think!" he said. "When I came home last evening the pansies in my window-box looked at me like so many human faces. I thought it was a hallucination of my overexcited nerves. And here are these pictures drawn a long time ago. It is then a fact and no illusion, for this unknown artist has made the same discovery before me."

We make progress in the art of vision, and this time it is I who discover a Napoleon with his marshals on the cupola of the dome of the Hôtel des Invalides. When one comes from Montparnasse to the Boulevard des Invalides, one sees above the Rue Oudinot the cupola, the corbels, and cornices of the substructure of the cupola displayed in the full light of the setting sun, and apparently assuming human forms which appear more or less distant according to the point of observation from which they are viewed. There are Napoleon, Bernadotte, Berthier, and my friend copies them, "after nature."

"How would you explain this phenomenon?" he asks.

"Explain? Has one ever explained anything by replacing one heap of words with another heap of words?"

"You don't think, then, that the architect has worked according to a hidden plan?"

"Listen, my friend. Jules Mansard, who built the dome in 1706, could not well have foreseen the silhouette of Napoleon who was born in 1769. That is a sufficient answer!"

Often I have dreams at night, and these dreams prognosticate my future, warn me against dangers, and reveal to me secrets. For instance, a long-deceased friend appears to me in a dream, and shows me a piece of money of uncommon size. On my asking where this remarkable piece came from, he answers, "From America," and disappears.

The next day I receive a letter from America from a friend whom I had heard nothing of for twenty years, informing me that an order in connection with the Chicago Exhibition had been following me in vain all over Europe. It carried with it an honorarium of 12,000 francs, an enormous sum for me in my desperate circumstances, which I could very easily find use for. This 12,000 francs would have secured my future, and no one besides myself would have guessed that the loss of this money was a punishment for an evil deed which I had committed

out of anger at the treachery of a literary colleague.

In another dream of wider significance I saw Jonas Lie,[6] with a gilt bronze clock curiously ornamented. Some days later, when I went to walk on the Boulevard St. Michel, a watchmaker's shopwindow attracted my attention. "Jonas Lie's clock!" I exclaimed aloud.

It was indeed the same. It was crowned by a celestial globe on which two female figures leaned; the works were supported by four pillars, and on the globe a date-indicator pointed to the 13th of August. In a future chapter I will explain what the fateful 13th of August brought with it. This and other occurrences took place during my stay in the Hôtel Orfila between 6th February and 19th July, 1896. Concurrently with them a larger adventure pursued its often interrupted course till, with my exit from the hotel, a new section of my life began.

Spring has returned; the valley of tears and sighs under my window is green and blossoming. Foliage hides the bare ground and its unsightliness. The Gehenna has turned into a Vale of Sharon full of lilies, lilacs, and acacias. I feel very melancholy, but the merry laughter of the girls who play unseen beneath the trees, reaches me and rouses me again to life. Life hurries by and old age approaches: Wife, children, home, dispersed and wrecked; without is spring, within is autumn.

The Book of Job and the Lamentations of Jeremiah comfort me, for, at any rate, there is a certain resemblance between Job's lot and mine. Am I not smitten with incurable boils? Am I not visited with poverty and forsaken by my friends? "I go blackened, but not by the sun; I am a brother to dragons and a companion to ostriches; my skin is black and falleth from me, and my bones are burned with heat. My harp is turned to mourning, and my pipe unto the voice of them that weep."

Thus Job. And Jeremiah with two words fathoms the depth of my sadness: "I forgat prosperity."

In this mood I sit one oppressive afternoon bent over my work, when, all of a sudden, behind the foliage of the garden in front of me, I hear the playing of a piano. Like a warhorse at the sound of the trumpet, I prick up my ears, straighten myself, and in a great state of excitement struggle for breath. Someone is playing Schumann's *Aufschwung*; and what is more, *he* is playing—he, my Russian friend, my pupil who called me "Father," because he owed all his culture to me, my assistant who called me "Master" and kissed my hands, whose life began where mine ended. He has come from Vienna to Paris to ruin me, as he ruined me in Vienna—and why? Because Fate has arranged that his present wife, before he knew her, was my sweetheart. Was it my fault that matters so fell out? Surely not, and yet he hated me with a deadly hatred, hindered my plays from being accepted, wove intrigues, and deprived me of the barest means of subsistence. Then, in a fit of rage, I reversed the spear and struck him, indeed, in such a brutal and cowardly way, that it made me feel like a murderer. The fact that he has come to kill me comforts me, for death alone can deliver me from my pangs of conscience.

It was he, then, who lurked behind those letters with false addresses which I always saw near the porter's lodge. Well, let him strike! I will not defend myself. For he is right, and my life is nothing to me. He continues to play the *Aufschwung*, which no one can play so well. He plays invisible behind the green wall, and his magic harmonies rise above its blossoming creepers like butterflies flying towards the sun.

But why is he playing? Is it to inform me of his coming to frighten me and drive me to flight? Perhaps I shall find out in the restaurant where the other Russians have long been talking about the arrival of their countryman.

I go for my evening meal there, and already at the doorway encounter hostile glances. The whole company, informed of my conflict with the Russian, has turned against me. In order to disarm them, I open fire myself.

"Popoffsky is in Paris?" I ask.

"No, not yet," one of them answers.

"Yes," says another, "he has been seen in the office of the *Mercure de France*."

They disagree with each other, and at the end I am as wise as before, but I pretend to believe all I am told. But the obvious enmity with which I am regarded in the restaurant makes me swear not to go there again. I am sorry, for some of them were really congenial to me. Thus, once more, this cursed enemy drives me into loneliness and exile. My hatred against him is again aroused, and torments and poisons me. I don't look forward to death now! Shall the hand of an inferior man crush me? The humiliation for me and the honour for him would be too great. I will accept the challenge and defend myself. In order to obtain clear information I go to find a Danish painter, a friend of Popoffsky, in the Rue de la Santé behind the Val de Grâce. Six weeks before he had come to Paris, and, although formerly a friend of mine, had at our first meeting greeted me in almost a hostile way. The next day, however, he visited me, invited me to his studio, and said so many kind things to me that I could not help doubting the genuineness of his friendship. When I asked him about Popoffsky, he answered evasively, but confirmed the rumour of his being about to come shortly to Paris.

"In order to murder me," I added.

"Yes; take care!"

On the morning on which I wished to return the Dane's visit, by a curious chance I found my way barred by an enormous Danish dog, which reposed in all its hideousness on the ground of the courtyard. For a moment I hesitated, then I turned back, and on arriving at home thanked the powers for their warning, for I had certainly escaped some unknown danger.

Some days afterwards, when I wished to repeat my visit, on the threshold of the open door there sat a child with a playing-card in its hand. I glanced at the card superstitiously; it was the ten of spades. "They are playing an evil game in this house," I said to myself, and turned back again.

In the evening, after the scene in the restaurant, I was almost determined to carry out my plan, in spite of dog and card, but fate willed it otherwise. In the restaurant of the Lilas brewery I met my man. He was delighted to see me, and we sat down on the terrace. We recalled our common experiences in Vienna; he seemed to be the same good friend that he was before, narrated his stories with enthusiasm, forgot our former small disagreements, and confessed the truth of some things which he had before publicly denied. Suddenly he appeared to remember his duty or some promises which he had given; he became taciturn, cold, hostile, and obviously vexed that he had been betrayed into disclosing secrets. He answered my direct question whether Popoffsky was in Paris with a brief "No," which was plainly false, and we parted.

Here I must remark that the Dane had been Frau Popoffsky's lover before me, and that from the time she had given him up on my account, he cherished a grudge against me. Now he played the role of family friend with Popoffsky, who knew nothing of his former relation with his wife.

Schumann's *Aufschwung* sounds over the deep-leaved trees, but the musician remains invisible and leaves me doubtful as before as to the exact house in which he lives. For a whole month the music continues from four to five in the afternoon.

One morning, as I go down the Rue de Fleurs, in order to comfort myself by looking at my rainbow in the dyer's window, and enter the Jardin de Luxembourg, which, with all its trees in blossom, is as beautiful as a fairytale, I find on the ground two dry twigs which have been broken off by the wind. They formed the two Greek letters "p" and "y," the first and last letters of Popoffsky. He *was*, then, persecuting me, and the powers wished to guard me

against the danger. I felt uneasy in spite of these signs of grace from the unseen. I invoked the protection of Providence, I read the imprecatory psalms, I hated my enemy with an Old Testament hatred, while I lacked the courage to use the black magic which I had recently studied. “Make haste O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul. Let them be turned back and put to confusion that desire my hurt. Let them be turned back as a reward of their shame that say, ‘Aha! Aha!’”

This prayer seemed to me at that time right, and the mercy inculcated in the New Testament like cowardice. To what unknown power my iniquitous prayer found its way I do not know. The sequel of this narrative will, at any rate, show that it was heard.

EXTRACTS FROM MY JOURNAL
1896

May 13th.—A letter from my wife. She has learned from the papers that a Mr. S. is about to journey to the North Pole in an air-balloon. She feels in despair about it, confesses to me her unalterable love, and adjures me to give up this idea, which is tantamount to suicide. I enlighten her regarding her mistake. It is a cousin of mine who is risking his life in order to make a great scientific discovery.

May 14th.—Last night I had a dream. A head which had been cut off was set on the trunk of a man who looked like an actor come down in the world through drink. The head began to speak. I was frightened, and knocked my bed-screen down while I, as I thought, pushed a policeman before me to protect me from the madman’s attack.

May 17th and the following days.—The glass of absinthe at six o’clock, and the terrace of the Brewery of Lilas behind the statue of Marshal Ney, are my only remaining sin and delight. There, after finishing the day’s work, when soul and body are exhausted, I refresh myself with the green drink, a cigarette, the *Temps*, and the *Débuts*. How sweet is life after all, when the mist of a mild intoxication casts its veil over the miseries of existence. Probably the powers envy me this hour of a visionary happiness, for from this evening onwards it is disturbed by a series of annoyances which cannot be attributed to chance. On May 17th, I find my place, which has been reserved for me daily for nearly two years, occupied; all the other chairs are also taken. Deeply annoyed, I have to go to another café.

May 18th.—My old corner in Lilas is again vacant, and I am again under my chestnut behind the Marshal, feeling contented, even happy. My well-concocted absinthe is there, my cigarette lighted, and the *Temps* spread out. Then a drunken man passes; a hateful-looking fellow, whose mischievous, contemptuous air annoys me. His face is red, his nose blue, his eyes malicious. I taste my absinthe, and feel happy not to be like this sot.… There! I don’t know how, but my glass is upset and empty. Without sufficient money to order another, I pay

for this and leave the café. Certainly it was again the Evil One who played me this trick.

May 19th.—I don't venture to go to the café.

May 20th.—I have slunk round the terrace of the Lilas, and at last found my corner unoccupied. One must fight the evil spirits and begin the war oneself. The absinthe is made, the cigarette glows, and the *Temps* has important news. Then (I speak the truth, reader), a chimney of the café over my head takes fire! There is a universal panic. I remain sitting, but a stronger will than mine directs a cloud of soot with such a good aim on me, that two large flakes settle on my glass. Disconcerted, but as unbelieving and sceptical as ever, I depart.

June 1st.—After long abstinence, the longing for my chestnut again awakes. My table is occupied, and I sit down at a vacant one standing somewhat apart. Then there comes a middle-class family, and sits near me. There seems to be no end of them. Women push against my chair, children do their little businesses before my eyes, young men take away my matches without asking leave. Thus I sit in the midst of a noisy, shameless throng, but do not waver nor yield. Then occurs something which, without any doubt, shows the skilful hand of the unseen, for there is no room for suspecting these people to whom I am entirely unknown.

A young man lays with an unmistakable gesture a sou on my table. A stranger, and alone among a crowd of people, I let it happen, but, blind with anger, I seek for an explanation.

He gives me a sou, as if to a beggar! Beggar! that is the dagger which I drive into my breast. Beggar! for thou deservest nothing, and—

The waiter offers me a more comfortable place, and I leave the money lying. What a disgrace! He brings it after me, and informs me politely that the young man had found it under my table, and thought it was mine. I feel ashamed, and in order to calm my anger, order another absinthe.

The absinthe comes, and I feel quite comfortable, when a pestilential smell of ammonia almost stifles me. Again a miracle or some evil purpose! An escape-pipe flows out at the edge of the pavement, exactly where my seat is. I begin to understand that the good spirits wish to heal me of a sin, which at last leads to the madhouse. Blessed be Providence which has saved me!

May 25th.—In spite of the regulations of the house which exclude women, a family has taken up its quarters next my room. For a day and a night crying babies afford me much pleasure, and remind me of the good old times when I was between thirty and forty and life was pleasantest.

May 26th.—The family quarrel together and the children howl. How similar it is, and yet how pleasant it is for me—*now*!

May 29th.—A letter from the children of my first marriage informs that a telegram had come for them bidding them to be present in Stockholm at the farewell feast which was to celebrate my departure for the North Pole. They understand nothing about it, and I just as little. What a fatal error!

June 2nd.—In the Avenue de l'Observatoire I find two pebbles shaped exactly like hearts. In the evening, in the garden of a Russian painter, I found a third heart of the same size, exactly like the two others. The playing of Schumann's *Aufschwung* has ceased, and I am again calm.

June 9th.—I visit the Danish painter in the Rue de la Santé. The great dog has disappeared; the entrance is free. We go to dine on a terrace in the Boulevard Port-Royal. My friend is cold and uncomfortable, and as he has forgotten his overcoat I lay mine over his shoulders. At first this quiets him; he feels himself dominated by me, and does not struggle against it. We are agreed on all points; he does not venture any more to oppose me. He admits that Popoffsky is a scoundrel, and that all my misfortunes are due to him. Suddenly a strange fit of nervousness takes hold of him; he trembles like a medium under the influence of the hypnotiser, gets excited, shakes off the overcoat, stops eating, lays his fork on one side, stands up and goes off. What is the meaning of it? Does he feel my coat to be a Nessus robe? Has my nervous fluid become stored up in it, and through its opposite polarity subjugated him? Does Ezekiel, chap. xiii, ver. 18, refer to something similar? "Woe to you that sew pillows upon all armholes, and make kerchiefs for the heads of persons of every stature, to catch souls.… I will tear your kerchiefs, and I will deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall no more be in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

Have I become a wizard without knowing it?

June 7th.—I visited my Danish friend in order to look at his pictures. When I arrived he seemed well and cheerful, but after half an hour he had a nervous attack, which increased so much that he had to undress and go to bed. What was the matter with him? Had he a bad conscience?

June 14th, Sunday.—In the Jardin du Luxembourg I found a fourth heart-shaped pebble, like the three former ones. The stone has a piece of gold tinsel adhering to it; altogether it remains a puzzle, but seems to foreshadow something. I compare the four stones together before the open window, as the bells of St. Sulpice begin to ring; then the great bell of Notre-Dame commences, and through these usual sounds, there comes a heavy solemn peal, as though it issued from the bowels of the earth. I ask the waiter who brings my letters what it is. He says, "The great bell of the Church Sacré Cœur of Montmartre."

It is then the festival of the Sacred Heart? And I contemplate these four hard stone hearts, curiously moved by this striking coincidence.

In the direction of Notre-Dame des Champs I hear a cuckoo, and yet it is impossible; or have my ears become so extra-sensitive that they can hear as far as the wood of Meudon?

June 15th.—I go to the city to change a cheque into banknotes and gold. To my astonishment, the Quai Voltaire sways under my feet; certainly the Carrousel Bridge trembles under the weight of the carts. But today, this movement continues past the Tuileries to the Avenue de l'Opéra. There is always vibration in a town, but in order to notice it one must have very sensitive nerves.

The other side of the river is, for us dwellers in Montparnasse, a foreign world. It is nearly a year since I visited the Lyons Bank, or the Café de la Régence. On the Boulevard des Italiens, I felt homesick, and I hurried back to the river, where the sight of the Rue des Saints Pères revived me. Near the Church St. Germain des Prés I met a funeral, and after that, two colossal Madonnas, which were being carried on a cart. One of them, with folded hands and eyes directed heavenwards, made a deep impression on me.

June 16th.—On the Boulevard St. Michel I bought a paperweight adorned with a glass globe containing the Madonna of Lourdes in her famous grotto; before her kneels a veiled woman. When I place the figure in the sun, it casts strange shadows. On the back of the grotto the plaster has accidentally formed a head of Christ, though evidently unintended by the artist.

June 18th.—My Danish friend rushes in, in a state of excitement and trembling all over, into my room. Popoffsky has been arrested in Vienna on the charge of having murdered his paramour and two illegitimate children. After I recover from the first surprise, and my first feeling of sincere sympathy for a man who at any rate had once been my intimate friend, a deep peace settles on my spirit, which had been tortured for months with long-continued threats. Unable to conceal my real selfishness, I give free vent to my feelings. It is dreadful, and yet I am relieved when I think of the danger from which I have escaped.

What was his motive for the crime? We conjecture as a reason the jealousy which his lawful wife felt against the illegitimate family, and the expense which they involved. Perhaps also.…

"What?"

"Perhaps his bloodthirsty instincts have recently been able to find no outlet in Paris, and have sought for satisfaction in some other way, no matter upon whom." To myself I say: "Was it possible that my earnest prayers had averted the dagger, and turned it against the murderer himself?" Then, giving up guessing, I conclude magnanimously like a victor: "Let us at any rate save our friend's literary reputation. I will write an essay on his merits as an author; you draw a flattering portrait, and we will send both to the *Revue Blanche*."

In the Dane's studio (the dog guards it no more) we stand and contemplate a picture of Popoffsky painted two years ago. It represents only his head, with a cloud below it. Underneath are a pair of crossbones like one sees on tombstones. The decapitated head makes us shudder, and the dream of May 14th steals into my memory like a ghost. "How did you come to think," I asked, "of representing him with a head only?"

"That is hard to say; but there seemed to be a fate brooding over this fine mind, with marks of genius, which dreamed of fame without being willing to pay the price for it. Life lets us choose one of two things—the laurel or luxury."

"You have at last discovered that!"

June 23rd.—During these last days since the news of the Russian's arrest, a fresh disquiet

seizes me. It appears to me as though someone somewhere were meddling with my destiny, and I tell the Danish painter my suspicion that the hate of the imprisoned Russian makes me suffer like the electric fluid from a dynamo.

There are moments in which I foresee that my stay in Paris will soon be at an end, and that a revolution in my circumstances is at hand.

The weathercock on the cross of Notre-Dame des Champs seems to me to flap its wings as though it wished to fly northwards. Anticipating my speedy departure, I hastily conclude my studies in the Jardin des Plantes. A zinc bath in which I make experiments in alchemy shows on its inner sides a landscape formed by the evaporation of iron salts. I understand it is a presage, but I cannot guess where this landscape is. Hills covered with forests of firs; lying between them, plains covered with fruit trees and cornfields; everything indicates the neighbourhood of a river. One of the hills with precipices of stratified formation is crowned with the ruins of a stately castle. I cannot make out more, but I shall not remain long in uncertainty.

June 20th.—We receive an invitation from the head of the scientific occultists, the editor of the *Initiation*. As the doctor and I arrived at Marolles en Brie we received three pieces of bad news: A weasel had killed the ducks; a servant girl was ill; the third I forget.

On the evening of our return to Paris, I read in a paper the famous history of the haunted house in Valence en Brie. Brie? I begin to fear that the occupants of my hotel will become suspicious, hear of my excursion to Brie, and in consequence of my experiments in alchemy suppose that I have set on foot that humbug or witchcraft.

I have bought myself a rosary. Why? It is pretty, and the evil spirits fear the Cross; besides, I don't worry any more about the motives of my actions. I act, as the humour takes me, and life is much more interesting. There is a sudden change as regards the Popoffsky case. His friend the Dane begins to doubt his having committed the crime, and says the accusation against him was refuted at the inquest. The publishing of my article is put off, and I feel as cold towards him as before. At the same time the monstrous dog reappears—a hint for me to be on my guard.

As I am writing in the afternoon at the table near my window, a thunderstorm bursts. The first drops of rain fall on my manuscript and blot it in such a way that from the obliterated letters the word "Alp"[7] is formed, and also a blot in the shape of an enormous face. I preserve this; it resembles the Japanese god of thunder as portrayed in the *Atmosphère* of Camille Flammarion.

June 28th.—I have seen my wife in a dream; her front teeth were missing. She gave me a guitar, which looked like a Danube boat. This dream threatened me with imprisonment.

In the afternoon I rub together on a piece of paper quicksilver, tin, sulphur, and chlorate of ammonia. When I took off the mixture, the paper retained the impression of a face, which had an extraordinary resemblance to that of my wife in the dream of the past night.

July 1st.—I expect an eruption, an earthquake, a thunderbolt somewhere or other. Nervous as a horse when wolves are near, I scent danger, and pack my box ready for Hight without being able to decide on it. The Russian has been liberated from prison for want of proofs; his friend the Dane has become my enemy. The customers in the restaurant persecute me. We had our

last meal in the courtyard on account of the heat. The table was placed between the dustbin and the lavatory. Over the dustbin hung the picture of the crucified woman by my former American friend. They had revenged themselves so severely upon him that he had disappeared without paying his debts. Near the table the Russians have placed a statuette, a warrior with the conventional scythe, possibly to frighten me! A young fellow belonging to the house goes behind my back to the lavatory with the thinly concealed purpose of annoying me. The court is as narrow as a mineshaft, and admits no sunlight over the high walls. The women who live in the different storeys make obscene remarks over our heads. Domestic servants come with their baskets full of rubbish in order to empty them into the dustbin. It is hell itself! Moreover, my two neighbours, notoriously immoral characters, try, with their disgusting talk, to entangle me in a quarrel.

Why am I here? Because loneliness compels me to seek human society and to hear human voices. Just as my mental suffering reaches its highest pitch, I discover some pansies blooming in the tiny flowerbed. They shake their heads as though they wished to warn me of a danger, and one of them with a child's face and large eyes signals to me, "Go away!" I rise and pay; as I go out the young fellow mentioned above greets me with concealed contempt, which irritates me. But I remain quiet.

I feel pity for myself and shame for the others. I forgive the offenders as though they were demons, who must now fulfil their duty. Meanwhile, the disfavour of the powers is all too obvious, and I begin in my room to total up the debit and credit side. Hitherto, and that was my comfort, I have never been able to bow myself before others, but now, crushed by the hand of the invisible, I am anxious to own myself wrong, and fear lays hold upon me when I carefully think over my behaviour during the last weeks. My conscience exacts my confession ruthlessly and pitilessly. I had sinned through conceit, through *ὕβρις*, the one sin which the gods do not forgive. Encouraged by the friendship of Dr. Popus, who had praised my experiments, I imagined that I had solved the riddle of the Sphinx. An imitator of Orpheus, I assumed it as my role to reanimate nature, which had been done to death by the scientists. Confident of the favour of the powers, I flattered myself that I was invincible as regards my foes, and forgot the most ordinary rules of modesty.

This is the right point at which to insert the history of my secret friend who has played a decisive role in my life as mentor, counsellor, comforter, judge, and, not least, as a reliable helper in various times of need. As early as 1890 he wrote to me about a book which I then published. He had found points of contact between my ideas and those of the theosophists, and wished to hear my opinion of the Occult Doctrine and the priestess of Isis, Madame Blavatsky. The aggressive tone of his letter annoyed me, and I did not conceal this annoyance in my answer. Four years later I published my *Antibarbarus*, and received at the most critical juncture of my life a second letter from this unknown friend, in which, in an elevated and almost prophetic style, he foretold for me a future fraught with suffering and glory. At the same time he explained to me that he had resumed this correspondence, because he guessed that I was just now in the throes of a spiritual crisis in which a word of comfort might be opportune. Finally, he offered me material aid, which I, jealous of my miserable independence, declined.

In the autumn of 1895 I resumed the correspondence by offering him my natural history studies for publication. From that time we kept up the most intimate and friendly correspondence, with the exception of a small disagreement which occurred, when he once took upon himself to instruct me in an insulting way about matters which I knew very well, and preached to me proudly about my want of modesty. After we had made it up again, I imparted to him all my observations, and gave him more of my confidence than was perhaps wise. I confessed to this man, whom I had never seen, everything, and let him admonish me seriously, for I regarded him more as an idea than a person; he was for me a messenger of

Providence, my good angel.

Then there occurred between us a strong difference of opinion which led to very lively discussions, without, however, leading to any bitterness. As a theosophist, he preached "Karma," i.e., an abstract total of human destinies which balance each other so as to result in a kind of Nemesis. He was accordingly a champion of the mechanical view of the universe, a representative of the so-called materialistic school. To me, on the other hand, the powers had revealed themselves as concrete, living, individual personalities, who guide the course of the world and the destinies of men, as self-conscious entities or, as the theologians say, as "hypostases." The second difference of opinion was regarding the denying and putting to death of one's own self, which always seemed to me perfectly foolish, and seems so still.

Everything, i.e., the little which I know, goes back to the Ego as its central point. Not the cultus, indeed, but the culture of this Ego seems, therefore, the highest and ultimate aim of existence. My final and constant answer to his objections, therefore, was: "The killing of the Ego is self-murder."

Moreover, before whom should I bow myself? Before the theosophists? Never! But before the Eternal, the Powers, Providence, I seek to subdue my evil propensities daily as much as possible. To combat for the preservation of my ego, against all influence which a sect or party, from love of ruling, may bring to bear upon me, *that* is my duty enjoined on me by conscience; the guide which the grace of my divine protector has given me.

Nevertheless, because of the qualities of this unseen friend, whom I felt drawn to love and admire, I put up with his admonitions when he often addressed me in a presumptuous way as his inferior. I always answered him, but did not conceal from him my dislike for theosophy.

Finally, however—it was during the Popoffsky episode—he assumed such a domineering tone, and became so intolerable in his tyranny, that I feared he took me for a fool. He called me "Simon Magus, the necromancer," and recommended me to take Madame Blavatsky as my teacher. I wrote back to him that I had no need of the lady, and that no one had anything to teach me. Thereupon what did he threaten me with? That he would bring me back to the right path with the aid of stronger powers than mine. Then I asked him not to meddle with my destiny, which the hand of Providence had always so well protected and guided. And in order to further impress upon him my conviction by means of an example, I related to him the following incident out of my life, which has been so rich in providential occurrences, premising at the same time that by relating this very incident I feared lest I should be challenging Nemesis.

It was ten years before this time, during the most stormy period of my literary life, when I was raging against the feminist movement, which, with the exception of myself, everyone in Scandinavia supported. The heat of the conflict hurried me on, so that I so far overstepped the bounds of propriety that my countrymen considered me mad.

I was just then staying with my wife and the children of my first marriage in Bavaria, when I received a letter from a friend of my youth inviting me and my children to stop with him for a year, he made no mention of my wife. This letter, with its affected style, its corrections and omissions, seemed to betray some hesitation on the part of the writer in the choice of the reasons which he alleged for his invitation. As I suspected some trap, I declined the offer in a few noncommittal polite phrases.

Two years later, after my first divorce, I went to him of my own accord and found him living on a little island off the coast of the Baltic Sea as an inspector of customs. His reception of me was friendly, but his whole manner embarrassed and equivocal, and our conversation was more like a police examination. After giving a wakeful night's consideration to the matter, I understood it. This man, whose self-love I had wounded in one

of my novels, in spite of his display of sympathy, was not really my well-wisher. An absolute tyrant, he wanted to interfere with my destiny, to tame and subdue me, in order to show me his superiority.

Quite unscrupulous in his choice of means, he tormented me for a week long, poisoned my mind with slanders and stories invented to suit every occasion, but did it so clumsily that I was more and more convinced that he wished to have me incarcerated as a person of unsound mind.

I offered no special resistance, and left it to my good fortune to liberate me at the right time.

My apparent submission won my executioner's favour, and there alone, in the midst of the sea, hated by his neighbours and subordinates, he yielded to his need to confide in someone. He told me, with incredible frankness for a man of fifty, that his sister during the past winter had gone out of her mind, and in a fit of frenzy had destroyed all her savings. The next morning he told me, further, that his brother was in a lunatic asylum on the mainland.

I asked myself, "Is that why he wants to see me confined in one, in order to avenge himself on fate?" After he had thus related to me his misfortunes, I won his complete confidence, so that I was able to leave the island, and hire a house on a neighbouring one, where my children joined me. Four weeks later a letter summoned me to my "friend," whom I found quite broken down because his brother in a fit of mania had shattered his skull. I comforted my executioner, and his wife whispered to me with tears that she had long feared lest the same fate should overtake her husband. A year later the newspapers announced that my friend's eldest brother had taken his life under circumstances which seemed to indicate that he was out of his mind. Thus three distinct blows descended on the head of this man who had wished to play with lightning.

"What a strange chance!" people will say. And stranger, and more ominous still, every time that I relate this history, I am punished for doing so.

The fierce July heat broods over the city; life is intolerable, and everything is malodorous. I expect a catastrophe. In the street I find a scrap of paper with the word "marten" written on it; in another street a similar scrap with the word "vulture" written by the same hand. Popoffsky certainly has a resemblance to a marten as his wife has to a vulture. Have they come to Paris to kill me? He, the murderer, is capable of everything after he has murdered wife and children.

The perusal of the delightful book *La joie de mourir* arouses in me the wish to quit the world. In order to learn to know the boundary between life and death, I lie on the bed, uncork the flask containing cyanide of potassium, and let its poisonous perfume stream out. The man with the scythe approaches softly and voluptuously, but at the last moment someone enters or something else happens; either an attendant enters under some pretext, or a wasp flies in through the window.

The powers deny me the only joy left, and I bow to their will.

At the beginning of July the house is empty; the students have gone for their holidays. All the more is my curiosity aroused by a stranger who has taken the room on that side of mine where my writing-table is placed. The Unknown never speaks; he appears to be occupied in writing on the other side of the wall which divides us. Curiously enough, whenever I move my chair, he moves his also, and, in general, imitates all my movements as though he wished to annoy me. Thus it goes on for three days. On the fourth day I make the following

observations: If I prepare to go to sleep, he also prepares to go to sleep in the next room; when I lie down in bed, I hear him lie down on the bed by my wall. I hear him stretch himself out parallel with me; he turns over the pages of a book, then puts out the lamp, breathes loud, turns himself on his side, and goes to sleep. He apparently occupies the rooms on both sides of me, and it is unpleasant to be beset on two sides at once. Absolutely alone, I take my midday meal in my room, and I eat so little that the waiter pities me. For eight days I have not heard the sound of my own voice, which begins to grow feeble for want of exercise. I haven't a sou left, and my tobacco and postage stamps run out. Then I rally my will power for a last attempt: I *will* make gold, by the dry process. I manage to borrow some money and procure the necessary apparatus: an oven, smelting-saucepans, wood-coals, bellows, and tongs. The heat is terrific and, like a workman in a smithy, I sweat before the open fire, stripped to the waist. But sparrows have built their nests in the chimney, and smoke pours out of it into the room. I feel like going mad over this first attempt, my headaches, and the frustration of my efforts; for everything goes wrong. I have smelted the mass of metal in the fire and look inside the saucepan. The borax has formed within it a death's-head with two glowing eyes which seem to pierce my soul with uncanny irony. Not a grain of gold is there, and I give up all further effort. I resume my seat, and read the Bible just where I happen to open it: "None calleth to mind, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also, I have baked bread upon the coals thereof, I have roasted flesh and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand. Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth forth the earth; who is with me? that frustrateth the tokens of the liars and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish."

For the first time I despair of my scientific experiments. If they are all folly, then I have sacrificed my happiness and that of my wife and children to a phantom. Alas for my delusion! There is a gaping abyss between my parting from my family and this moment. A year and a half has elapsed, and so many painful days and nights have been spent for nothing. But no! it cannot be, it is not so.

Have I lost myself in a dark wood? The good spirit has guided me on the right way to the island of the blessed, but Satan tempts me. I am punished again. I sink relaxed on my scat, an unwonted depression weighs upon my spirits. A magnetic fluid streams from the wall, and sleep nearly overcomes me. I pull myself together, and stand up, in order to go out. As I pass through the passage, I hear two voices whispering in the room adjoining mine. Why are they whispering? In order that I may not overhear them. I go through the Rue d'Assas to the Jardin du Luxembourg. I drag myself wearily along, feeling lame from my loins to my feet, and sink on a seat behind the group of Adam and his family.

I am poisoned! That is my first thought. And Popoffsky, who has murdered his wife and children with poisonous gases, is here. He has copied the famous experiment of Pettenkofer, and discharged a stream of gas through the wall. What shall I do? Go to the police? No! for if I can adduce no proofs they will shut me up as a lunatic.

Væ soli! Woe to the solitary, the sparrow upon the housetop! Never was my misery greater, and I weep like a forsaken child that fears the dark.

In the evening I dare not remain sitting at my table for fear of a new attack, and lie on the bed without venturing to go to sleep. The night comes and my lamp is lit. Then I see outside, on the wall opposite to my window, the shadow of a human shape, whether a man or a woman, I cannot say, but it seems to be a woman. When I stand up, to ascertain which it is, the blind is noisily pulled down; then I hear the Unknown enter the room, which is near my

bed, and all is silent. For three hours I lie awake with open eyes to which sleep refuses to come; then a feeling of uneasiness takes possession of me; I am exposed to an electric current which passes to and fro between the two adjoining rooms. The nervous tension increases, and, in spite of my resistance, I cannot remain in bed, so strong is my conviction: “They are murdering me; I will not let myself be murdered.” I go out in order to seek the attendant in his box at the end of the corridor, but alas! he is not there. They have got him to go away; he is a silent accomplice, and I am betrayed!

I go down the stairs, and hasten through the corridors in order to rouse the director of the *pension*. With a presence of mind, of which I would not have thought myself capable, I tell him that I have a sudden attack of indisposition, caused by the evaporations from my chemicals, and ask for another room for the night. Thanks to a wrathful Providence, the only vacant room is directly under that of my enemy. I open the window and inhale full draughts of the fresh air of a starry night. Above the roofs of the Rue d’Assas, and the Rue de Madame, the Great Bear and Polestar are visible. To the North, then! I take the omen!

As I draw back the curtain of the alcove where my bed is, I hear my enemy overhead get out of bed and place some heavy object in a box which he locks. He is concealing something then! Perhaps the electric machine.

The next morning, which is a Sunday, I pack up and give out that I am going to the seacoast. I tell the coachman to drive to the St. Lazare Station, but when we get opposite the Odeon, I alter the route and bid him drive to the Rue de la Clef, near the Jardin des Plantes. I wish to remain here incognito, in order to complete my studies before my departure for Sweden.

VI
HELL

At length a pause ensues in my sufferings. For hours at a time I sit in the open space before the summerhouse, watch the flowers, and think over the recent events. The peace of mind, which I find after my flight, convinces me that I have not been suffering from the delusions of disease, but have been persecuted by real enemies. I work during the day and sleep quietly at night. Delivered from the squalor of my former residence, I feel myself rejuvenated among the roses of this garden—the favourite flower of my youth. The Jardin des Plantes, this wonder of Paris unknown to the Parisians themselves, has become my park. This epitome of creation confined within a narrow circuit, this Noah's Ark, this Paradise Regained in which I wander without danger among wild beasts—it is too much happiness. Beginning with stones, I proceed to the vegetable and animal kingdoms, till I come to man, and behind man I discover the Creator—the great Artist who develops as he creates, sets on fool designs which He rejects later on, resumes plans which have failed, and completes and multiplies primitive forms endlessly. All is the work of His hand. Often in the discovery of methods He makes enormous leaps, and then Science comes and ascertains the extent of the gaps and the missing links, and imagines that it has found the intermediary forms which have disappeared.

As I now consider myself safe from my persecutors, I send my address to the Pension Orfila in order to resume my correspondence with the outer world. But no sooner have I lifted the mask of my incognito than my peace is interrupted. All kinds of things disquiet me, and my former discomfort returns.

To begin with, articles whose use I cannot understand are being stored away in the room which adjoins mine on the ground-floor, and which hitherto was vacant of furniture. An old gentleman, with grey, malicious eyes, carries empty boxes, strips of metal, and other mysterious objects into it. At the same time the noises over my head recommence. They file and hammer as though they were constructing some infernal machine.

Moreover, the landlady, who at first appeared pleased at my taking up my abode here, alters her demeanour; she tries to ferret out my affairs, and vexes me by her manner of greeting me. Besides this, the lodger who occupies the first floor above me, leaves the house. He was a quiet old gentleman, whose heavy footfall was familiar to me. In his place comes a reserved-looking tenant who has lived in the house for years. He has not changed his lodgings but only his room. Why?

The servant-maid who looks after my room, and brings my meals, has a serious air and casts sympathetic glances at me.

All at once a wheel begins to turn over my head, and continues to do so the whole day long. I am condemned to death! That is my firm conviction. By whom? By the Russians, the Pietists, Catholics, Jesuits, Theosophists? As what?—A wizard or practiser of black arts? Or perhaps it is by the police as an anarchist? That is a very plausible pretext for removing personal enemies.

At the moment that I write this, I do not know what was the real nature of the events of that July night when death threatened me, but I will not forget that lesson as long as I live.

If the initiated believe that I was then exposed to a plot woven by human hands, let me tell them that I feel anger against no one, for I know now that another stronger Hand, unknown to them, guided those hands against their will.

On the other hand, if there was no plot, I must suppose that my own imagination conjured up these chastising spirits for my own punishment. We shall see in the sequel how far this supposition is probable.

On the morning of my last day (as I suppose) I rise in a resigned frame of mind, which might be called religious; I have no more ties binding me to life. I have put my papers in order, written necessary letters, and burnt what had to be burnt. Then I go to bid farewell to the world in the Jardin des Plantes.

The Swedish block of lodestone before the mineralogical museum gives me a greeting from my native land. I greet the acacias, the cedars of Lebanon, and the monuments of great epochs when botany was still a living science. I buy bread and cherries for my old friends. The old bear knows me well, for I am the only one who brings him cherries morning and evening. I give bread to the young elephant, who spits in my face after he has eaten it—the young, faithless ingrate!

Farewell, ye vultures who had to exchange the sky for a dirty cage! Farewell, bison and behemoth, thou chained demon! Farewell, ye loving pair of seabirds whom wedded love consoles for the loss of ocean and its wide horizon! Farewell, stones, plants, flowers, trees, butterflies, birds, snakes, all creatures of a good God! And you great men, Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, Linnaeus, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Haüy, whose names shine in gold on the front of the temple—farewell! but we meet again. So I part from this earthly Paradise, and Séraphita's noble words come to my mind, "*Adieu, pauvre terre! adieu!*"

When I re-enter the hotel garden, I become aware of the presence of a man, who must have come in my absence. I do not see him, but feel him. What increases my confusion is the visible alteration which the adjoining room has undergone. A cloth hung over a rope obviously conceals something. On the mantelpiece are metal projections isolated by wooden panels, and on each there lies a photograph album or some other book, in order to give these diabolical machines, which I am inclined to think are accumulators, an innocuous appearance. Moreover, on a roof in the Rue Censier, exactly opposite my summerhouse, I see two workmen. I cannot make out what they are doing, but they seem to have an eye on my glass-door and are busy with objects which I cannot distinguish.

Why do I not escape? Because I am too proud, and must bear the inevitable. I therefore prepare myself for the night. I take a bath, and am especially careful to wash my feet, for my mother has told me when a child, that there is something disgraceful in dirty feet. I shave and perfume myself, and put on the underclothes which I bought three years ago in Vienna for my wedding—the toilet of a man condemned to die. I read the psalms in the Bible in which David invokes the wrath of the Eternal upon his enemies. I do not read the penitential psalms. I have no right to remorse, for it is not I who have guided my destiny. I have never requited evil with evil, except when I had to defend myself. To be remorseful is to criticise Providence, which imposes sin on us as a suffering, in order to purify us through the disgust with which each evil deed inspires us.

The summing up of my reckoning with life is as follows: If I have sinned, on my word of honour, I have been sufficiently punished. That is certain. As to the fear of hell, I have wandered through a thousand hells, without trembling, and have experienced enough of them to feel an intense desire to depart from the vanities and false joys of this world, which I

always despised. Born with a heavenly homesickness, I wept as a child over the filthiness of life, and felt strange and homeless among relations and friends. From childhood onwards I have sought for God and found the Devil. I have borne the cross of Christ in my youth, and have denied a God who delights to reign over slaves who love their tormentor.

As I let down the curtains of my glass-door, I see a number of ladies and gentlemen sitting at their champagne in the private drawing-room. They seem to be strangers just arrived this evening. But they are not a merry company; their faces are all serious, they discuss, seem to form plans, and speak in an undertone with each other, as though it were a conspiracy. To intensify my mental torture, they turn round on their chairs, and point with their fingers in the direction of my room. About ten o'clock I extinguish my lamp, and go to sleep quietly, resigned as a dying man.

I wake up. A clock strikes two; a door is fastened, and—I am out of bed, as though someone had applied an air-pump to my heart and drawn me out *so*. At the same time an electric stream strikes my neck, and presses me to the ground. I rise again, seize my clothes and rush, my heart beating violently, into the garden. When I have dressed myself, my first clear thought is to go to the police and have the house searched. But the front door is shut, and so is the porter's box. I grope my way on, open a door on the right, and step into the kitchen, in which a lamp is burning. I upset it, and stand in pitch darkness.

Fear restores me to my senses, and I return to my room with the thought: "If I make a mistake, I am lost." I drag a chair out into the garden, and, sitting under the starry sky, I reflect on what is happening. Am I ill? Impossible: for until I disclosed my incognito, I was quite well. Is it an attack? Yes, because I saw the preparations for it going on. For the rest, I feel better here outside in the garden beyond the power of my enemies, and my heart beats quite regularly. While reflecting thus, I hear someone cough in the room adjoining mine. It is at once answered by a low cough from the room on the other side. Doubtless it is a signal, just like the one I heard my last night in the Pension Orfila. I try to open forcibly the glass-door of the ground-floor room, but the bolt holds.

Wearied by the useless fight against invisible powers, I sink on a garden seat. Sleep has pity on me, so that under the stars of a beautiful summer night I fall asleep among the roses whispering in the warm airs of July.

The sun awakes me, and I thank Providence which has saved me from death. I pack my things, and mean to go to Dieppe to find shelter with some friends, whom I have neglected as I have all others, but who are considerate and generous towards the fallen and shipwrecked. When I ask to speak to the directress of the house, she is not visible, and sends a message to say she is unwell. I might have expected that she would be involved in the plot against me. I leave the house with a curse on the head of my knavish enemies, and call on heaven to send down fire on this den of robbers—whether rightly or wrongly, who knows? My Dieppe friends were alarmed, when they saw me mounting the hill of their town with my bag heavy with manuscripts.

"Where have you come from, poor fellow?"

"I come from death."

"I doubt it, for you look as if you had not been dug out yet."

The kind, good-hearted lady of the house takes me by the hand and leads me before a looking-glass, that I may see myself. I certainly look a pitiable object; my face blackened by smoke from the engine, my cheeks fallen in, my hair grown grey, my eyes staring wildly, and

my linen dirty.

But when I was left alone in the dressing-room by my kind hostess, who treated me like a sick, deserted child, I examined my face more closely. There was an expression in my features which alarmed me. It was not fear of death or wickedness, but something else, and had I at that time known Swedenborg, he would have explained to me the impression made by the evil spirit on my soul, and the occurrences of the last weeks. Now I felt ashamed and angry with myself, and my conscience pained me on account of my ingratitude towards this family, which had proved a harbour of refuge for me, as for so many other shipwrecked voyagers. As a punishment, I shall be driven hence also by the furies. Here is a beautiful artistic home, ordered domestic economy, married happiness, with charming children, cleanness and comfort, boundless hospitality, charitable judgment, an atmosphere of beauty and goodness which dazzles me—a paradise, in short, and I in the midst of it, all like a lost soul. I see spread out before my eyes all the happiness which life can offer, and all that I have lost.

I occupy an attic room looking out on a hill where there is an asylum for old people. In the evening I observe two men looking over the wall of the institution towards our villa, and pointing at my window. The idea that I am being persecuted by means of electricity again takes possession of me.

The night between the 25th and 26th of July, 1896, comes on. We have searched together all the attic rooms near mine, and the loft itself, so as to satisfy me that no one with evil intentions could be lurking there. Only in a lumber-room an object of no significance in itself has a depressing effect upon me. It is only the skin of a polar bear used as a rug; but the gaping jaws, the threatening teeth, the sparkling eyes irritate me. Why should this creature lie just now, just there? Without taking off my clothes, I lie down on the bed, determined to wait for the fateful hour—two o'clock.

While I am reading, midnight approaches. One o'clock strikes, and the whole house is wrapped in slumber. At last two o'clock strikes! Nothing happens. Then in a daredevil spirit, or perhaps only with the intention of making a physical experiment, I rise, open both windows, and light two candles. Then I sit at the table behind them, expose myself with bared breast as a mark, and challenge the unknown: "Attack, if you dare!"

Then I feel, at first only faintly, something like an inrush of electric fluid. I look at my compass, but it shows no sign of wavering. It is not electricity then. But the tension increases; my heart beats violently; I offer resistance, but as if by a flash of lightning my body is charged with a fluid which chokes me and depletes my blood. I rush down the stairs to the room on the ground-floor, where they have made up for me a provisional bed in case of necessity. There I lie for five minutes and collect my thoughts. Is it radiating electricity? No; for the compass has not been affected. Is it a diseased state of mind induced by fear of the fatal hour of two o'clock? No; for I have still the courage to defy attacks. But why must I light the candles and attract the mysterious fluid? In this labyrinth of questioning I find no answer, and try at last to go to sleep, but a new discharge of electricity strikes me like a cyclone, forces me to rise from bed, and the chase begins afresh. I hide myself behind the walls, lie down close to the doors, or in front of the stove. Everywhere, everywhere the furies find me. Overmastered by terror, I fly in panic from everything and nothing, from room to room, and finish by crouching down on the balcony. The grey-yellow light of dawn begins to break, the sepia-coloured clouds assume fantastic and monstrous shapes, which increase my despair. I repair to my friend's studio, lie down on the carpet, and close my eyes. After barely five minutes' quiet, a rustle awakes me. A mouse looks at me and seems to wish to come nearer. I drive it away; it comes back with another one. Good Heavens! Have I got delirium

tremens, though I have been quite temperate the last three years? (In the daytime I find that there are really mice in the studio. It was a coincidence, then, but who caused it, and what is his object?) I change my place, and lie down on the hall carpet. Merciful sleep descends upon my tortured spirit, and for about half an hour I lose consciousness of my sufferings. Then a distinct cry "*Alp!*" makes me suddenly start up. "*Alp!*" That is the German for nightmare. "*Alp*" is the word which the rainstorm caused to be formed on my paper in the Hôtel Orfila. Who uttered that cry? No one, for the whole house is asleep. Is it a devil's game? That is a poetical expression which perhaps contains the whole truth.

I mount the steps to my attic. The candles have burnt to their sockets; deep silence reigns. The Angelus rings out. It is the day of the Lord. I open my breviary and read "*De Profundis clamavi ad Te, Domine!*" That comforts me, and I sink down on the bed like a corpse.

July 26th, Sunday.—A cyclone devastates the Jardin des Plantes. The papers contain items which I find especially interesting. Today, Andrée's balloon is to ascend for its voyage to the North Pole, but the occasion is not propitious. The storm has hurled down several balloons, which have ascended at various points, and killed many aeronauts.

The next morning I leave Dieppe, uttering a benediction on the house, over whose well-deserved happiness my sadness had cast a shadow.

Since I do not wish to believe in the interference of supernatural powers, I imagine that I am the victim of a nervous illness. Accordingly, I make up my mind to go to Sweden and see a physician who is a friend of mine.

As a memorial of Dieppe, I take a piece of iron-ore which has a trefoil shape like a Gothic window, and is marked with the sign of a Maltese cross. A child has found it on the shore, and tells me that these stones fall from the sky and are cast by the waves on the land. I believe him willingly, and keep the gift as a talisman, the significance of which is hidden from me. (On the coast of Brittany the coast-dwellers are accustomed after storms to collect stones shaped like crosses, with a gold-like shimmer. These stones are called "staurolites.")

The little town to which I now betook myself lies in the extreme south of Sweden, on the seacoast. It is an old pirates' and smugglers' haunt, in which exotic traces of all parts of the world have been left by various voyagers. My doctor's house looks like a Buddhist cloister. The four wings of the one-storeyed house form a quadrangle, in the centre of which the dome-shaped woodshed resembles the tomb of Tamerlane at Samarcand. The style of which the roof is built and faced with Chinese bricks recalls the Farther East. An apathetic tortoise crawls over the pavement and disappears in a Nirvana of innumerable weeds. In the garden is a pagoda-shaped summerhouse completely overgrown by clematis.

In the whole of this cloister, with its countless rooms, there lives only one person, the director of the district hospital. He is a widower, solitary and independent, and from the hard discipline of life has derived that strong and noble contempt of men which leads to a deep knowledge of the vanity of all things, oneself included.

The entrance of this man into my life occurred in such an unexpected manner, that I am inclined to assign it to the dramatic skill of a *Deus ex machina*.

At our first greeting, on my arrival from Dieppe, he looks at me inquiringly, and suddenly asks, "You have a nervous illness! Good! But that is not all. You look so strange that I do not recognise you. What have you been after? Dissipation, crime, lost illusions, religion? Tell me, old fellow!"

But I tell him nothing special, for my first thought is one of suspicion. He is prejudiced against me, has made inquiries about me in some quarter, and wants to have me confined. I tell him about my sleeplessness, nervousness, and bad dreams, and then we talk of other things.

In my room my attention is arrested by the American bed, with its four legs topped by four brass balls, which look like the conductors of an electric machine. Add to this an elastic mattress with copper springs, resembling Ruhmkorff induction coils, and one can easily imagine my rage at this diabolical coincidence. Besides, it is impossible to ask for another bed, as I might be suspected of being mad. In order to assure myself that nothing is concealed above me, I mount into the loft overhead. There is only one object there, but it drives me almost to desperation. An enormous wire-net rolled together stands immediately over my bed. One could not wish for a better accumulator. If there is a thunderstorm, such as is frequent here, the wire network will attract the lightning, and I shall be lying on the conductor. But I do not venture to say a word.

The first thing that disturbs me is the noise of a machine. Since I have quitted the Hôtel Orfila I have a roaring in my ears like the sound of a waterwheel. Doubting the objective existence of this noise, I ask the cause of it, and learn that it is the printing-press close by. The explanation is plausible, and, though little satisfied, I do not wish to excite myself.

The dreaded night comes on. The sky is covered with clouds; the air is close; we expect a thunderstorm. I do not venture to lie down to sleep, and write letters for two hours. At last, overcome with weariness, I undress myself and creep into bed. The lamp is extinguished; a terrible stillness reigns in the house. I feel that someone is watching me in the darkness, touches me and feels for my heart in order to suck my blood. Without waiting any longer, I spring out of bed, fling open the window and jump into the courtyard—but I have forgotten the rosebushes, whose sharp thorns pierce me through my nightshirt. Scratched and streaming with blood, I grope about the courtyard. Gravel-stones, thistles, and nettles lacerate my feet; unknown objects trip me up. At last I reach the kitchen, which adjoins the doctor's sitting-room. I knock. No answer. Suddenly I discover that it is raining all the time. O misery of miseries! What have I done to deserve these tortures? It is hell. Miserere! Miserere!

I knock repeatedly. It is strange that no one is at hand when I am attacked. Always this solitude! Does it not point to a plot against me in which all are implicated?

At last I hear the doctor's voice, "Who is there?"

"It is I: I am ill. Open, or I die!"

He opens the door. "What is the matter?"

I begin my report by giving an account of the attack in the Rue de la Clef, which I ascribe to enemies, who persecute me by means of electricity.

"Stop, unhappy man! Your mind is affected!"

"The devil it is! Test my intelligence; read what I write daily and what is printed—"

"Stop! not a word to anyone! These stories of electricity are frequent in asylum reports."

"All the better! I care so little for your asylum reports that in order to clear the matter up, I am willing to be examined tomorrow in the asylum at Lund."

"Then you are lost! Not a word more now! Lie down and sleep."

I refuse to do so, and insist on his hearing me; he refuses to listen.

When I am alone, I ask myself, "Is it possible that my friend, an honourable man, who has always kept aloof from dirty transactions, at the close of a blameless career should succumb to temptation? But who has tempted him?" I have no answer to this question, but many surmises. "Every man has his price," says the proverb, but a large sum must have been necessary to bribe this strong character. But one does not pay very highly for an ordinary piece of revenge. Therefore he must have a strong interest in the matter himself. Stop! I have it! I have made gold; the doctor has half-accomplished it also, although, when asked, he denies having repeated the experiments regarding which I had corresponded with him. He denies it, and yet as I stepped across the pavement of the courtyard last evening I found proofs that he had been experimenting. Therefore he is lying. Moreover, in conversation the same evening, he enlarged on the sad consequences which the possible manufacture of gold

would entail upon mankind. Universal bankruptcy, universal confusion, anarchy, ruin. “One would have to kill the discoverer of the process,” he concluded.

Moreover, I know the fairly modest private means of my friend. I am astonished to hear him speak of his intended purchase of the ground on which his dwelling stands. He is in debt, must even economise, and yet means to be a landowner. Everything combines to render me suspicious of my good friend.

Grant that I am suffering from persecution-mania, but what smith forges the links of these hellish syllogisms?

“The discoverer would have to be killed.” This is the thought with which my mental torment subsides into sleep about the time of sunrise.

We have commenced a cold-water cure. I have changed my room, and have fairly quiet nights now, although not without relapses.

One evening the doctor sees the breviary lying on my table, and becomes angry and excited. “Always this religion! That is also a symptom, don’t you know?”

“Or a necessity like other necessities!”

“Enough! I am no atheist, but I think the Almighty does not wish to be addressed in such intimate terms as formerly. These flatteries of the Deity belong to the past, and personally I agree with the Mohammedans, who only ask for the gift of resignation in order to support the burden Destiny imposes upon them with dignity.”

Significant words, from which I extract some grains of gold for myself. He carries away my breviary and Bible, and says: “Read indifferent matters of secondary interest, world histories, or mythologies, and leave idle dreaming. Above all things, beware of occultism, that caricature of science. It is forbidden to us to spy out the Creator’s secrets, and woe to them who seek to do so!”

On my objecting that the occultists in Paris form a whole body by themselves, he only says, “All the worse for them.” In the evening he brings me, without any ulterior purpose, I am sure, Victor Rydberg’s *German Mythology*.

“Here is something to send you to sleep, standing. It is better than sulphonal.”

If my good friend had known what a spark he was throwing into a keg of powder, he would rather—

The *Mythology* which he put into my hands is in two volumes, has altogether a thousand pages, and opens, so to speak, of itself. My eyes are arrested by the following lines which are imprinted in letters of fire on my memory:—“As the legend relates, Bhrign, having outgrown his father’s teaching, became so conceited, that he believed he could surpass his teacher. The latter sent him into the underworld where, in order to humble him, he had to witness countless terrible things, of which he had never had a conception.”

That means: “My conceit, my pride, my *ὕβρις*, has been punished by my father and teacher. And I am in hell, driven thither by the powers. And who is my teacher? Swedenborg.”

I turn over more leaves of this wonderful book: “One may compare with this the German myth of the fields of thorns which tear the feet of the unrighteous.”

Enough! Enough! Thorns, too! That is too much! No doubt of it—I am in hell! And in fact, real occurrences support this idea so powerfully, that I must at last believe it.

The doctor seems to me to be struggling with conflicting emotions. At one time he seems prejudiced against me, looks at me contemptiously, and treats me with humiliating rudeness; at another he seems himself unhappy, and soothes and comforts me as though I were a sick child. But then, again, it seems to give him pleasure to be able to trample under his feet a man of worth for whom he has formerly had a high regard. Then he lectures me like a pitiless

tormentor. I am to work, but not to give way to exaggerated ambition; I am to fulfil my duties to my fatherland and family: “Leave chemical speculations alone,” he says; “they are a chimera. There are so many specialists, authorities, and professional scientists well versed in their own branches.”

One day he proposes to me to write for the newest Stockholm society paper. A fine idea, indeed! I answer him that I do not require to write for the newest Stockholm paper, since the leading paper of Paris and of the whole world has accepted my manuscripts. Then he plays the incredulous, and treats me as a braggart, although he has read my articles in the *Figaro*, and has himself translated my first one in *Gil Blas*.

I am not angry with him; he only plays the role assigned to him by Providence. I forcibly suppress the growing hatred which I feel towards this unexpected tormentor, and curse the fate which changes what might have been thankfulness towards a generous friend into unnatural ingratitude.

Trifling occurrences ceaselessly arouse my suspicions regarding the doctor’s evil intentions. Today he has deposited in the garden verandah an entirely new set of axes, saws, and hammers. What does he want with them? In his sleeping-room are two guns and a revolver, and in a corridor a collection of axes which are much too heavy for merely domestic purposes. What a Satanic coincidence that I should have these implements of execution and torture before my eyes! For I cannot explain to myself what they mean, and why they are there. My nights now pass fairly quietly, while the doctor has taken to roaming about at night. Once at midnight I am startled by the sudden report of a gun. Out of politeness I pretend not to have heard it. The next morning he explains that a covey of woodpeckers had flown into the garden and disturbed his sleep. Another time, at two o’clock at night, I hear the hoarse voice of the housekeeper, and on another occasion I hear the doctor sigh and groan and invoke “the Lord.” Is this house haunted? Who has brought me here?

I cannot suppress a smile when I see how the nightmare with which I have been oppressed now takes possession of my gaoler. But my malicious joy is promptly punished. I have a terrible nervous attack. My heart seems to stop beating, and I hear two words, which I have noted in my diary. An unknown voice calls out, “Luthardt: Druggist.” Druggist! Are they slowly poisoning me with alkaloids such as hyoscyamin, hashish, digitalis, and stramonin, which cause delirium?

I don’t know, but from that time my suspicion is doubled. They do not dare to murder me, but they are trying to drive me mad by artificial means, in order to make me disappear in an asylum. Appearances are stronger and stronger against the doctor. I find out that he has discovered my process of making gold, and that perhaps he knew it before I did. Everything which he says contradicts itself the next moment, and when confronted by a liar my imagination takes the bit between its teeth and rushes beyond all reasonable bounds.

On the morning of the 8th of August I go for a walk before the town. On the high road a telegraph post is humming: I step up to it, lay my ear on it, and listen as if bewitched. At the foot of the post there lies by chance a horseshoe. I pick it up and carry it away as an omen of good luck.

August 10th.—The behaviour of the doctor during the last few days has disquieted me more than ever. By his strange aspect I see that he has struggled with himself; his face is pale; his eyes seem dead. During the whole day he sings or whistles; a letter which he has received has excited him much.

In the afternoon he comes home with bloody hands from an operation, and brings a two months’ old foetus with him. He looks like a butcher, and talks in a hateful way: “Let them kill the weak, and protect the strong! Down with pity, for it degrades men.” I hear him with

alarm, and secretly watch him, after we have wished each other good night on the threshold which divides our rooms. First of all, he goes in the garden, but I cannot hear what he does. Then he steps into the verandah adjoining my sleeping-room and stops there. He busies himself with some fairly heavy object, and winds up a piece of clockwork which, however, belongs to no clock. Half-undressed, I await, standing motionless, the result of these mysterious preparations.

Then once more the well-known electric fluid streams through the wall on my bed, seeks my breast, and under it, my heart. The tension increases: I seize my clothes, slip through the window, and do not dress till I am outside the house. There I am again in the street, on the pavement, my last refuge and only friend behind me! I wander onward without a definite aim; but when I come to myself I go direct to the chief physician of the town. I have to ring and wait, and prepare what to say so as not to injure my friend.

At last the doctor appears. I excuse myself for paying such an untimely visit on the plea of sleeplessness, palpitations, and want of confidence in my own doctor, who, I said, treated me as a hypochondriac and would not listen to me. The doctor invites me inside, as though he had been expecting me, asks me to take a seat, and offers me a cigar and a glass of wine. I breathe freely at finding myself once more treated as a respectable man, and not a wretched idiot. We chat for two hours, and the doctor turns out to be a theosophist to whom I can tell everything, without compromising myself. At last about midnight I rise in order to find an hotel; the doctor, however, advises me to return home.

"Never! he is capable of murdering me!"

"But if I accompany you?"

"Then, indeed, we should meet the enemy's fire together. But he would never forgive me!"

"All the same, let us venture."

So I return to the house. The door is shut, and I knock. When my friend enters after a minute, it is I who am seized with compassion, he, the surgeon, who is accustomed to witness suffering without emotion, he, the advocate of deliberate murder, is an object of pity indeed. He is pale as death, trembles, stammers, and at the sight of the doctor standing behind me seems on the point of collapse, so that I feel more panic-struck than ever. Is it conceivable that this man intended a murder and now feared detection? No, it is not; I reject the thought; it is wicked. After insignificant and on my part really ridiculous remarks, we go to our bedrooms.

There occur in life such terrible incidents that the mind refuses to retain the memory of them for a moment, but the impression remains and becomes irresistibly alive again. Thus there comes to my mind something which took place in the doctor's waiting-room during my night visit. He went to fetch wine; left alone I contemplated a cupboard with carved panels of walnut or alderwood, I forget which. As usual, the veins in the wood formed figures in my imagination. Among them I saw in lively presentment a head with a goat's beard, and immediately turned my back upon it. It was Pan in person, as depicted by the ancients and as metamorphosed later into the Devil of the Middle Ages. I content myself by noting the fact; the owner of the cupboard, the doctor, would be doing occult sciences a great service if he would allow the panel to be photographed. In the *Initiation* for November, 1896, Dr. Marc Haven has treated of this phenomenon, which is common in all the kingdoms of nature, and I recommend the reader to regard attentively the face on the shell of the tortoise.

After this adventure, open hostility breaks out between my friend and me. He gives me to

understand that I am an idler, and that my presence is superfluous. To this I rejoin that I must wait for the arrival of important letters, but that I am ready at any time to go to an hotel. He now plays the role of the injured party. As a matter of fact, I cannot leave for want of money. For the rest, I anticipate that a turning-point in my destiny is at hand. My health is now restored again; I sleep quietly and work diligently. The wrath of Providence seems to have spent itself, for my exertions are crowned with success in all quarters. If I take a book at haphazard out of the doctor's library, it always gives the explanation I was looking for. Thus I find in an old chemical treatise the secret of my process for making gold, and I can now prove by metallurgic calculations and analogies that I have made gold, and that gold has always been obtained when one has gone to work in the same way. An essay on matter which I have written and sent to a French review is immediately published. I show the article to the doctor, who betrays his annoyance, since he cannot deny the fact. Then I say to myself, "How can that man be my friend, who is vexed at my *success*?"

August 12th.—I buy an album at the bookshop. It is a kind of notebook with a gilt leather cover. The design on it attracts my attention, and constitutes, strange as it may sound, a kind of prophecy, the interpretation of which will appear in the sequel. It is as follows: On the left is the waxing moon in the first quarter, surrounded by a branch in blossom; three horses' heads (*trijugum*) project from the moon; above is a branch of laurel; beneath three pillars; on the right hand, a bell out of which flowers appear; a wheel like a sun, etc.

August 13th.—The day announced by the clock on the Boulevard St. Michel has arrived. I wait for something to happen, but in vain; none the less. I am certain that somewhere something is happening, the result of which I shall hear in a short time.

August 14th.—On the street I pick up a leaf out of an old office calendar; in large type there is printed on it "August 13th" (the same date which was on the clock). Underneath in smaller type is a sentence, "Do nothing secretly which thou canst not do also openly."

August 15th.—A letter from my wife. She bewails my lot; she still loves me, and with our child is waiting for a change in the melancholy situation. Her parents, who formerly hated me, are full of sympathy for my sufferings, and what is more, they invite me to visit my little angel of a daughter, who lives with her grandparents in the country. That calls me back to life. My child, my daughter is more than my wife. Only to think of embracing the harmless, innocent creature, whom I wished to injure,[8] to ask her forgiveness, to brighten her life by little paternal attentions, after having longed for years to show the love which has been repressed! I live again, wake up as if out of a long bad dream, and revere the stern will of the Lord, whose hard but wise hand has smitten me. "Blessed is he whom God chastens." Blessed, for he does not trouble about others.

While it is still uncertain whether I shall meet my wife on the Danube, a matter to which, because of an undefined grudge against her, I am quite indifferent, I prepare for my pilgrimage, perfectly aware that it is a penance, and that new mortifications await me.

After thirty days of misery, at last the doors of my torture-chamber open. I part from my friend—my executioner—without bitterness. He has only been the scourge in the hand of Providence. Behold, blessed is the man whom the Lord chasteneth.

VII
BEATRICE

In Berlin, I drive from the Stettin to the Anhalt Station. The half-hour's drive becomes a real way of thorns for me, so many are the memories which painfully revive in me. At first we pass through the street in which my friend Popoffsky, as an unknown, but yet misunderstood, man fought his first battles with poverty and passion. Now his wife and child are both dead; they died in this house on the left; and our friendship has turned into bitter hatred.

Here, on the right, are the restaurants frequented by artists and authors, the scenes of so many intellectual and erotic orgies. Here is the Cantina Italiana, where I used to meet with my fiancée three years ago, and where the first honorarium I received from Italy was spent in Chianti. There is the Schiffbauerdamm with the Pension Fulda, which we lived in when a young married pair. Here is my theatre, my bookseller, my tailor, my chemist.

What unhappy instinct leads the cabman to drive me through this *via dolorosa* full of buried memories, which at this late hour of the night rise again like ghosts? Why does he choose just the street in which is the restaurant, the "Black Pig," well known as a favourite resort of Heine and E. T. A. Hoffmann? The restaurant keeper himself stands on the steps under the grotesque signboard. He looks at me without recognition. For a second the candelabrum within darts coloured rays through the numerous bottles in the window, and makes me live again a year of my life which abounded in grief and joy, friendship and love. At the same time, I feel keenly that it is all over, and must be buried to make place for something new.

I spent the night in Berlin. The next morning a deep rose-red flush in the East greeted me over the roofs. I remember having seen this rosy colour in Malmö on the evening of my departure. I leave Berlin, my second home, where I have spent my "second spring," that is, my last. At the Anhalt Station, full of these memories, I give up all hope of the renewal of a spring and a love which can never return.

After a night in Tabor, whither the rosy glow followed me, I travel through the Bohemian mountains to the Danube. There the railway ends, and I traverse the Danube plain, which extends to Grein, in a carriage. We pass between orchards of apple and pear trees, cornfields and green meadows. At last, on a hill on the other side of the river, I discover the little church in which I never was, but which I know well as the central point of the landscape which extends before the house where my child was born. It is now two years since that unforgettable month of May. I pass through villages and convents; along the road there rise innumerable penitential chapels, hills crowned with crucifixes, votive pictures, monuments, reminding one of accidents and sudden deaths by lightning, and in other ways. At the end of my pilgrimage there certainly await me the twelve stations of the Cross. Every hundred paces the Crucified meets me with His crown of thorns, and instils into me courage to bear scourging and crucifixion. I painfully convince myself beforehand, that *she*, as I might have known, will not be there. Now, since my wife can no more divert the domestic storm, I must expect tit-for-tat from the old parents, whom I left under unpleasant circumstances, though against my will. I come accordingly for the sake of peace to be punished, and when I have

passed the last village and the last crucifix, my feelings are something like those of a condemned man awaiting execution.

I had left an infant six weeks old, and I found a little girl of two and a half. She turned on me a searching look, but not one of dislike, as though she wished to find out whether I had come for her own or her mother's sake. After she had assured herself of the former, she let herself be embraced, and put her little arms round my neck. I am in a mood like Faust's when he exclaims, "the earth has me again," but more tender and purer. I am delighted in taking the little one on my arm, and feeling her heart beat against mine. Love for a child turns a man into a woman; it is sexless and heavenly, as Swedenborg says. This is the beginning of my education for heaven. But I have not yet done penance enough.

Briefly put, the situation is as follows: My wife is staying with her married sister, for her grandmother, who is in possession of the family property, has vowed that our marriage shall be dissolved, so intensely does she hate me, on account of my ingratitude and other matters. So I with my child remain as a welcome guest of my mother-in-law, and contentedly accept the hospitality offered me, under present circumstances, for an indefinite time. My mother-in-law, with the placable and submissive mind of a deeply religious woman, has forgiven me all.

September 1st.—I occupy the room in which my wife has spent her two years of separation. Here she has suffered, while I suffered in Paris. Poor, poor woman! Are we so severely punished, because we have trifled with love?

During the evening meal the following incident happens. In order to help my little daughter, who cannot yet help herself, I touch her hand quite gently and kindly. The child utters a cry, draws her hand back, and casts at me a glance full of alarm. When her grandmother asks what is the matter, she answers, "He hurts me." In my confusion I am unable to utter a word. How many persons have I deliberately hurt, and hurt still, though without intending it. At night I dream of an eagle which tears at my hand for some unknown crime.

In the morning my daughter visits me; her manner is gentle and coaxing. She drinks coffee with me, and remains standing by my writing-table while I show her pictures. We are already good friends, and my mother-in-law is glad that she has someone to help her in educating the little one. In the evening I accompany her going to bed, and hear her prayers. She is a Catholic, and when she bids me pray and make the sign of the cross, I remain silent, for I am a Protestant.

September 2nd.—Everything is in confusion. My mother-in-law's mother, who lives not far from here on the bank of the stream, intends to have an expulsion order made out against me. She wants me to go at once, and threatens if I disobey to disinherit her daughter. My mother-in-law's sister, a good woman, who is separated from her husband, invites me to stay with her in the neighbouring village till the storm has blown over. She comes herself to fetch me. From the top of a hill about a mile off, one looks into a circular valley, like the crater of a volcano, out of which rise many smaller hills covered with pines. In the middle of this crater lies the village with its church, and above, on a precipitous height, a castle built in the medieval style; between, lie fields and meadows watered by a stream which rushes into a ravine below the castle.

This peculiar and unique landscape makes a strange impression on me, and the thought arises: "I must have seen it somewhere before, but where, where?"

In the zinc bath in the Hôtel Orfila, traced out in oxide of iron! Without question, it is the same landscape!

My aunt goes down with me into the village, where she owns a three-storeyed house. The capacious edifice also contains a baker's and butcher's shop, and a restaurant. It has a

lightning-conductor, because the store was a year ago struck by lightning. When my good aunt, who is as rigidly religious as her sister, conducts me to the room assigned for my use, I remain fixed on the threshold as if arrested by a vision. The walls are painted a rose-colour, which reminds me of the flush of the dawns which accompanied me on my journey. The curtains are also rose-coloured, and the windows so full of flowers that the daylight is subdued by them. Everything is spotlessly clean, and the bed with its canopy supported by four pillars is like that of a maiden. The whole room with its appurtenances is a poem, and speaks of a soul which only half lives upon earth. The Crucified is not there, but the Blessed Virgin is, and a vessel of holy water guards the entrance against evil spirits.

A feeling of shame seizes me, and I fear to sully the ideal of a pure heart which has erected this temple to the Virgin over the grave of her only love, who has been dead ten years, and in confusion I attempt to decline the kindly offer. But the good lady insists: “It will do you good, if you sacrifice your earthly love to the love of God, and of your child. Believe me, this thornless love will preserve your peace of mind and cheerfulness of spirit, and under the protection of the Virgin you will sleep quietly.”

I kiss her hand as a sign of gratitude for her sacrifice, and consent with a feeling of humility of which I had not thought myself capable. The powers seem to be gracious to me, and to have arranged the sufferings they have ordained for my improvement. Still, for some reason or other, I wish to sleep another night in Saxen, and put off my change of residence till the next day. So I return with my aunt to my child. Looking at the house from the street, I discover that the lightning-conductor is fastened exactly above my bed.

What an infernal coincidence! It makes me think again that I am the subject of a personal persecution. I also notice that my window commands a pleasant prospect, looking out as it does on a poorhouse occupied by released criminals and sick people, among whom several are dying. A sorry spectacle truly, to have continually before one’s eyes!

In Saxen I pack my things and prepare for departure. I part with sorrow from my child, who has become so dear to me. The cruelty of the old woman, who has succeeded in separating me from wife and child, enrages me. Angrily I shake my fist against a painting of her which hangs over my bed, and utter an imprecation against her. Two hours later a terrible storm breaks over the village. One lightning flash succeeds another, the rain pours in torrents, the sky is pitch dark.

The next day I am in Klam, where the rose-coloured room awaits me. Over my aunt’s house there hangs a cloud in the shape of a dragon. They tell me that a house quite close by has been struck by lightning, and that the torrents of rain have injured haystacks and carried away bridges.

On the 10th of September a cyclone has devastated Paris, and that under most extraordinary circumstances. Without any warning, it suddenly rises behind St. Sulpice in the Jardin de Luxembourg, grazes the Théâtre du Châlet and the police station, and disappears behind the St. Louis hospital, after it has torn up iron gratings for fifty yards round. Regarding this cyclone and the one in the Jardin des Plantes, my theosophical friend asks me, “What is a cyclone? Is it an ebullition of hatred, the eruption of some passion, the effluence of some spirit?”

It must be a coincidence, or rather, more than a coincidence, that in a letter which crosses his, I have asked him as one initiated in the occult doctrines of the Hindus, “Can the philosophers of Hindustan cause cyclones?”

I began to suspect the adepts in magic of persecuting me on account of my gold-making or my obstinacy, and of wishing to bring me in complete subjection to their society. In the *German Mythology* of Rydberg and in *Wärend och Widarne* of Hilten-Cavallius, I had read that witches were in the habit of appearing in a storm or in short and violent gusts of wind. I mention this to show my mental condition before I fell in with Swedenborg’s teaching.

The sanctuary shines in white and rose, and the saint will soon join his disciple, who summons him from their common fatherland in order to revive the memory of the man who was more highly equipped with spiritual gifts than any born of woman in these modern times. France sent Anskar[8] in the early middle ages to baptise Sweden; a thousand years later Sweden sent Swedenborg to re-baptise France by means of his disciple Saint-Martin. The Martinist orders, who know the role they have to play in the founding of a new France, will not undervalue the purport of these words, and still less the significance of the above-mentioned millennium.

VIII

SWEDENBORG

My mother-in-law and my aunt completely resemble each other in character, tastes, and inclinations, and each sees in the other her counterpart. On the first evening of my stay I narrate to them my mysterious adventures, doubts, and sufferings. They both exclaim, with a certain look of satisfaction in their faces, “You are where we have already been.” Both starting from a neutral point of view as regards religion had begun to study occultism. From that moment onwards they suffered from sleepless nights, mysterious accidents accompanied by terrible fears, and at last, attacks of madness. The invisible furies pursue their prey up to the very gates of the city of refuge—religion. But before they have got so far the protecting angel reveals himself—and that is Swedenborg. The good ladies wrongly suppose that I have a thorough acquaintance with the writings of my fellow-countrymen. Astonished at my ignorance, they give me, with a certain air of reserve, however, an old volume in German, saying, “Take it, read, and don’t be afraid.”

“Afraid? Why should I be?” I answer.

Returning to the rose-coloured room, I open the book at haphazard and read. The reader may conceive my astonishment when my eyes fall on the description of one of Swedenborg’s hells which exactly reproduces the landscape of Klam, as I saw it in the zinc bath. The crater-shaped valley, the pine-crowned hill, the ravine with the stream, the heaps of dung, the pigsty—they are all there.

Hell? But I have been brought up in the profoundest contempt of the doctrine of hell, as one consigned to the rubbish-heap of outworn ideas. And yet I cannot deny the fact—and that is the novelty in this exposition of the doctrine of so-called eternal punishment—we are already in hell. Earth, earth is hell—the dungeon appointed by a superior power, in which I cannot move a step without injuring the happiness of others, and in which others cannot remain happy without hurting me. Thus Swedenborg depicts hell, and perhaps without knowing it, earthly life, at the same time.

The fire of hell is the wish to rise in the world; the powers awaken this wish and allow the damned souls to get all they want. But as soon as the goal is reached, and the wish is fulfilled, everything is seen to be worthless and the victory is null and void. Oh, vanity of vanities! Then, after the first disappointment, the powers rekindle the flame of ambition and desire; and satisfied greed and satiety are still a worse torment than unquenched appetite. Thus the Devil suffers everlasting punishment, for he gets all he wants at once, so that he cannot enjoy it.

When I compare the Swedenborgian hells with the punishments described in the *German Mythology,* I find an obvious likeness, but for me the bare fact that both these books have fallen into my hand exactly at the right moment is the essential point. I am in hell, and damnation weighs upon me like a heavy burden. When I go over my past, my childhood already appears to me like a prison house or torture chamber. In order to explain the sufferings inflicted upon innocent children, one has only to suppose an earlier existence, out of which we have been cast down in order to bear the consequences of forgotten sins. With a

docile mind, which is my chief weakness, I receive a deep and sombre impression from my reading of Swedenborg. And the powers let me rest no more. Walking along the little brook in the neighbourhood of the village, I reach the so-called ravine path between the two mountains. The entrance between fallen and precipitous rocks has a wonderful attraction for me. The almost perpendicular hill, crowned by the deserted castle, forms the gate of the ravine, in which the stream drives a water-mill. A freak of nature has given the rock the form of a Turk's head, a fact well known in the neighbourhood. Underneath, the miller's shed leans against the wall of rock. Upon the latch of the door hangs a goat's horn smeared over with fat, and by it stands a broom. This is certainly quite natural and ordinary, yet I cannot help asking myself what devil has put these two symbols of witchcraft, the goat's horn and the broom, just this morning in my way? I press farther on up the damp, dark, and uneven path, and come to a wooden building, the strange aspect of which makes me stop. It is a long, low erection, with six openings like oven doors. Oven doors! Ye gods, where am I then?

The image of Dante's hell, the red-glowing tombs of the heresiarchs, rises before me—and the six oven doors! Is it a bad dream? No, commonplace fact, for a frightful stench, a stream of dirt, and a chorus of grunting reveals to me immediately that I have a pigsty in front of me.

Between the miller's house and the hill, just under the Turk's head, the path contracts to a narrow passage. As I go farther along it, I find myself confronted by a large, wolf-coloured Danish dog, a counterpart of the monster which guarded the studio in the Rue de la Santé in Paris. I retreat two steps, but immediately remember Jacques Cœur's motto, "To a brave heart nothing is impossible," and press onward into the ravine. Cerberus appears not to notice me, and so I pursue the path which now winds between low and gloomy houses. On one side, a black, tailless fowl with a red comb is running about, on the other a woman wearing a red crescent-shaped ornament on her forehead comes out of a house. She looks beautiful at first, but as she comes nearer, I see that she is toothless and ugly.

The waterfall and the mill combined make a noise like that roaring in the ears which I had during my first period of disquiet in Paris. The white-powdered miller's men, who control the machinery, look like angels or executioners, and the never-ceasing stream of water rushes from under the great never-resting wheel. Then I reach the smithy with its bare-armed, blackened workmen armed with tongs, choppers, screw-vices, and hammers; amid the flames and sparks of the furnace there lie red-glowing iron and molten lead. There is a frightful din, which makes my brain vibrate and my heart leap. Farther on groans the great saw of the sawmill, and tortures with gnashing teeth the giant tree-trunks which lie on the block, while the sawdust trickles down on the damp ground.

The ravine-path, terribly devastated by cyclones and storms, continues along the stream; the subsiding overflow has left a greyish-green layer of mud behind, covering the sharp pebbles on which my feet continually slip. I wish to cross the water, but since the little bridge has been swept away, I halt under a precipice whose overhanging rock threatens to fall on an image of the Virgin, who seems to support the sinking hill on her tender shoulders.

Meditating on this combination of coincidences, which, taken together, without being supernatural, form a remarkable whole, I return home.

Eight days and eight quiet nights I spend in the rose-coloured room. My peace of mind returns with the daily visits of my little daughter, who loves me, and whom I love. By my relations I am treated like a sick, spoilt child. The reading of Swedenborg occupies me during the day and depresses me by the realism of its descriptions. All my observations, feelings, and thoughts are so vividly reflected there, that his visions seem to me like experiences and real "human documents." It is no question of blind faith; it is enough for me to read his experiences and to compare with them my own. The book I have is only an extract; the chief

riddle of the spiritual life will be solved for me later on when his *Arcana Cœlestia* falls into my hands. In the midst of my reflections, which lead to the newly-won conviction that there is a God who punishes, some lines of Swedenborg comfort me, and immediately I begin to excuse myself and yield to my old pride. In the evening I take my mother-in-law into my confidence, and ask her, "Do you think I am a damned soul?"

"No; although I have never seen any human destiny like yours; but you have not yet found the right way to lead you to the Lord."

"Do you remember Swedenborg and his *Principia Cœli*, how he describes the stages of spiritual progress? First, an elevated ambition. Now, my ambition has never led me to strive after honour, nor to try to impress people with a sense of my ability. Secondly, love of happiness and money, in order to profit people. You know that I seek no gain and despise money. As regards my gold-making, I have sworn in the presence of the powers that any profits I made should be used for humanitarian, scientific, and religious objects. Finally, wedded love. Need I say that from my youth I have concentrated my love of woman on the idea of marriage, of the family, and the wife. What in actual experience befell me that I should marry the widow of a man who was still alive, is an irony of fate which I cannot explain, but which cannot be regarded as a serious misdemeanour when contrasted with the irregularities of ordinary bachelor life."

After some moments of reflection, my mother-in-law replied: "I cannot dispute your assertion; for I have found in your writings a spirit of aspiration and endeavour, whose efforts have been involuntarily frustrated. Certainly, you must be doing penance, for sins which you committed before your birth. You must in your former existence have been a bloodstained conqueror, and therefore you suffer repeatedly the terrors of death without being able to die. Now be religious inwardly and outwardly."

"You mean that I should become a Catholic?"

"Yes."

"Swedenborg says it is forbidden to quit the religion of one's fathers, for everyone belongs to the spiritual territory on which he is born."

"The Catholic religion receives graciously everyone who seeks it."

"I will be content with a lower position. In case of need I can find a place among the Jews and Mohammedans, who are also admitted to heaven. I am modest."

"Grace is offered you, but you prefer the mess of pottage to the right of the firstborn."

"The right of the firstborn for the *Son of a Servant*![9] Too much! Too much!"

Restored to self-respect by Swedenborg, I regard myself once more as Job, the righteous and sinless man, whom the Eternal tries in order to show the wicked the example of a righteous man enduring unjust sufferings.

My pious vanity is tickled by the idea. I am proud of the distinction of being persecuted by misfortune, and am never weary of repeating, "See! how I have suffered." Before my relatives I accuse myself of living in too much luxury, and my rose-coloured room seems to me to be a satire upon me. They notice my sincere repentance, and overwhelm me with kindnesses and little indulgences. In brief, I am one of the elect; Swedenborg has said it, and confident of the protection of the Eternal, I challenge the demons to combat.

On the eighth day which I spend in my rose-coloured room the news arrives that my mother-in-law's mother, who lives on the bank of the Danube, is ill. She has a pain in the liver accompanied with vomiting, sleeplessness, and attacks of palpitation at night. My aunt whose

hospitality I enjoy is summoned thither, and I am to return to my mother-in-law in Saxen. To my objection that the old lady has forbidden it, they reply that she has withdrawn her order of expulsion, so that I am free to arrange my residence where I like. This sudden change of mind astonishes me, and I hardly dare to attribute it to her illness. The next day she gets worse. My mother-in-law gives me in the name of her mother a bouquet as a sign of reconciliation, and tells me in confidence that, besides other wild fancies, the old lady thinks she has a snake in her body. The next news is that she has been robbed of 1000 gulden, and suspects her landlady of stealing them. The latter is enraged at the unjust suspicion and wishes to bring an action for libel. The old lady, who had retired hither to die quietly, finds her domestic peace completely destroyed. She is continually sending us something—flowers, fruit, game, pheasants, poultry, fish.

Is the old lady's conscience troubled at the prospect of judgment? Does she remember that she once had me put out on the street, and so obliged me to go to hospital? Or is she superstitious? Does she think she is bewitched by me? Perhaps the presents she sends are meant as offerings to the wizard, to still his thirst for vengeance.

Unfortunately, just at this juncture, there comes a work on magic from Paris containing information regarding so-called witchcraft. The author tells the reader that he must not regard himself as innocent, if he merely avoids using magic arts; one must rather keep watch over one's own evil will, which by itself alone is capable of exercising an influence over others in their absence.

The results of this teaching on my mind are twofold. In the first place, it arouses my scruples at the present juncture, for I had raised my fist in anger against the old lady's picture and cursed her. Secondly, it reawakens my old suspicions that I myself am the victim of malpractices on the part of occultists or theosophists. Pangs of conscience on one side, fear on the other! And the two millstones begin to grind me to powder.

Swedenborg describes Hell as follows: The damned soul inhabits a splendid palace, leads a luxurious life there, and regards himself as one of the elect. Gradually the splendours disappear, and the wretched soul finds that it is confined in a wretched hovel and surrounded by filth. This is parallelled in my own experience.

The rose-coloured room has disappeared, and as I remove into a large chamber near that of my mother-in-law, I feel that my stay here will not be of long duration. As a matter of fact, all possible trifles combine to poison my life and to deprive me of the necessary quiet for work. The planks of the floor sway under my feet, the table wobbles, the chair is unsteady, the articles on the washing-stand clash together, the bed creaks, and the rest of the furniture moves whenever I cross the floor. The lamp smokes, the ink-pot is too narrow so that the pen-holder gets inky. The farmhouse smells of dung and manure, ammonia, sulphuretted hydrogen, and sulphuric acid. The whole day there is a noise of cows, swine, calves, cocks, turkeys, and doves. Flies and wasps worry me by day, and gnats by night. At the village shop there is nothing to be had. Because there is no other sort, I must use rose-coloured ink. Strange, too! In a packet of cigarette papers which I buy there is a single rose-coloured one among a hundred white. It is a miniature hell, and I, who am accustomed to bear great sufferings, suffer inexpressibly from these needle-pricks, all the more that my mother-in-law believes that I am not satisfied by her kind attentions.

September 17th.—I awake at night and hear the church clock of the village strike thirteen. Immediately I feel the electric band encircle me, and think I hear a noise in the attic above

me.

September 19th.—I search the attic and discover a dozen distaffs, the wheels of which remind me of electric machines. I open a large box; it is empty; only five staves painted black, the use of which is unknown to me, lie in the form of a pentagram at the bottom of the box. Who has played me this trick, and what does it mean? I do not venture to ask anything about it, and the riddle remains unsolved.

Between midnight and two o'clock a terrible storm breaks out. As a rule a storm exhausts itself and soon subsides; this one, however, remains raging for two hours over the village. Every lightning flash is a personal attack on me, but none of them strike me.

In the evening my mother-in-law relates to me the history of the district. What a monstrous collection of domestic and other tragedies, consisting of adulteries, divorces, lawsuits between relatives, murders, thefts, violations, incests, slanders. The castles, the villas, the huts are occupied by unhappy people of all kinds, and I cannot take my walks without thinking of Swedenborg's hells. Beggars, imbeciles of both sexes, sick persons and cripples line the high roads or kneel at the foot of a crucifix, a Madonna, or a martyr. At night the wretched creatures try to escape their sleeplessness and their bad dreams by wandering about in the meadows and woods in order to fatigue themselves, and to be able to sleep. Members of good society, well-educated ladies, even a pastor, are among them.

Not far from us is a convent which serves as a penitentiary and rescue home. It is a real prison, in which the strictest rules prevail. In the winter when the thermometer registers twenty degrees of frost, the penitents must sleep on the cold stone pavement of their cells, and their hands and feet, which they cannot warm, are covered with chilblains.

Among the others is a woman who has sinned with a priest, which is a deadly sin. Tortured by pangs of conscience, she flies in her despair to her confessor, who, however, refuses her absolution and the sacrament. A deadly sin entails damnation. Then the wretched creature loses her reason, imagines that she is dead, wanders from village to village and implores the priests to be merciful and to bury her in consecrated ground. Shunned and driven away everywhere, she wanders about, howling like a wild beast, and those who see her cross themselves and exclaim, "She is damned!" No one doubts but that her soul is already in hell, while her shadow, a wandering corpse, wanders about as a terrible warning.

They tell me of a man who, possessed by the Devil, has so altered his personality that the Evil One can make him utter blasphemies against his will. After long search they discover a suitable exorcist in a young Franciscan monk of acknowledged purity of life. He prepares himself by fast and penance; the great day comes, and the possessed man makes his confession in church before the people. Thereupon the young monk sets to work and succeeds, after prayers and conjurations which last an entire day, in driving out the Devil. The alarmed spectators have not ventured to relate the details of the affair. A year later the young monk dies. These and still more tragic narratives confirm me in my conviction that this district has been marked out as a place for penance, and there must be some mysterious connection between this neighbourhood and Swedenborg's hell. Has he perhaps visited this part of upper Austria, and, just as Dante describes the region south of Naples, drawn from nature in his account of hell?

After a couple of weeks have passed in work and study I am again unsettled, as with the setting in of autumn my aunt and mother-in-law wish to live together in Klam. We therefore break up our camp. In order to preserve my independence, I hire a cottage consisting of two rooms, so as to be quite close to my little daughter.

The first evening after settling in my new quarters I am overcome by a terrible depression, as though the air were poisoned. I go to my mother-in-law: "If I sleep up there you will find

me dead in bed tomorrow. Shelter a pilgrim for this night, my good mother!”

The rose-coloured room is at once placed at my disposal, but, good heavens! how it has altered since my aunt’s departure! There is black furniture in it; the empty pigeonholes of a bookcase gape like so many jaws; a tall iron oven, ornamented with ugly devices of salamanders and dragons, confronts me like a spectre. In a word, there reigns such a disharmony in the room as makes me feel poorly. Moreover, every irregularity upsets my nerves, for I am a man of ordered habits who does everything at stated hours. In spite of my efforts to conceal my dissatisfaction, my mother-in-law reads my thoughts.

“Always dissatisfied, my child?”

She does her best to allay my discontent, but when the spirit of dissension is once aroused, everything is in vain. She tries to remember my favourite dishes, but everything goes wrong. There is nothing I dislike more than calf’s head with brown butter.

“Here is something nice,” she says to me, “expressly for you,” and sets calf’s head with brown butter before me. I understand that it is an unconscious mistake on her part, but can only eat with scarcely-concealed repugnance and simulated appetite.

“You are not eating anything!”

It is too much! Formerly I attributed these annoyances to feminine malice; now I acquit everyone and say, “It is the Devil!”

From my early days I am accustomed to plan out the day’s work during my morning walk. No one, not even my wife, has ever been allowed to accompany me on it. And, as a matter of fact, in the morning my mind rejoices in a feeling of harmony and happy elevation which borders on ecstasy. My corporeal part seems to have disappeared, my griefs too have fled; I am all soul. The early morning is my time of self-collection, my hour of prayer, my matins.

Now I must sacrifice it all, and give up my most innocent pleasure. The powers compel me to renounce this last and purest enjoyment. My little daughter wishes to accompany me. I embrace her tenderly, and tell her why I wish to be alone, but she does not understand it. She cries, and I have not the heart to sadden her today, but make a firm resolve not to allow her again to misuse her rights. She is certainly thoroughly fascinating as a child, with her originality, her cheerfulness, her gratitude for trifles, that is, when one has leisure to be occupied with her. But when one is absentminded and distracted, it is intensely annoying to be plagued with endless questions and changes of mood about mere nothings.

My little one is as jealous as a lover about my thoughts; she seems to watch for the exact opportunity to destroy a carefully-woven web of thought with her prattle—but no, it is not she who does it; she is only an instrument, but I seem to be the object of deliberate attacks by a poor little innocent. I go on with slow steps; I don’t seek to escape any more, but my soul is a prisoner, and my brain exhausted by the effort of continually having to descend to a child’s level. What, however, pains me intensely is the deep, reproachful look she casts at me when she thinks I find her a nuisance, and imagines that I love her no longer. Then her open joyous little face falls, her looks are averted, her heart is closed to me, and I feel myself bereft of the light which this child had brought into my dark soul. I kiss her, take her on my arm, look for flowers and pretty pebbles for her, cut a switch for her, and pretend to be a cow which she is driving to the meadow. She is contented and happy, and life smiles at me again.

I have sacrificed my morning hour. So do I atone for the evil which in a moment of madness I had wished to conjure down on this angel’s head. What a penance—to be loved! Truly the powers are not so cruel as we are!

IX

Extracts from the Diary of a Damned Soul

October, *November*, 1896

The Brahmin has fulfilled his duty as regards life when he has begotten a child. Then he goes into the desert, to dedicate himself to solitude and asceticism.

My mother-in-law.—"What have you done in your former human existence that Fate deals so hardly with you?"

I.—"Think! Remember a man who was first married to another man's wife, like myself, and who separated from her in order to marry an Austrian, like myself! Then his little Austrian is torn from him, as mine has been from me, and their only child is kept in the Bohemian mountains as mine is. Do you remember the hero of my romance, *On the Open Sea*, who commits suicide on an island—"

M.—"Enough! Enough!"

I.—"You don't know that my father's mother was called Neipperg—"

M.—"Stop! Unhappy man!"

I.—"And that my little Christina resembles the greatest murderer of the century to a hair. Only look at her, the little tyrant, the man-tamer at two and a half!"

M.—"You are mad."

I.—"Yes! And what sins have you women formerly committed, since your lot is still harder than ours? See how justly I have called woman our evil angel. Each has his or her deserts."

M.-"To be a woman is a twofold hell."

I.—"And so woman is a twofold devil. As regards reincarnation, that is a Christian doctrine which has been maintained by some of the clergy. Christ said that John the Baptist was Elijah reborn on earth. Is that an authority or not?"

M.—"Yes, but the Roman Church forbids inquiry into secrets."

I.—"And science permits it, as soon as science itself is tolerated."

The spirits of discord are abroad, and despite of the fact that we are quite aware of their game and our freedom from blame in the matter, our repeated misunderstandings leave a bitter wish for revenge behind them. Moreover, both sisters suspect that my evil wishes caused their mother's mysterious illness, and remembering that it is to my interest to have my separation from my wife terminated, they cannot suppress the fairly reasonable thought that the death of the old lady would cause me joy. The mere existence of this wish makes me hateful in their eyes, and I do not venture any more to ask how their mother is because I fear to be regarded as a hypocrite.

The situation is strained, and my two former friends exhaust themselves in endless discussions regarding my person, my character, my feelings, and the sincerity of my love for the little one. At one time they regard me as a saint, and the scars in my hands as wound-prints. And certainly the marks on my palms resemble large nail-holes. But in order to put an end to all ideas of saintship, I designate myself the penitent thief, who has come down from the cross and started on his pilgrimage to Paradise.

Another time, they try to solve the riddle by regarding me as Robert the Devil. At that time many incidents occurred, sufficient to give ground for fearing that I might be stoned by the inhabitants of the place. Here is a simple fact. My little Christina has an extraordinary dread of chimney sweeps. One evening, at supper, she suddenly begins to scream, points at someone invisible behind my chair, and cries, “The chimney sweep!”

My mother-in-law, who believes in the clairvoyance of children and animals, turns pale; and I become alarmed all the more as I see my mother-in-law make the sign of a cross over the child’s head. A dead silence ensues, which puts a stop to all cheerfulness.

The autumn with its storms, heavy rains, and dark nights has come. In the village and the poorhouse the number of the sick, dying, and dead increases. In the night one hears the choirboy ring the bell before the Host. All through the day the church bell is tolling, and one funeral follows another. Death and life have grown into a single horror. My night attacks recommence. Prayers are said for me, beads are told, and the holy water vessel in my room is filled by the priest himself. “The hand of the Lord rests heavily on thee!” with these words my mother-in-law crushes me. But slowly I recover myself. My mental elasticity and an inborn scepticism free me again from these black thoughts, and after the perusal of certain occult writings, I believe myself to be persecuted by spirits of the elements, incubi and Lamias[10] who wish to hinder me in the completion of my great work on Alchemy. Instructed by the initiated in such matters, I procure a Dalmatian dagger, and consider myself well-armed against evil spirits.

In the village a shoemaker dies, who was an atheist and blasphemer. He had a jackdaw, who now left to himself lives on the roof of a neighbouring house. While watch is being kept by the dead, they suddenly discover the jackdaw in the room without anyone being able to explain how it got there. On the day of the burial, the black bird accompanies the funeral procession, and perches on the coffin in the churchyard before the ceremony. Every morning this creature follows me in my walk, a fact which really disquiets me because of the superstitious nature of the people. One day, which is destined to prove its last, the jackdaw accompanies me with horrible screams and words of abuse, which the blasphemer had taught him, through the streets of the village. Then there come two little birds, a robin and a yellow wagtail, and follow the jackdaw from roof to roof. The jackdaw flies outside the village and perches on the roof of a cottage. At the same moment a black rabbit springs up before the cottage, and disappears in the grass. Some days afterwards we hear of the jackdaw’s death. It had been killed by the street boys because of its propensity for stealing.

During the day I work in my little house. But for some time past it seems that the powers are no longer well intentioned towards me. When I enter the house I find the air thick, as if it had been poisoned, and have to open doors and windows. Wrapped in a thick cloak, with a fur cap on my head, I sit at the table and write, and resist the so-called electric attacks which compress my chest and seize me in the back. Often I feel as though someone were standing behind my chair. Then I stab with the dagger behind me, and imagine I am fighting an

enemy. So it goes on till five o'clock in the afternoon. If I remain sitting longer, the conflict becomes terrific, until, feeling wholly exhausted, I light my lantern and go to my mother-in-law and my child. On one occasion, as early as two or three o'clock, I find my room full of the thick and choking atmosphere I have spoken of. But I continue the struggle till six o'clock in order to finish an article on chemistry. On a bunch of flowers sits a ladybird marked with yellow and black—the Austrian colours. It clambers about, gropes, and seeks for a flying-off place. At last it falls on my paper, spreads out its wings exactly like the weathercock on the church of Notre-Dame des Champs in Paris, then crawls along the manuscript and up my right hand. It looks at me, and then flies towards the window; the compass on the table points towards the north.

"Very well!" I say to myself, "to the north then; but not before I choose; till I am summoned again, I remain where I am."

Six o'clock strikes, and it is impossible to remain in this haunted house. Unknown forces lift me from my chair and I must leave the place.

It is All Souls' Day, about three o'clock in the afternoon; the sun shines and the air is clear. The villagers are going in a procession led by the clergy, with banners and music, to the churchyard, to greet the dead. The bells begin to ring. Then, without a warning, without even one cloud appearing as precursor in the pale blue sky, a storm breaks loose. The banners flap violently against the poles, the festal robes of the men and women are a prey of the winds. Dust-clouds rise and whirl; trees bend. It is a real wonder.

I feel afraid of the next night, and my mother-in-law knows it. She has given me a charm to wear round my neck. It is a Madonna and a cross made out of consecrated wood—the timber of a church which is more than a thousand years old. I accepted it as a valuable present offered in good will, but a lingering respect for the religion of my fathers prevents my wearing it round my neck.

It is about eight o'clock, and we are having our evening meal; the lamp burns and a weird stillness reigns in our little circle. Outside it is dark; there is no wind in the trees; all is quiet. All at once a single gust of wind blows through the crevices of the window with a curious humming noise like that of a Jew's-harp. Then it is past. My mother-in-law throws a look of alarm at me and folds the child in her arms. In a second I interpret what her look means: "Leave us, O damned soul, and do not bring avenging demons on our innocent heads." Everything goes to pieces; my last remaining happiness, the companionship of my little daughter, is taken from me, and in the gloomy silence I mentally bid the world adieu.

After the evening meal I withdraw to the once rose-coloured—now black—room and prepare, since I feel myself threatened, for a night-battle. With whom? I know not, but challenge the Invisible, be it diabolic or divine, and will wrestle with It, like Jacob with the angel. There is a knock at the door. It is my mother-in-law, who forebodes a bad night for me, and invites me to sleep on the sofa in her sitting-room. "The presence of the child will safeguard you," she says. I thank her and assure her there is no danger, and that nothing can frighten me so long as my conscience is untroubled. With a smile she wishes me good night.

I put on my martial cloak, boots and cap again, determined to lie down dressed and ready to die like a brave warrior who despises life and challenges death. About eleven o'clock the air in the room begins to grow dense, and a deadly fear masters my courageous heart. I open the window. The draught threatens to blow out the lamp. I close it again. The lamp begins to make a sound between a sigh and a moan; then all is still again.

A dog in the village howls. According to popular superstition, this is a sign of death. I look out of the window; only the Great Bear is visible. Down there in the poorhouse a light is burning; an old woman is sitting bent over her work, as though she were waiting for her

release; perhaps she fears sleep and its dreams. Weary, I lie down again on the bed, and try to sleep. At once the old game recommences. An electric stream seeks my heart; my lungs cease to work; I must rise or die. I sit down on a chair, but am too exhausted to be able to read, and spend half an hour thus in listless vacancy. Then I resolve to go for a walk till daybreak. I leave the house. The night is dark and the village asleep, but the dogs are not. One attacks me, and then the whole band surrounds me; their wide-open jaws and fiery eyes compel me to retreat.

When I open the door of my room and enter, it seems to me as though it were full of hostile living creatures through whom I must force my way in order to reach my bed. Resigned, and resolved to die, I throw myself upon it. But at the last moment, when the invisible vulture is about to stifle me under its wings, someone lifts me up, and the pursuit of the furies is at an end. Conquered, hurled to the earth, beaten down, I quit the scene of an unequal battle and yield to the invisible. I knock at the door on the other side of the passage. My mother-in-law, who is still at prayer, opens the door. The expression of her face as she looks at me makes me feel afraid of myself.

"What do you wish, my child?"

"I wish to die, and then to be burnt, or rather, burn me alive!"

She does not answer. She has understood me, and sympathy and pity conquer her fear, so that she prepares the sofa for me with her own hand. Then she retires to her own room where she sleeps with the child. Through a chance—always this Satanic chance!—the sofa stands opposite the window, and the same chance has willed that it has no curtains, so that the black window opening gapes at me. Moreover, it is the very same window through which the wind gust came when we were at supper. With all my powers exhausted, I sink on the sofa. I curse this ever-present, unavoidable "chance" which persecutes me with the obvious purpose of making me fall a victim to persecution-mania. For five minutes I have rest, while my eyes are fastened on the black square of the window; then an invisible something glides over my body, and I stand up. I remain standing in the middle of the room like a statue for hours, half-conscious, turned to stone, I know not whether awake or asleep.

Who gives me the strength to suffer? Who denies me the power, and delivers me over to torments? Is it He, the Lord of life and death, Whose wrath I have provoked, when, influenced by the pamphlet *The Joy of Dying*, I tried to die, and considered myself already ripe for eternal life? Am I Phlegyas doomed to the pains of Tartarus for his pride, or Prometheus, who, because he revealed the secret of the powers to mortals, was torn by the vulture?

(While I am writing this, I think of the scene in the sufferings of Christ when the soldiers spit in His face, some buffet Him and others strike Him with rods and say to Him, "Tell us, who is he that smote thee?"

Perhaps my old companions in Stockholm remember that orgy when the author of this book played the role of the soldier?)

Who has struck thee? A question without an answer. Doubt, uncertainty, mystery—there is my hell! Oh that my enemy would reveal himself, that I might do battle with him, and defy him! But that is just what he avoids doing, in order to afflict me with madness and make me feel the scourge of conscience, which causes me to suspect enemies everywhere, enemies, i.e., those injured by my evil will. Indeed, my conscience smites me every time that I come on the track of a new foe.

Awoken the next morning after a few hours' sleep by the prattle of my little Christina, I seem to forget all, and go to my usual work, which is not unsuccessful. Everything that I write is immediately accepted and printed—a proof that my senses and understanding are unimpaired.

Meanwhile the papers spread the report that an American scientific man has discovered a method of converting silver into gold. This saves me from being suspected of being an adept in the black art, a fool, or a swindler. My theosophical friend, who has hitherto furnished me with the means of livelihood, tries to enrol me in his sect. He sends me one of Madame Blavatsky's occult treatises and ill conceals his anxiety that I should pronounce a favourable verdict upon it. I also am embarrassed, for I see that the continuance of our friendly relations will depend upon my answer.

Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* is plagiarised from all the so-called occult theories; it is a hash-up of all ancient and modern scientific heresies. Her book is worthless as regards her own presumptuous claims, interesting through its quotations from little-known authors, repellent through its conscious or unconscious fabrications regarding the Mahatmas. It is the work of a mannish woman, who, in order to put man to shame, undertook to overthrow science, religion, and philosophy, and to set a priestess of Isis on the altar of the Crucified.

With all the reserve and moderation which is due to a friend, I let my friend know that the collective god, Karma, does not please me, and that it is impossible for me to belong to a sect which denies a personal God, Who alone can satisfy my religious needs. It is a confession of faith which is demanded from me, and although I know that my answer entails a breach in our friendship, and the cessation of my means of support, I speak it out freely.

Then my faithful friend turns into a demon of vengeance. He hurls an excommunication against me, threatens me with occult powers, tries to intimidate me by vulgar accusations, and storms at me like a heathenish sacrificial priest. Finally, he summons me before an occultist tribunal, and swears to me that I shall never forget the 13th of November. My situation is painful; I have lost a friend and am nearly destitute. By a diabolical chance during our paper war, the following incident takes place: *L'Initiation* publishes an article by me which criticises the current astronomical system. A few days after its appearance Tisserand, the head of the Paris observatory, dies. In an access of mischievous humour I trace a connection between these two things, and mention also that Pasteur died the day after I published *Sylva Sylvarum*.[11] My friend, the theosophist, does not know how to take a joke, and being superstitious above the average, and perhaps, more deeply initiated in black magic than I, gives me clearly to understand that he regards me as a wizard.

One may imagine my consternation when, after the last letter of our correspondence, the most famous of the Swedish astronomers dies of a fit of apoplexy. I am alarmed, and with reason. To be accused of witchcraft is a very serious matter, and "even after death one will not escape punishment."

Further calamities follow. In the course of a month about five well-known astronomers die, one after another. I fear my fanatical friend, whom I credit with the cruelty of a Druid and with the power of the Hindu yogis who can kill at a distance.

Here is a new hell of anxieties. From this day onwards I forget the demons, and direct all my attention to the unwholesome ranks of the theosophists and their magicians, the Hindu sages, supposed to be gifted with incredible powers. I now feel myself condemned to death, and keep sealed my papers, in which, in case of my sudden death, I have specified the murderers. Then I wait.

A few miles eastward on the bank of the Danube, lies the little chief town of the district Grein. There, I am told, a stranger from Zanzibar has arrived at the end of November in midwinter. That is enough to rouse doubts and dark thoughts in a morbid mind. I try to obtain information regarding the stranger, whether he is really an African, whence he has come, and what is his object?

I can learn nothing; a mysterious veil envelops the unknown, who, like a spectre, stands day and night before my anxious mind. I always find my best comfort in the Old Testament, and I invoke the protection of the Eternal and His vengeance against my enemies. The psalms

of David best express my soul's deepest needs, and Jehovah is my God. The 86th Psalm has made a special impression on my mind, and I gladly repeat it.

"O God, the proud have set themselves against me, and tyrants seek after my soul, and have not thee before their eyes. Show me a token for good; that all they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me."

That is the "token" I ask for, and notice well, reader, how my prayer will be heard.

X
The Eternal Has Spoken

Winter, with its grey-yellow skies is here; no ray of sunlight has lit up the sky for weeks. The muddy roads hinder us from taking walks; the leaves fall from the trees and rot; all nature is dissolving in decay.

The usual autumn butchery of dumb animals has begun. All day long the cries of the victims rise against the dark vault of heaven; one steps in blood and among corpses. It is terribly depressing, and I feel sad for the two, good, kindhearted sisters who tend me like a sick child. Besides this, my poverty, which I must conceal from them, depresses me, together with the futility of my attempts to avert approaching beggary. For my own good they wish for my departure, since such a lonely life is not good for a man; moreover, they believe that I need a doctor. In vain I wait for the necessary money to be sent from Sweden, and prepare to depart, even though I have to tramp the high roads. “I have become like a pelican of the wilderness, and like an owl in the desert.” My presence is a trial to my relatives, and but for my love to the child, they would have hurried me away. Now that mud or snow makes walking difficult, I carry the little one along the paths on my arms, climb hills, and clamber up rocks, so that both the old ladies say, “You will make yourself ill, you will get giddy, you will kill yourself.”

“And a beautiful death that would be!” I reply.

On the 20th of November, a grey, gloomy, dreary day, we sit at the midday meal. Altogether worn-out after a sleepless night and new conflicts with the Invisible, I curse life, and lament that no sun shines.

My mother-in-law has prophesied that I will not be well till Candlemas (February 2nd), when the sun returns again. “That is my only ray of sunlight,” I answer, pointing to my little Christina who sits opposite to me. At this moment the clouds, which have been massed together for weeks, part, and through the cleft a ray of light shines into the room and illuminates my face, the table-cover, the glasses.

“See, papa! see! there is the sun!” exclaims the child, and clasps her hands together. I rise in confusion, a prey to the most conflicting feelings. “A chance? No!” I say to myself. Is it the wonder, the sign I prayed for? But that would be too much to grant to one fallen into disfavour like me. The Eternal does not interfere in the little affairs of earthworms. And yet this ray of light abides in my heart like a happy smile on a discontented face. During the couple of minutes which I take in walking to my little house, the clouds have formed themselves into strange-shaped groups, and in the east, where the veil has lifted, the sky is as green as an emerald, or a meadow in midsummer. I stand in my room and wait in a state between reverie and mild compunction, which has no fear in it, for something which I cannot exactly define.

Then suddenly there is a single thunderclap over my head. No flash has preceded it. At first I feel alarmed, and wait for the usual rain and storm to follow. But nothing happens; all is

perfectly quiet, and it is over. “Why,” I ask myself, “have I not sunk down in humility before the voice of the Eternal?” Because, when the Almighty with majestic condescension allowed an insect to hear His voice, this insect felt elevated and puffed up by such an honour, considering itself in its pride to be possessed of some special desert. To speak freely, I felt myself almost on a level with the Lord, as an integral part of His personality, an emanation of His being, an organ of His organism. He needed me in order to reveal Himself; otherwise he would have sent a thunderbolt and struck me dead upon the spot. But whence springs this monstrous arrogance in a mortal? Must I trace my origin to the primeval Titans who revolted against a despot who delighted in ruling over slaves? Is this why my earthly pilgrimage has become a mere running the gauntlet, while the dregs of humanity delight to strike, spit on, and defile me? There is no imaginable humiliation which I have not endured, yet the more I am crushed the more my pride asserts itself. I am like Jacob wrestling with the angel, and though a little lamed, maintaining the conflict manfully; or Job, chastised, and yet steadily justifying himself in the face of undeserved punishments.

Attacked by so many conflicting thoughts, I relapse from my megalomania, and feel so insignificant, that the incident dwindles down to a mere nothing—a thunderclap in November.

But the echo of the thunder reverberates, and once more in a sort of religious ecstasy I open the Bible at haphazard, and pray the Lord to speak more plainly that I may understand Him. My eyes immediately fall upon this verse in Job: “Wilt thou disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be justified? Hast thou an arm like God? *Or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him?*”

I doubt no more. The Eternal has spoken! O Eternal! What demandest Thou of me? Speak, for thy servant heareth!

No answer!

Good! I will humble myself before the Eternal Who has humbled Himself to speak to His servant. But bow my knee before the mob and the mighty? Never!

In the evening my good mother-in-law receives me with a manner that is enigmatic. She casts a searching look at me sideways, as though she wished to ascertain what sort of impression the stupendous occurrence had made on me. “You have heard it?” she asks.

“Yes, it is strange—a clap of thunder in November.” She at any rate no longer considers me damned.

XI
Hell Let Loose

Meanwhile, in order to entirely bewilder me regarding the real nature of my illness, a current number of *L'Événement* contains the following notice:

"The unhappy Strindberg, who brought his misogyny to Paris, was quickly compelled to take himself off. Since then his partisans are dumb and confounded before the feminist flag. They do not wish to undergo the fate of Orpheus, whose head was torn off by the Thracian Bacchanals."

So they actually did lay a plot against me in the Rue de la Clef, and the morbid symptoms from which I still suffer are the result of that murderous attempt. Oh, these women! Certainly my articles on the feminist pictures of my Danish friend were not calculated to please them. But, at any rate, here is a fact, a tangible occurrence which dissipates my terrible doubts regarding my mental soundness.

I hasten with the good news to my mother-in-law. "You see that I am not out of my mind!"

"No, you are not, but only ill, and the doctor will recommend physical exercise for you—wood-chopping, for instance."

"Is that of any use against women, or not?"

My too hasty retort makes a breach between us. I had forgotten that a female saint is still a woman, i.e., man's enemy.

All is forgotten, the Russians, the Rothschilds, the dabblers in black magic, the theosophists, and the Eternal Himself. I am the innocent sacrifice, blameless Job, Orpheus whom the women want to kill, the author of *Sylva Sylvarum*, the reviver of dead science. Lost in a labyrinth of doubt, I abandon the newborn idea of providential interposition with a spiritual purpose, and absorbed in the bare fact that a plot has been laid against me, I forget to think of the original Plotter. Thirsting for vengeance, I prepare to send notices to the police-offices and papers in Paris, when a timely change of affairs puts an end to the sorry drama, which would have degenerated into a farce.

One grey-yellow winter day, about an hour after the midday meal, my little Christina insists on following me to my house, where I generally have my afternoon siesta. I cannot resist her, and give way to her request, When we get to my room Christina asks for pen and paper; then she demands picture-books, and I must remain, show, and explain.

"You must not go to sleep, papa!"

Although feeling weary and exhausted, I obey my child, I don't know why myself, but there is a tone in her voice which I cannot resist.

Outside, before the door, an organ-grinder is playing a waltz tune. I propose to the little one to dance with the nurse who has accompanied her. Attracted by the music, the neighbours' children come, the organ-grinder is invited into the kitchen, and we improvise a dance. This goes on for an hour, and my sadness is dispelled. In order to distract myself and to keep off sleep, I take the Bible, my oracle, and open it at haphazard. "But the spirit of the

Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on the harp, and it shall come to pass when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.'"

An evil spirit! That is what I am always suspecting! While the children are dancing, my mother-in-law comes in in order to fetch the little one, and when she sees them, she stands still, astonished. Then she tells me that just now, down in the village, a lady of good family has been seized with an attack of frenzy.

"What is the matter with her?"

"She dances without stopping, has dressed herself as a bride and fancies she is Burger's Lenore."

"She dances, and then?"

"She weeps in terror of death, who she believes will come and take her."

What lends a darker shade to this tragedy is that the lady has occupied the same house I live in now, and that her husband died in the same room where the children are noisily dancing.

Explain me that, O doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, or acknowledge the bankruptcy of science!

My little daughter has exorcised the evil spirit who, driven out by her innocence, has entered into an old lady who used to boast of being a free thinker.

The death-dance lasts the whole night. The lady is guarded by friends, who she says, are to ward off the attack of death. She calls it "death" because she does not believe in the existence of evil spirits. And yet she often asserted that her deceased husband tormented her.

My departure is postponed, but, in order to recruit my strength after so many sleepless nights, I remove to my aunt's house on the other side of the street, and leave the "rose-red" room. It is a curious fact that in the good old times the torture chamber in Sweden was called the "Chamber of Roses."

At last I spend a night again in a quiet room. The walls are painted white and covered with pictures of saints. Over my bed hangs a crucifix. But when night comes the spirits begin their tricks again.

I light the candles in order to kill the time with reading. There is a weird stillness in which I can hear my heart beating. Then a slight noise startles me, like an electric spark.

What is that?

A large piece of wax has dropped from the candle on the ground. Nothing more, but the people here believe it is a sign of death! It may be, as far as I am concerned. After reading for half an hour, I want to take my handkerchief from under my pillow. It is not there, and when I look for it, I find it on the ground. I stoop to pick it up. Something falls on my head, and when I extricate it from my hair, I find it is another piece of wax. Instead of being alarmed, I cannot help smiling; the whole thing seems a piece of practical joking.

Smiling at death! How could that be possible, were not life essentially comic. Such a fuss about nothing! Perhaps in the depth of our souls there lurks a shadowy consciousness that everything down here is all humbug, a masquerade, a mere pretence, and that all our sufferings afford mirth to the gods.

High over the hill on which the castle is built there towers another, from which a more

commanding view over the Inferno-like landscape can be gained than from any other. The way thither lies through the remains of an ancient oak forest, which, according to tradition, was a scene of Druidic worship, and where mistletoe grows luxuriantly on the apple and lime trees. Above this wood the path mounts steeply through pines.

Several times I have tried to reach the summit, but something unforeseen has always hindered me. One time it was a deer which broke the silence with an unexpected leap, another time a hare, which resembled no hare which I had ever seen, and yet another time a magpie with its deafening chatter. But on the last morning, the day before my departure, I pressed in spite of all hindrances through the dark melancholy pine wood up to the summit, whence I obtained a splendid view of the valley of the Danube and the Styrian Alps. I breathe freely for the first time now that I have at last emerged from the gloomy, funnel-shaped valley below. The sun illuminates the landscape to the farthest horizon, and the white crests of the Alps melt into the clouds. The whole scene is one of heavenly beauty. Does the earth comprise at the same time heaven and hell, and is there no other place of punishment and reward? Perhaps. Certainly, the most beautiful moments of my life seem to me heavenly, and the worst, hellish. Has the future still in reserve for me hours or minutes of that happiness which can be won only by tribulation and a tolerably clean conscience?

I feel little inclination to descend into the valley of sorrows again, and walk about on the mountain plateau, wondering at the beauty of the earth. On the summit is a rock shaped by nature like an Egyptian Sphinx. On its gigantic head is a heap of stones in which stands a stick bearing a white piece of linen attached, like a flag. Without troubling myself about its significance, an uncontrollable desire to seize the flag takes possession of me. Despising death, I clamber up the steep rock, and lay hold of it. At the same moment the sound of a bridal march sung by triumphant voices arises from the Danube below. It is a marriage party; I cannot see it, but the musket shots customarily fired on such occasions place it beyond a doubt. Childish enough and unhappy enough to give a poetical colouring to the most ordinary occurrences, I take this as a good omen.

Reluctantly and slowly I descend again into the valley of sorrows, of death, of sleeplessness, and of demons, where my little Beatrice awaits me and the promised piece of mistletoe, the green branch in the midst of the snow, which really ought to be cut with a golden sickle.

For a long time past the grandmother had expressed a wish to see me, whether it were to bring about a reconciliation or for occultist reasons, because she is a clairvoyante and visionary. I had postponed the visit under various pretexts, but now that my departure was resolved on, my mother-in-law obliged me to visit the old lady and bid her farewell, probably for the last time on this side of the grave. On November 26th, a cold, clear day, my mother-in-law, the child, and I made the pilgrimage to the bank of the Danube, where the family residence is. We alighted at the inn, and while my mother-in-law went to announce my visit to her mother, I wandered through the meadows and woods, which I had not seen for two years. Recollections overpowered me, and in all of them was interwoven the figure of my wife. And now everything is blighted by autumnal frosts; there is now not a single flower, nor a green blade of grass where we both plucked all the flowers of spring, summer, and autumn!

After the midday meal I am taken to the old lady who occupies the annex to the villa, the little house in which my child was born. Our meeting is, considering the circumstances, a cold one; they seem to expect that I should appear as the prodigal son, but I have no wish to act that role. I confine myself to indulging in reminiscences of our lost paradise. She and I had painted the door-and window-panels in honour of the little Christina’s arrival in the world. The roses and clematis which adorn the front of the house were planted by my own

hands. I had cut out the path through the garden. But the walnut tree which I planted the morning after Christina's birth has disappeared. The "life-tree," as we called it, is dead. Two years, two eternities, have elapsed since the farewell between her on the shore and me on the ship, in which I went to Linz in order to proceed thence to Paris.

Who has caused the breach between us? I, for I have murdered my own love and hers. Farewell, my white house, where grew thorns and roses. Farewell, Danube! I say to comfort myself, "You were a dream, short as summer, too sweet to be real, and I do not regret it."

The night comes. My mother-in-law and my child have, at my request, taken up their quarters in the inn, in order to protect me against the deadly attacks, which I forebode by means of a sixth sense which has been developed in me during the six months of persecution which I have suffered.

About ten o'clock in the evening a gust of wind begins to shake the door of my room, which is on the ground-floor. I make it fast with wooden wedges; it is no use; the door shakes still more. The windows rattle; there is a doglike howling in the stove; the whole house reels like a ship. I cannot sleep; at one time my mother-in-law groans, at another the child cries. The next morning my mother-in-law, exhausted by sleeplessness and something else, which she conceals from me, says: "Depart, my child; I have enough of this hellish stench!" And I travel northwards, a restless pilgrim, into the fire of a new purgatory.

XII

Pilgrimage and Penance

There are ninety towns in Sweden, and the powers have condemned me to go to the one which I most dislike. First of all, I visit the doctors. The first speaks of neurasthenia, the second of angina pectoris, the third of paranoia, a mental disease, the fourth of emphysema. This is enough to ensure me against being put into a lunatic asylum. Meanwhile, in order to procure the means of livelihood, I am forced to write articles for a newspaper. But whenever I sit at the table to write, hell is let loose. A new discovery comes to make me wild. Whenever I take up my quarters in an hotel there breaks out a fiendish noise, just as there did in the Rue de la Grande Chaumière in Paris; I hear shuffling footsteps and the moving of furniture. I change my room, I go into another hotel, and still there is the noise over my head. I visit the restaurants, but as soon as I sit down to a meal the noise begins there also. And it should be observed that whenever I ask those present whether they hear the same noise too, they say "yes," and their description of it tallies with mine.

It is then no acoustic hallucination from which I suffer; everywhere there are plots, I say to myself. But one day, as I go by chance into a shoemaker's shop, the noise instantaneously breaks out. It is no plot, then! It is the Devil himself! Hunted from hotel to hotel, pursued everywhere by electric wires even to my bed, attacked everywhere by electric currents which lift me from my chair, or out of bed, I deliberately set about planning my suicide. The weather is terrible, and in my depression I seek distraction in drinking bouts with friends.

One dreary day, after such a bout, I have just finished my early breakfast in my room. I turn round towards the table on which the breakfast things are standing. A slight noise attracts my attention, and I see that a knife has fallen on the ground. I lift it up and place it so that it cannot do so again. The knife moves and falls.

So it is electricity!

The same morning I write a letter to my mother-in-law, and complain of the bad weather and life in general. As I write the sentence, "The earth is dirty, the sea is dirty, and dirt rains from the sky," imagine my astonishment, as I see a clear drop of water fall upon the paper. No electricity! A miracle! In the evening as I am still working at the table, a noise from the washing-stand startles me. I look in that direction, and see that a wax-cloth, which I use in my morning ablutions, has fallen down. In order to get at the rights of the matter, I hang it up, so that it cannot fall down again.

It falls again!

What is that? My thoughts now revert to the occultists and their secret powers. I leave the town with my written indictment of them in my pocket, and betake myself to Lund, where there are old friends of mine: doctors, specialists in mental disease, and even theosophists on whose aid I reckon.

How have I come to settle down in this little university town, this place of rustication and penance for the students of Upsala, when they have lived too freely at the cost of their purses and their health? Is this my Canossa, where I must retract my false doctrines before the same set of youths who between 1880 and 1890 regarded me as their standard-bearer? I understand

my position exactly, and know well that I am under the ban of most of the professors as a seducer of youth, and that the fathers and mothers fear me like the Evil One himself.

Moreover, I have made personal enemies here, and have contracted debts under circumstances which set my character in a dubious light. Here Popoffsky's sister-in-law and her husband live, and both of these, who have an influential position in society, are able to stir up powerful enemies against me. I have also here relations who ignore me, and friends who have left me to become my enemies. In a word, it is the worst place I could have chosen for a quiet residence; it is hell, but a hell contrived with masterly logic and divine ingenuity. Here I must drain the cup of humiliation, and reconcile the youth of Lund with the alienated powers. By a picturesque accident, I buy myself a mantle with cape and cowl, of a flea-brown colour, like a Franciscan's. Thus, after a six years' banishment, I return to Sweden in a penitent's costume.

About the year 1885 there was formed in Lund a Students' Association called "The Old Boys," whose literary, scientific, and social programme was best expressed by the word "Radicalism." It was coloured by modern ideas; it was first socialistic, then nihilistic, and tended finally to a general dissolution of society. It had besides a fin de siècle flavouring of Satanism and decadence. The head of that party, the most conspicuous of their champions, a friend of mine, whom I have not seen for three years, pays me a visit. Dressed like myself in a monkish-looking mantle of a grey colour, grown old, lean, with melancholy aspect, he shows his history in his face.

"You also?" I ask him.

"Yes! It is all up with us."

On my inviting him to take a glass of wine, he declares himself a teetotaller.

"How are the 'Old Boys'?" I ask.

"Dead, come croppers, turned into Philistines and steady members of society."

"It is a case of Canossa, then!"

"Canossa all along the line."

"Then it is Providence Itself which has brought me here."

"Providence! That is the right word."

"Do they know the 'powers' in Lund?"

"The 'powers' are preparing to return."

"Do people sleep well here?"

"No; they complain of nightmares, constrictions of the breast and heart."

"My arrival is appropriate, then; for that is precisely my case."

We talk for some hours over the strange times we are living in, and my friend relates to me some extraordinary occurrences which have recently happened. Finally, he gives a brief account of the minds of the present young generation, who are looking out for something new.

People want a religion; a reconciliation with the "powers" (that is the phrase), a new approach to the invisible. The fruitful and important epoch of naturalism is past. One cannot say anything against it, nor regret it, for the powers willed that we should pass through it. It was an experimental epoch, the negative results of which have disproved certain theories when they were put to the test. A God, unknown at present, seems to be developing, growing, and revealing Himself from time to time. In the intervals, so it seems, He leaves the world to itself, like the farmer, who lets the tares and wheat grow together till the harvest. Each epoch of revelation shows Him animated with new ideas, and practically improving His methods. Thus Religion will return, but under new aspects, for a compromise with the old religions seems impossible. We do not await an epoch of reaction, nor a return to outworn ideals, but an advance towards something new. But of what sort? Let us wait!

At the end of our conversation a question escapes my lips like an arrow which flies

skywards, “Do you know Swedenborg?”

“No; but my mother has his works, and has found wonderful things in them.”

From atheism to Swedenborg is only a step!

I beg him to lend me Swedenborg’s works, and my friend, that Saul among the young prophets, brings me the *Arcana Cœlestia*. Moreover, he introduces a young man to me who has been highly gifted by the powers. The latter relates to me events in his life which only too closely resemble my own. When we compare our trials, we find a new light thrown upon them, and we gain deliverance by the help of Swedenborg. I thank Providence which has sent me into this small despised town to expiate my sin and to be delivered.

XIII
THE DELIVERER

When Balzac introduced me to my noble countryman, “The Buddha of the North,” by means of his book *Séraphita*, he showed me the evangelistic side of the Prophet. Now it is the Law which encounters, crushes, and releases.

A single word suffices to illuminate my soul, and to scatter my doubts and vain fancies regarding supposed enemies, electricians, black magic, etc., and this single word is “Devastation.”[12] All my sufferings I find described by Swedenborg—the feelings of suffocation (angina pectoris), constrictions of the chest, palpitations, the sensation which I called the “electric girdle”—all exactly correspond, and these phenomena, taken together, constitute the spiritual catharsis (purification) which was already known to St. Paul, “Whom,” he says speaking of someone, “I have determined to hand over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,” and “Among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, that they may be taught not to blaspheme.”

When I read the visions of Swedenborg belonging to the year 1744, the year preceding his establishment of relations with the spiritual world, I discover that the Prophet has endured the same nightly tortures as I have, and what astonishes me still more is the complete identity of the symptoms, which leave me no longer room for doubting the real nature of my illness. In the *Arcana Cœlestia*, the mysterious occurrences of the last two years are explained with such convincing exactness, that I, a child of the renowned nineteenth century, am firmly convinced that there is a hell—a hell, however, on earth, and that I have just come out of it.

Swedenborg explains to me the reason of my detention in the Hospital St. Louis thus:

“Alchemists are attacked by leprosy and scratch the scurf off like fish-scales. It is an incurable skin disease.” The apparition of the chimney sweep which my daughter saw in Austria is also explained: “Among the spirits, there is a kind called ‘chimney sweeps,’ because they actually have faces blackened by smoke, and seem to wear soot-coloured clothes.… One of these ‘chimney sweep’ spirits came to me, and begged me earnestly to pray for his admission into heaven. ‘I don’t think,’ he said, ‘I have done anything on account of which I should be excluded. I have often rebuked the inhabitants of earth, but after rebuke and punishment, I have always given them instruction.’

“The chastising, reforming, or instructing spirits approach a man from the left side, lean on his back, consult his book of memory, and read his deeds and even his thoughts in it. For when a spirit enters a man, he first of all takes possession of his memory. If they behold an evil deed or the intention to commit one, they punish him with a pain in the foot or in the hand, or the neighbourhood of the stomach, and they do this with unexampled dexterity. A shudder announces their approach.

“Besides inflicting pains in the limbs, they employ a painful pressure against the navel, which gives the sensation of being surrounded with a prickly girdle; moreover, they sometimes cause constrictions of the chest, which they intensify to a terrible degree; finally, they inspire a disgust of all food except bread, which continues for days.

"Other spirits try to convince their victims of the opposite to that which the instructing spirits have said. These spirits of contradiction were, during their earthly existence, men who had been expelled from society on account of some crime. Their approach is heralded by a flickering flame, which seems to hover about one's face; their place is above the back, whence they make themselves felt to the extremities." (These flickering flames or sparks have appeared to me twice, and both times on occasions when I resisted my better self, and rejected all apparitions as idle dreams.)

"These spirits of contradiction tell men not to believe what the instructing spirits have been commissioned by the angels to say, and not to rule their lives accordingly, but to live in all licence and wantonness as they choose. Usually the former come as soon as the latter have gone. Men know what to expect from them, and do not trouble much about them, but they learn through their assaults to distinguish between good and evil. For the knowledge of good is first gained through that of its opposite, just as every perception or idea of a matter is obtained by carefully observing what distinguishes it from its contrary." The reader may remember the faces like antique sculptures which I saw formed by the white cover of my pillow in the Hôtel Orfila. Swedenborg speaks regarding them as follows:

"Two signs show that they (the spirits) dwell with a man; one is an old man with a white face. This sign will signify to him that he is always to speak the truth, and to act justly.… I myself have seen such an antique human face. There are faces of pure whiteness and great beauty, from which uprightness and modesty beam."

(In order not to alarm the reader, I have purposely concealed the fact, that all the above relates to the inhabitants of the planet Jupiter. My surprise may be imagined when one spring morning they bring me a French review containing a picture of Swedenborg's house in the planet Jupiter, drawn by Victorien Sardou. Why on Jupiter? What a remarkable coincidence! And has the master and doyen of the Théâtre Français observed that the left façade of the building seen from a sufficient distance forms an antique human face? This face is the same as that which was formed by my cushion-cover. But in Sardou's drawing there are more of such silhouettes formed by the lines of the building. Has the master's hand been guided by another hand, so that he produced more than he knew?)

Where has Swedenborg seen his heaven and hell? Are they visions, intuitions, inspirations? I hardly know, but the correspondence of his hell to that of Dante, and of the Greek, Roman, and German mythologies, leads to the idea that the powers have generally used similar means to realise their purposes. And what are these purposes? The completion of the human type; the production of the higher Man—the Superman, as Nietzsche, that rod of chastisement prematurely used and cast into the fire, has announced him. So the problem of good and evil is again set up for us to solve, and Taine's moral indifference seems insipid before these new demands.

The belief in spirits follows as a natural consequence. What are spirits? As soon as we admit the immortality of the soul, we see that the dead are still alive and continue their relationships with the living. "Evil spirits," then, are not evil, for their object is good, and it would be better to call them, with Swedenborg, "corrective spirits," than to abandon oneself to fear and to despair. Accordingly, there exists no Satan, as an autonomous personality opposed to God, and the undeniable apparitions of the Evil One in his traditional form must be regarded as a scarecrow conjured up by Providence—Providence the Supreme and Good, which carries on its government by means of an enormous comprehensive staff, consisting of departed souls.

Be comforted, and be proud of the grace bestowed upon you, all ye who suffer from sleeplessness, nightmares, apparitions, palpitations, and fears of death! *Numen adest!* God is seeking for you!

XIV

TRIBULATIONS

Interned in this little university town, without hope of getting out of it, I engage in the terrible fight against my worst enemy—myself. Every morning, when I go for a walk on the wall under the plane trees, the large red lunatic asylum reminds me of the danger I have escaped, and of that which still awaits me, if I relapse. Swedenborg, by explaining to me the true character of my terrors during the last year, has delivered me from the fear of electricians, "black" magicians, wizards, the ambition of the gold-maker, and from madness. He has pointed out the only way to salvation: to seek out the demons in their dens within myself, and there to slay them by—repentance. Balzac, the Prophet's assistant, has taught me in *Séraphita* that "Pain of conscience is a weakness which does not put an end to sin; repentance is the only power which makes a decisive end of all." Very well, let us repent! But is not that equivalent to criticising Providence, which has chosen me for its scourge? and to saying to the powers: "You have guided my destiny ill; you have made me and commissioned me to chastise, to overthrow idols, to stir up revolt, and then you withdraw your protection from me and disown me in an absurd way, telling me to creep to the cross and repent!"

Strange *circulus vitiosus*, which I already foresaw in my twentieth year, when I wrote my drama *Meister Olaf*, and which has constituted the tragedy of my life. Why be tormented during thirty years in order to be taught by experience what one had already foreboded? When young I was sincerely pious, and you have made me a freethinker. Out of the freethinker you have made an atheist, and out of the atheist a religious man. Inspired by humanitarian ideas, I have been a herald of socialism. Five years later, you have shown me the absurdity of socialism; you have made all my prophecies futile. And supposing I become again religious, I am sure that, in another ten years, you will reduce religion to an absurdity.

Ah! what a game the gods play with us poor mortals! And therefore, in the most tormented moments of life, we too can laugh with self-conscious raillery.

How is it that you wish us to take earnestly what is nothing but a huge bad joke?

For whom was Christ the Saviour? Consider the most Christian of all Christians, our pious Scandinavians, these anaemic, wretched, timid creatures, who look as though they were possessed. They seem to carry an evil spirit in their hearts, and observe how most of their leaders have ended in prison as criminals. Why has their master delivered them over to the enemy? Is religion a punishment, and Christ an Avenger?

The sun shines, everyday life proceeds on its usual course, the cheerful bustle of business raises the spirits. Then one feels rebellious, and challenges heaven with doubts. But when night, silence, and loneliness reign, the heart beats, and the breast suffers from constriction. Then one jumps out of window into a hedge of thorns, and humbly begs a physician for help, and seeks someone to share the sleeping chamber.

Go again into your room, and you will find someone is there; he is invisible, but you feel his presence. Then go to the asylum, and ask the doctor; he will talk to you about

neurasthenia, paranoia, angina pectoris, and stories of that kind, but will never heal you. Whither, then, will you go, all ye who, sleepless, wander through street after street, waiting for the dawn? “The mills of the universe,” “The mills of God,” are two expressions in common use. Have you had that roaring in your ears which is like the noise of a waterwheel? Have you in the solitude of night or in broad daylight observed how memories of the past stir and arise, singly or in groups? Memories of all your faults, crimes, and follies which make your ears tingle, your brows perspire, your spine shudder? You relive your life from your birth to the present day, you suffer over again all the sorrows you have endured; you empty again all the cups which you have drunk to the dregs so often; you crucify your skeleton when there is no more flesh left to crucify; you consume your soul when your heart is reduced to ashes!

You know all that?

Those are the “mills of God” which grind slowly but exceeding small. You are ground to powder, and think it is over. But no! You are brought again to the mill. Be thankful! That is hell upon earth, as Luther knew it, and reckoned it a special grace to be pulverised on this side of the grave.

Think yourself happy and be thankful!

What is one to do then? Humble oneself?

If you humble yourself before men, you will arouse their pride, for all will think themselves, no matter how guilty they may be, better than you.

Well, then, is one to humble oneself before God? But is it not disgraceful to degrade the Highest by conceiving of Him as the overseer of a slave plantation?

Shall we pray? What! Presume to try to alter the will and decision of the Eternal by flattery and crawling? I look for God and find the Devil! That is my destiny! I have repented and reformed myself.

I renounce alcohol, and come about nine o’clock soberly home to drink milk. The room is filled with all kinds of demons, who drag me out of bed and try to stifle me under the blankets. But if I come home at midnight intoxicated, I sleep like an angel and wake up strong as a young god, and ready to work like a galley-slave.

I live a chaste life, and am troubled by unwholesome dreams. I accustom myself to think only good of my friends, entrust my secrets and my money to them, and am betrayed. If I show offence at such treachery, it is always I who am punished.

I try to love mankind in the mass; I shut my eyes to their faults, and with inexhaustible patience endure their meanesses and slanders, and one fine day I find myself a sharer of their crimes. Whenever I withdraw from society which I consider injurious, the demons of solitude attack me, and when I look for better friends, I come on the track of the worst. Yes, after I have conquered my evil inclinations and through loneliness have attained to a certain degree of inward peace, I am caught in the snare of self-satisfaction and despising my neighbour. And self-conceit is the deadliest of sins, which is instantly punished.

How is one to explain the fact that every step of progress in virtue gives rise to a fresh sin?

Swedenborg solves the puzzle by declaring that sins are punishments inflicted on men in requital for sins of the more heinous class. Thus those who are greedy of power are condemned to the hell of the Sodomites. Supposing this theory to be true, we must endure the burden of our wickedness and rejoice at the pangs of conscience which accompany it, as at the payment of fees at a tollgate. To seek virtue, accordingly, resembles an attempt to escape from prison and its punishments. That is what Luther asserts in article xxix against the Romish bull, when he declares that “souls in purgatory sin continually, because they seek for peace, and try to avoid torments.” Similarly, in article xxxiv, he says, “To fight with the

Turks is equivalent to rebellion against God, whose instrument the Turks are, in order to punish our sins." It is therefore obvious "that all our good works are deadly sins," and that "the world must become guilty before God, and learn that no one is justified except through grace."

Let us therefore suffer without hoping for any real joy in life, for, my brothers, we are in hell. And do not let us accuse the Lord, when we see our little innocent children suffer. No one knows why, but divine justice gives us a ground for surmising that it is on account of sins committed by them before their birth. Let us rejoice in our torments, as though they were the paying off of so many debts, and let us count it a mercy that we do not know the real reason why we are punished.

XV
WHITHER?

Six months have passed, and I still go daily walking on the city wall and survey the lunatic asylum, and catch glimpses of the blue sea in the distance. Thence will the new epoch, the new religion, come of which the world is dreaming.

Gloomy winter is buried, the meadows are green, the trees are in blossom, the nightingale sings in the garden of the observatory, but a wintry sadness still weighs upon our spirits, for so many weird and inexplicable things have happened, that even the most incredulous waver. The general sleeplessness increases, nervous breakdowns are common, apparitions are matters of every day, and real miracles happen. People are expecting something.

A young man pays me a visit, and asks, "What must one do in order to sleep quietly at night?"

"Why?"

"Upon my word, I cannot say, but my bedroom has become a terror to me, and I give it up tomorrow."

"Young man, atheist, naturalist, why?"

"The Devil must be in it! When I open the door of my room at night and enter, someone seizes me by the arms and shakes me."

"Then there is someone in your room?"

"No, when I light a candle there is no one to be seen."

"Young man, there is someone who cannot be seen by candlelight!"

"Who is that?"

"The invisible, young man! Have you taken sulphonal, bromkali, morphium, chloral?"

"I have tried all."

"And the invisible does not quit the field. Very well! You want to sleep at night, and wish me to tell you how. Listen, young man, I am neither a physician nor a prophet, I am an old sinner, who does penance. Demand therefore neither preaching nor prophecy from an old gallows-bird, who wants all his leisure time to preach to himself. I have also suffered from sleeplessness and paralysis of the arms; I have wrestled eye to eye with the invisible, and finally recovered sleep and health. Do you know how? Guess!"

The young man guesses my meaning, and casts his eyes down. "You guess it! Go in peace, and sleep well!"

Yes! I must be silent and let my meaning be guessed, for if I began to play the preaching monk, they would turn their backs on me at once.

A friend asks me, "Whither are we going?"

"I cannot say, but as regards myself personally, it seems that the way of the Cross leads me

back to the faith of my fathers."

"To Catholicism?"

It appears so. Occultism has played its part, by giving a scientific explanation of miracles and demonology. Theosophy, the forerunner of religion, has fulfilled its function, when it has revived belief in a world-order which punishes and rewards, Karma will be replaced by God, and the Mahatmas will be revealed as the newborn powers, the chastising and instructing spirits. Buddhism in Young France has preached renunciation of the world and the worship of sorrow, which leads direct to Golgotha.

As regards the homesick longing I feel for the bosom of the Mother Church, that is a long story, which I may summarise as follows:

When Swedenborg taught me that it is unlawful to quit the religion of one's ancestors, he said that with reference to Protestantism, which is treason against the Mother Church. Or, to put it better, Protestantism is a punishment inflicted on the barbarians of the North. Protestantism is the Exile, the Babylonish Captivity, but the Return seems near, the Return to the promised land. The immense progress which Catholicism makes in America, England, and Scandinavia seems to point towards a great reconciliation, in which the Greek Church, which has already stretched out her hand towards the West, is not to be forgotten.

That is the dream of the socialists regarding the restoration of the United States of the West, but taken in a spiritual sense. But I beg you not to think that it is a political theory which takes me back to the Roman Church. I have not sought Catholicism; it has found a place in me, after following me for years. My child, who became a Catholic against my will, has shown me the beauty of a cult which has maintained itself unaltered from the first, and I have always preferred the original to the copy. The considerable time I spent in my child's native country gave me opportunity to observe and admire the sincerity of the religious life there. I have been also influenced by my stay in the St. Louis Hospital, and finally by the occurrences of the last few weeks. After contemplating my life, which has whirled me round like some of the damned in Dante's hell, and after discovering that my existence in general had no other object but to humble and to defile me, I determined to anticipate my executioner, and take in hand my own torture. I determined to live in the midst of sufferings, dirt, and death-agonies, and with this object I prepared to seek a post as attendant on the sick in the Hôpital des Frères St. Jean de Dieu in Paris. This idea occurred to me on the morning of April 29th, after I had met an old woman with a head resembling a skull. When I return home, I find *Séraphita* lying open on my table, and on the right page a splinter of wood, which points to the following sentence: "Do for God what you would do for your own ambitious plans, what you do when you devote yourself to your art, what you have done when you love someone more than Him, or when you have investigated a secret of science! Is God not Science Itself?…"

In the afternoon the newspaper *L'Éclair* arrived, and, strange to say, the Hôpital des Frères St. Jean de Dieu is twice mentioned in it.

On May 1st I read for the first time in my life Sar Peladan's *Comment on devient un Mage*.

Sar Peladan, hitherto unknown to me, overcomes me like a storm, a revelation of the higher man, Nietzsche's Superman, and with him Catholicism makes its solemn and victorious entry into my life.

Has "He who should come" come already in the person of Sar Peladan. The Poet-Thinker-Prophet—is it *he*, or do we wait for another?

I know not, but after I have passed through these antechambers of a new life, I begin on May 3rd to write this book.

May 5th.—A Catholic priest, a convert, visited me.

May 9th.—I saw the figure of Gustavus Adolphus in the ashes of the stove.

On May 14th I read in Sar Peladan: "About the year 1000 AD. it was possible to believe in

witchcraft; today, as the year 2000 AD. approaches, it is an established fact that such and such an individual has the fatal peculiarity of bringing trouble to those who come into collision with him. You deny him a request, and your dearest friend deceives you; you strike him, and illness makes you keep your bed; all the harm you do to him recoils on you in twofold measure. But, say people, that signifies nothing; 'chance' can explain these inexplicable coincidences. Modern determinism sums itself up in the expression 'chance.'"

On May 17th I read what the Dane, Jorgensen, a convert to Catholicism, says about the Beuron convent.

On May 18th a friend whom I have not seen for six years comes to Lund, and takes a room in the house where I am staying. Who can picture my emotion when I learn that he also has just been converted to Catholicism? He lends me his breviary (I had lost mine a year ago), and as I read again the Latin hymns and chants, I feel myself once more at home.

May 21th.—After a series of conversations regarding the Mother Church, my friend has written a letter to the Belgian convent, where he was baptised, requesting them to find a place of refuge for the author of this book.

May 28th.—There is a vague rumour in circulation that Mrs. Annie Besant has become a Catholic.

I am waiting the answer from the Belgian convent. By the time this book is printed, the answer will have arrived. And then? After that? A new joke for the gods, who laugh heartily when we shed bitter tears.

Lund, *May 3rd–June 25th*, 1897.[14]

EPILOGUE

I had finished this book with the exclamation, “What humbug! What wretched humbug life is!” But after some reflection I found the sentiment unworthy, and struck it out. My mind swayed irresolute, and at last I took refuge in the Bible, to find the explanation I needed. And thus the Holy Book, more inspired with prophetic qualities than any other, answered me: “And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And if that prophet be deceived, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.”—Ezek. xiv, 8, 9.

Such then is my life; a sign, an example to serve for the betterment of others; a proverb to set forth the nothingness of fame and of celebrity; a proverb to show the younger generation how they should not live; yes! I am a proverb, I who regarded myself as a prophet, and am revealed as a braggart. Now the Eternal has led this false prophet to speak empty words, and the false prophet feels irresponsible since he has only played the role assigned to him.

Here you have, my brothers, the picture of a human destiny, one among so many, and now confess that a man’s life may seem—a bad joke!

Who is the Prince of this world, who condemns mortals to their wickedness, and rewards virtue with the cross, the stake, sleeplessness, and dreadful dreams? The Punisher of our unknown sins committed somewhere else or forgotten? And who are Swedenborg’s reforming spirits, the guardian angels who protect us from the evil ones?

What a Babel-like confusion!

St. Augustine pronounced it effrontery to doubt the existence of demons. St. Thomas Aquinas declared that demons produce storms and thunderbolts, and can delegate their power to human hands. Pope John XXII complained of the unlawful devices of his enemies, who pierced portraits of him with needles. Luther believed that all accidents, such as breaking bones, falls, conflagrations, and most illnesses were traceable to the machinations of devils. He also asserted that some individuals have already had their hell upon earth.

Have I not, then, rightly named my book *Inferno*? If any reader holds it for mere invention, he is invited to inspect my journal, which I have kept daily since 1895, of which this book is only an elaborated and expanded extract.

ENDNOTES

1. Reprinted by permission from *The Spectator* ↩

2. “Who never ceases still to strive,
   ’T is him we can deliver.”

   ↩

3. Hospital for the Blind. ↩

4. “Woe to the solitary.” ↩

5. *L’extériorisation de la sensibilité*. ↩

6. Famous Norwegian novelist. ↩

7. Nightmare. ↩

8. French missionary (801–865 AD.). ↩

9. The title of Strindberg’s first autobiography. ↩

10. A kind of female vampire. ↩

11. A botanical treatise. ↩

12. According to Swedenborg the name of a stage in the religious life. ↩

13. Strindberg never actually entered the Roman Church. ↩

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