

AGAINST THE GRAIN
(*A rebours*)

By

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humble carapace, it had not been able to support the dazzling splendor imposed on it, the glittering garment in which it had been clad, the pavement of precious stones wherewith they had inlaid its poor back like a jeweled pyx.

CHAPTER 5

SIMULTANEOUSLY with his craving to escape a hateful world of degrading restrictions and pruderies, the longing never again to see pictures representing the human form toiling in Paris between four walls or roaming the streets in search of money, had obtained a more and more complete mastery over his mind.

Having once divorced himself from contemporary existence, he was resolved to suffer in his hermit's cell no specters of old repugnances and bygone dislikes; accordingly he had chosen only to possess pictures of a subtle, exquisite refinement, instinct with dreams of Antiquity, reminiscent it may be of antique corruption, but at any rate remote from our modern times and modern manners.

He had selected for the diversion of his mind and the delight of his eyes works of a suggestive charm, introducing him to an unfamiliar world, revealing to him traces of new possibilities, stirring the nervous system by erudite phantasies, complicated dreams of horror, visions of careless wickedness and cruelty.

Of all others there was one artist who most ravished him with unceasing transports of pleasure,—Gustave Moreau.

He had purchased his two masterpieces, and night after night he would stand dreaming in front of one of these, a picture of Salomé.

The conception of the work was as follows: A throne, like the high altar of a Cathedral, stood beneath an endless vista of vaulted arches springing from thick set columns resembling the pillars of a Romanesque building, encased in many colored brickwork, incrust-ed with mosaics, set with lapis lazuli and sardonyx, in a Palace that recalled a basilica of an architecture at once Saracenic and Byzantine.

In the centre of the tabernacle surmounting the altar, which was approached by steps in the shape of a recessed half circle, the Tetrarch Herod was seated, crowned with a tiara, his legs drawn together, with hands on knees.

The face was yellow, like parchment, furrowed with wrinkles, worn with years; his long beard floated like a white cloud over the starry gems that studded the gold fringed robe that molded his breast.

Round about this figure, that sat motionless as a statue, fixed in a hieratic pose like some Hindu god, burned cressets from which rose clouds of scented vapor. Through this gleamed, like the phosphoric

glint of wild beasts' eyes, the flash of the jewels set in the walls of the throne; then the smoke rolled higher, under the arcades of the roof, mingling its misty blue with the gold dust of the great beams of sun light pouring in from the domes.

Amid the heady odor of the perfumes, in the hot, stifling atmosphere of the great basilica, Salomé, the left arm extended in a gesture of command, the right bent, holding up beside the face a great lotus blossom, glides slowly forward on the points of her toes, to the accompaniment of a guitar whose strings a woman strikes, sitting crouched on the floor.

Her face wore a thoughtful, solemn, almost reverent expression as she began the wanton dance that was to rouse the dormant passions of the old Herod; her bosoms quiver and, touched lightly by her swaying necklets, their rosy points stand pouting; on the moist skin of her body glitter clustered diamonds; from bracelets, belts, rings, dart sparks of fire; over her robe of triumph, bestrewn with pearls, brodered with silver, studded with gold, a corselet of chased goldsmith's work, each mesh of which is a precious stone, seems ablaze with coiling fiery serpents, crawling and creeping over the pink flesh like gleaming insects with dazzling wings of brilliant colors, scarlet with bands of yellow like the dawn, with patterned diapering like the blue of steel, with stripes of peacock green.

With concentrated gaze and the fixed eyes of a sleep walker, she sees neither the Tetrarch, who sits there quivering, nor her mother, the ruthless Herodias, who watches her, nor the hermaphrodite or eunuch who stands saber in hand on the lowest step of the throne, a terrible figure, veiled to below the eyes, the sexless dugs of the creature hanging like twin gourds under his tunic barred with orange stripes.

The thought of this Salomé, so full of haunting suggestion to the artist and the poet, had fascinated Des Esseintes for years. How often had he read in the old Bible of Pierre Variquet, translated by the Doctors in Theology of the University of Louvain, the Gospel of St. Matthew where it recounts in brief, naive phrases the beheading of the Precursor; how often had he dreamed dreams between the simple lines:

“But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

“Whereupon, he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

“And she, being before instructed of her mother, said ‘Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.’

“And the king was sorry: nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

“And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

“And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.”

But neither St. Matthew, nor St. Mark, nor St. Luke, nor any other of the Sacred Writers had enlarged on the maddening charms and the active allurements of the dancer. She had always remained a dim, obliterated figure, lost with her mysterious fascination in the far off mist of the centuries, not to be realized by exact and pedestrian minds, only appealing to brains shaken and sharpened, made visionary as it were by hysteria; she had always eluded the grasp of fleshy painters, such as Rubens who travestied her as a Flemish butcher's wife; always baffled the comprehension of writers who have never yet succeeded in rendering the delirious frenzy of the wanton, the subtle grandeur of the murderess.

In the work of Gustave Moreau, going for its conception altogether beyond the meager facts supplied by the New Testament, Des Esseintes saw realized at last the Salomé, weird and superhuman, he had dreamed of. No longer was she merely the dancing girl who extorts a cry of lust and concupiscence from an old man by the lascivious contortions of her body; who breaks the will, masters the mind of a King by the spectacle of her quivering bosoms, heaving belly and tossing thighs; she was now revealed in a sense as the symbolic incarnation of world-old Vice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the Curse of Beauty supreme above all other beauties by the cataleptic spasm that stirs her flesh and steels her muscles,—a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning, like Helen of Troy of the old Classic fables, all who come near her, all who see her, all who touch her.

So understood, she belonged to the ancient Theogonies of the Far East; no longer she drew her origin from Biblical tradition; could not even be likened to the living image of Babylonish Whoredom, or the Scarlet Woman, the Royal Harlot of Revelation, bedecked like her with precious stones and purple, tired and painted like her; for *she* was not driven by a fateful power, by a supreme, irresistible force, into the alluring perversities of debauch.

Moreover, the painter seemed to have wished to mark his deliberate purpose to keep outside centuries of history; to give no definite indication of race or country or period, setting as he does his Salomé in the midst of this strange Palace, with its confused architecture of a grandiose complexity; clothing her in sumptuous, fantastic robes, crowning her with a diadem of no land or time shaped like a Phoenician tower such as Salammbô wears, putting in her hand the scepter of Isis, the sacred flower of Egypt and of India, the great lotus blossom.

Des Esseintes strove to fathom the meaning of this emblem. Did it bear the phallic signification the primordial religions of India give it; did it proclaim to the old Tetrarch a sacrifice of a woman's virginity, an exchange of blood, an incestuous embrace asked for and offered on the express condition of a murder? Or was it intended to suggest the allegory of Fertility, the Hindu myth of Life, an existence

held betwixt the fingers of woman, snatched away and defiled by the lustful hands of man, who is seized by a sudden madness, bewildered by the cry of the flesh?

Perhaps, too, in arming his enigmatic goddess with the revered lotus flower, the painter had thought of the dancing harlot of all times, the mortal woman the temple of whose body is defiled,—cause of all the sins and all the crimes; perhaps he had remembered the sepulchral rites of ancient Egypt, the ritual ceremonies of the embalment, when surgeons and priests stretch the dead woman's body on a slab of jasper, then with curved needles extract her brains through the nostrils, her entrails through an incision opened in the left side; finally, before gilding the nails and teeth, before coating the corpse with bitumen and precious essences, insert into her sexual parts, to purify them, the chaste petals of the divine flower.

Be this as it may, an irresistible fascination breathed from the canvas; but the water color entitled "The Apparition" was perhaps even yet more troubling to the senses.

In it, Herod's Palace towered aloft like an Alhambra on light columns iridescent with Moorish chequer work, joined as with silver mortar, consolidated with cement of gold; arabesques surrounded lozenges of lapis lazuli and wound all along the cupolas, where on marquetrys of mother of pearl, wandered glittering rainbows, flashes of prismatic color.

The murder had been done; now the headsman stood there impassive, his hands resting on the pommel of his long sword, stained with blood.

The decapitated head of the Saint had risen up from the charger where it lay on the flags, and the eyes were gazing out from the livid face with its discolored lips and open mouth; the neck all crimson, dripping tears of gore.

A mosaic encircled the face whence shone an aureola darting gleams of fire under the porticoes, illuminating the ghastly lifting of the head, revealing the glassy eyeballs, that seemed fixed, glued to the figure of the dancing wanton.

With a gesture of horror, Salomé repulses the appalling vision that holds her nailed to the floor, balanced on her toe tips; her eyes are dilated, her hand grips her throat convulsively.

She is almost naked; in the ardor of the dance the veils have unwound themselves, the brocaded draperies of her robes have slipped away; she is clad now only in goldsmith's artistries and translucent gems; a gorget clips her waist like a corselet; and for clasp a superb, a wondrous jewel flashes lightnings in the furrow between her bosoms; lower, on the hips, a girdle swathes her, hiding the upper thighs, against which swings a gigantic pendant, a falling river of carbuncles and emeralds; to complete the picture: where the body shows bare betwixt gorget and girdle, the belly bulges, dimpled by

the hollow of the navel that recalls a graven seal of onyx with its milky sheen and tint as of a rosy finger nail.

Beneath the ardent rays flashing from the Precursor's head, every facet of her jeweled bravery catches fire; the stones burn, outlining the woman's shape in flaming figures; neck, legs, arms, glitter with points of light, now red as burning brands, now violet as jets of gas, now blue as flames of alcohol, now white as moonbeams.

The dreadful head flashes and flames, bleeding always, dripping goutts of dark purple that point the beard and hair. Visible to Salomé, alone, it embraces in the stare of its dead eyes neither Herodias, who sits dreaming of her hate satiated at last, nor the Tetrarch, who, leaning rather forward with hands on knees, still pants, maddened by the sight of the woman's nakedness, reeking with heady fumes, dripping with balms and essences, alluring with scents of incense and myrrh.

Like the old King, Des Esseintes was overwhelmed, overmastered, dizzied before this figure of the dancing girl, less majestic, less imposing, but more ensnaring to the senses than the Salomé of the oil painting.

In the callous and pitiless statue, in the innocent and deadly idol, the emotion, the terror of the human being had dawned; the great lotus flower had disappeared, the goddess vanished; an atrocious nightmare now gripped the throat of the mime, intoxicated by the whirl of the dance, of the courtesan, petrified, hypnotized by terror.

In this, she was altogether feminine, obedient to her temperament of a passionate, cruel woman; she was active and alive, more refined and yet more savage, more hateful and yet more exquisite; she was shown awakening more powerfully the sleeping passions of man; bewitching, subjugating more surely his will, with her unholy charm as of a great flower of concupiscence, born of a sacrilegious birth, reared in a hothouse of impiety.

As Des Esseintes used to maintain: never before at any epoch had the art of water color succeeded in reaching such a brilliancy of tint; never had the poverty of chemical pigments been able thus to set down on paper such coruscating splendors of precious stones, such glowing hues as of painted windows illumined by the noonday sun, glories so amazing, so dazzling of rich garments and glowing flesh tints.

And, falling into a reverie, he would ask himself what were the origin and antecedents of the great painter, the mystic, the Pagan, the man of genius who could live so remote from the outside world as to behold, here and now in Paris, the splendid, cruel visions, the magic apotheoses of other ages.

Who had been his predecessors? This Des Esseintes found it hard to say; here and there, he seemed influenced by vague recollections of Mantegna and Jacopo de Barbari; here and there, by confused memories of Da Vinci and the feverish coloring of Delacroix.

But in the main, the effect produced by these masters' work on his own was imperceptible; the real truth was that Gustave Moreau was a pupil of no man. Without provable ancestors, without possible descendants, he remained, in contemporary art, a unique figure. Going back to the ethnographic sources of the nations, to the first origins of the mythologies whose blood stained enigmas he compared and unriddled, reuniting, combining in one the legends derived from the Far East and metamorphosed by the beliefs of other peoples, he thus justified his architectonic combinations, his sumptuous and unexpected amalgamations of costumes, his hieratic and sinister allegories, made yet more poignant by the restless apperceptions of a nervous system altogether modern in its morbid sensitiveness; but his work was always painful, haunted by the symbols of superhuman loves and superhuman vices, divine abominations committed without enthusiasm and without hope.

There breathed from his pictures, so despairing and so erudite, a strange magic, a sorcery that moved you to the bottom of the soul, like that of certain of Baudelaire's poems, and you were left amazed, pensive, disconcerted by this art that crossed the last frontier lines of painting, borrowing from literature its most subtle suggestions, from the art of the enameller its most marvelous effects of brilliancy, from the art of the lapidary and the engraver its most exquisite delicacies of touch. These two images of Salomé, for which Des Esseintes' admiration was boundless, were living things before his eyes where they hung on the walls of his working study on special panels reserved for them among the shelves of books.

But this was by no means the end of the purchases of pictures he had made with a view to beautifying his solitude.

True he had sacrificed all the first storey of his house, the only one above the ground floor, and occupied none of its rooms for his personal use, but the latter even by itself demanded a large number of pictures to cover the nakedness of its walls.

This ground floor was distributed as follows: A dressing room, communicating with the bedroom, occupied one angle of the building; from the bedroom you passed into the library, from the library into the dining room, which formed the other angle.

These rooms, making up one front of the house, extended in a straight line, pierced with windows giving on the valley of Aunay.

The opposite side of the edifice consisted of four rooms exactly corresponding, so far as size and disposition went, with the former. Thus a kitchen stood at the corner, answering to the dining room; a large vestibule, serving as entrance hall to the dwelling, matched the library; a kind of boudoir, the bedroom; the closets and bathrooms, the dressing room.

All these latter rooms looked out on the side opposite to the valley of Aunay, towards the Tour du Croy and Châtillon.

As to the staircase, it was built against one side of the house, on the outside, so that the servants' footsteps, trampling up the steps, reached Des Esseintes deadened and less noisy.

He had had the boudoir hung with tapestry of a vivid red, and on each of the four walls were displayed in ebony frames prints by Jan Luyken, an old Dutch engraver, almost unknown in France.

The works he possessed of this artist, at once fantastic and depressing, vigorous and brutal, included the series of his "Religious Persecutions," a collection of appalling plates representing all the tortures which the savagery of religious intolerance has invented, plates exhibiting all the horrors of human agony,—men roasted over braziers, skulls laid open by sword cuts, pierced with nails, riven asunder with saws, bowels drawn out of the belly, and twisted round rollers, finger nails torn out one by one with pincers, eyes put out, eyelids turned back and transfixed with pins, limbs dislocated or carefully broken bones laid bare and scraped for hours with knives.

These productions, replete with abominable imaginations, stinking of the stake, reeking with blood, echoing with curses and screams of agony, made Des Esseintes' flesh creep as he stood stifled with horror in the red boudoir.

But, over and above the qualms of disgust they provoked, over and above the dreadful genius of the man and the extraordinary vividness he gave his figures, there were likewise to be found among the thronging multitudes that people his marvelous drawings, among the hosts of spectators sketched with a dexterity of hand reminding us of Callot, but with a power that amusing but trivial draughtsman never possessed, curious reconstructions of the life of other places and periods; architecture, costumes, manners and customs in the days of the Maccabees, at Rome during the persecutions of the Christians, in Spain under the Inquisition, in France in the Middle Ages and at the date of the St. Bartholomew and the Dragonnades, were all noted with a scrupulous exactitude, and put on paper with a supreme skill.

These prints were mines of curious information; a man could look at them for hours and never weary; profoundly suggestive of ideas, they often helped Des Esseintes to kill the time on days when books refused to interest him.

Moreover, Luyken's own life was yet another attraction to him, explaining indeed the wildness of his work. A fervent Calvinist, a hidebound sectary, a fanatic of hymns and prayers, he composed religious poems, which he illustrated with his burin, paraphrased the Psalms in verse, lost himself in deep studies of the Bible, from which he would emerge, haggard and enraptured, his brain haunted by bloody pictures, his mouth full of the maledictions of the Reformation, and roused to an ecstasy by its songs of terror and fury.

Added to this, he was one who scorned this world, gave up his goods to the poor, lived on a crust of bread himself; in the end, he

had taken boat along with an old servant maid, carried away by a fanatic admiration of the man, put to sea at a venture, landing wherever his vessel came ashore and preaching the Gospel to all peoples, trying to live without eating, a madman and a savage almost at the last.

In the adjoining room, the vestibule, a larger apartment paneled with cedar wood the color of a cigar box, were ranged in rows other engravings and drawings equally extraordinary.

Bresdin's "Comedy of Death" was one, where in an impossible landscape, bristling with trees, coppices and thickets taking the shape of demons and phantoms, swarming with birds having rats' heads and tails of vegetables, from a soil littered with human bones, vertebrae, ribs and skulls, spring willows, knotted and gnarled, surmounted by skeletons tossing their arms in unison and chanting a hymn of victory, while a Christ flies away to a sky dappled with little clouds; a hermit sits pondering, his head between his hands, in the recesses of a grotto; a beggar dies worn out with privations, exhausted with hunger, stretched on his back, his feet extended towards a stagnant pool.

Another was the "Good Samaritan" by the same artist, an immense pen and ink drawing, lithographed,—a wild entanglement of palms, service trees, oaks, growing all together in defiance of seasons and climates, an outburst of virgin forest, crammed with apes, owls and screech owls, cumbered with old stumps shapeless as roots of coral,—a magic wood, pierced by a clearing dimly revealing far away, beyond a camel and the group of the Samaritan and the man who fell by the wayside, a river and behind it again a fairylike city climbing to the horizon line, rising to meet a strange looking sky, dotted with birds, woolly with rolling clouds, swelling, as it were, with bales of vapor.

You would have thought it the work of an Early Italian master or a half developed Albert Durer, composed under the influence of opium.

But, much as he admired the delicacy of detail and the imposing conception of this plate, Des Esseintes was more particularly attracted by the other pictures that decorated the room. These were signed Odilon Redon.

In their light frames of unpainted pear wood, with a gold beading, they contained productions of an inconceivable eccentricity,—a head in a Merovingian style, placed upon a cup; a bearded man, having something about him recalling at one and the same time a Buddhist priest and an orator at a public meeting, touching with the tip of his finger a colossal cannonball; a horrible spider, with a human face lodged in the middle of its body. Then there were crayons that went further yet in the horrors of a nightmare dream. Here it was an enormous die that winked a mournful eye; there, a series of landscapes,—barren, parched, burnt up plains, riven by earthquakes,

rising in volcanic heights wreathed with wild clouds under a livid, stagnant sky. Sometimes even the subjects seemed to be borrowed from the dreams of science, to go back to prehistoric times; a monstrous flora spread over the rocks; everywhere were erratic blocks, glacial mud streams, and amongst them human beings whose ape like type,—the heavy jaws, the projecting arches of the brows, the receding forehead, the flattened top of the skull, recalled the ancestral head, the head of the earliest quaternary period, when man was still a fruit eater and speechless, a contemporary of the mammoth, the woolly haired rhinoceros and the giant bear. These drawings passed all bounds, transgressing in a thousand ways the established laws of pictorial art, utterly fantastic and revolutionary, the work of a mad and morbid genius.

In fact, there were some of these faces, staring out with great, wild, insane eyes, some of these shapes exaggerated out of all measure or distorted as if seen refracted through water, that evoked in Des Esseintes' memory recollections of typhoid fever, remembrances that had stuck persistently in his head of hot nights of misery and horrid childish nightmares.

Overcome by an indefinable sense of distress before these designs,—the same distress he had formerly experienced at the sight of certain "Proverbs" of Goya's which they resembled, as also after reading some of Edgar Allan Poe's stories, whose mirages of hallucination and effects of terror Odilon Redon seemed to have transferred into a sister art, he would rub his eyes and gaze at a radiant figure that, amid these frenzied designs, rose calm and serene, a figure of "Melancholia," seated before a round sun's disk, on rocks, in an attitude of depression and despondency.

Then the gloom would be dissipated as if by magic; a pleasing sadness, a languor of gentle mournfulness, would fill his thoughts, and he would meditate for hours before this work, which, with its splashes of color wash gleaming amid the heavy chinks, struck a brilliant note of liquid green and pale gold to relieve the unbroken black of all these crayons and engravings.

Besides this series of Redon's works, covering nearly all the panels of the vestibule, he had hung in his bedroom an extravagant design, a sketch by Théocopuli, a Christ with livid flesh tints, the drawing of which was exaggerated, the coloring crude, the vigor excessive and undisciplined, an example of that painter's second manner, when he was tormented with the one haunting idea of avoiding any resemblance to Titian at all costs.

This gloomy work of art, with its tints of dead black and unhealthy green, corresponded in Des Esseintes' ideas with certain conclusions he came to with regard to the furnishing of the same apartment.

There existed, according to him, two ways and only two of arranging a bedroom; either to make it a place for pleasure, contrived

to excite the passions for nightly adventure; or else to regard it as a retreat dedicated to sleep and solitude, a home of quiet thoughts, a kind of oratory.

In the first case, the Louis XV. style, was preeminently the one for refined minds, for people exhausted above all by stress and strain of mental sensibility; indeed, only the Eighteenth Century has known how to envelope woman in a vicious atmosphere, shaping its furniture on the model of her charms, copying the contortions of her ardor, imitating the spasms of her amorousness in the waving lines and intricate convolutions of wood and copper, adding a spice to the sugar sweet languor of the blonde by the vivid, bright tone of its ornamentation, mitigating the salty savor of the brunette by tapes-tries of subdued, liquid, almost insipid hues.

A chamber of the sort he had already included in his Paris abode, with the broad, white bed that gives an added titillation, an enhanced satisfaction to the depraved senses of an old voluptuary, that is like a cynic's grin in face of pretended chastity, before Greuze's innocent sprigs of girlhood, before the artificial purity of naughty sheets that seem spread for children and young virgins.

In the other case,—and now that he was determined to break with the agitating memories of his past life, this was the only one possible,—he must contrive a bed chamber to resemble a monk's cell in a Religious House; but here came difficulty upon difficulty, for he refused absolutely to endure for his personal occupation the austere ugliness that marks such refuges for penitence and prayer.

By dint of turning the question over this way and that and looking at it from every side, he arrived at the conclusion that the result to be aimed at amounted to this—to arrange by means of objects cheerful in themselves a melancholy whole, or rather, while preserving its character of plain ugliness, to impress on the general effect of the room thus treated a kind of elegance and distinction; to reverse, in fact, the optical delusion of the stage, where cheap tinsel plays the part of expensive and sumptuous robes, to gain indeed precisely the opposite effect, using costly and magnificent materials so as to give the impression of common rags; in a word, to fit up a Trappist's cell that should have the look of the genuine article, and yet of course be nothing of the sort.

He set about the task as follows: to imitate the ochre wash that is the invariable mark of administrative and clerical direction, he had the walls hung with saffron silk; to represent the chocolate brown of the wainscot, the regulation color for suchlike places, he paneled the lower part of these same walls with wood painted a rich, deep purple. The effect was charming, recalling—though how different really!—the bald stiffness of the pattern he was copying,—with modifications. The ceiling, in the same way, was covered with unbleached white cloth, giving the appearance of plaster, but without its crude shiny look; then for the cold tiles of the floor; he mimicked these

very successfully, thanks to a carpet with a pattern of red squares, interspersed with spots of a whitish hue where the occupants' sandals might have been supposed to leave their mark.

This room he furnished with a little iron bedstead, a sham hermit's couch, constructed out of old pieces of wrought and polished iron, its plainness relieved at head and foot by a leaf and flower ornamentation,—tulips and vine tendrils intertwined, once part of the balustrade of the great staircase of an old chateau.

By way of night table, he installed an antique prie-Dieu, the inside of which would hold a utensil, while the top supported a book of offices of the Church; he erected against the opposite wall a state pew, surmounted by an open work canopy decorated with ornaments carved in the solid wood; he used candelabra that had come from a desecrated church, in which he burned real wax tapers purchased at a special house patronized by the clergy, for he felt a genuine repugnance for all the modern methods of illumination, whether petroleum, rock oil, gas or composite candles, all alike in their crude, dazzling effects.

In bed in the morning, as he lay with his head on the pillow before falling asleep, he would gaze at his Théocopuli, the painful coloring of which modified to some degree the soft cheerfulness of the yellow silk on the walls and gave it a graver tone; at these times, he could easily picture himself living a hundred leagues from Paris, far from the world of men, in the depths of a Monastery.

And, after all, the illusion was not difficult to sustain for truly he was living a life largely analogous to that of a Monk. In this way, he enjoyed the advantages of confinement in a cloister, while he escaped its inconveniences,—the quasi-military discipline, the lack of comfort, the dirt and herding together and the monotonous idleness. Just as he had made his cell into a warm, luxurious bedchamber, so he had procured himself an existence carried on under normal conditions, without hardship or incommodity, sufficiently occupied, yet free from irksome restraints.

Like an eremite, he was ripe for solitude, harassed by life's stress, expecting nothing more of existence; like a monk again, he was overwhelmed with an immense fatigue, a craving for peace and quiet, a longing to have nothing more to do henceforth with the vulgar, who were in his eyes all utilitarians and fools.

In short, though he was conscious of no vocation for the state of grace, he felt in himself a genuine sympathy for the folks shut up in Monasteries, persecuted by a society that hates them and can never forgive the well grounded contempt they entertain for it nor the wish they manifest to redeem, to expiate by long years of silence the ever increasing licentiousness of its grotesque or silly conversations.

piece of stuff torn in two, to rub his finger over a lump of chalk, to stroke the surface of watered silk.

The excesses of his bachelorhood, the abnormal strains put upon his brain had extraordinarily aggravated his original nervous weakness, still further impoverished the exhausted blood of his race; in Paris he had been obliged to resort to hydropathic treatment for trembling of the hands, for atrocious pains, for neuralgic agonies that seemed to cut his face in two, that beat with a never ceasing hammering at his temples, sent stabbing throbs through his eyelids, provoked fits of nausea he could only subdue by stretching himself flat on his back in the dark.

These inconveniences had gradually disappeared, thanks to a better regulated and quieter life; now they were making themselves felt again, though in a different shape, diffused through the body generally; the pain left the head and attacked the stomach, which was swollen and hard; scorched the inwards as with a red hot iron, brought on a condition of the bowels at once uneasy and constipated. Presently a nervous cough, dry and hacking, beginning always exactly at a set hour and lasting for precisely the same number of minutes, woke him half choking in his bed. Finally he lost all appetite; hot, gassy eructations rose like fire in his throat; the stomach was distended; he felt stifled, after each attempt to eat; he could not endure the least constriction about the body, a buttoned trouser belt or a buckled waistcoat.

He gave up spirituous liquors, coffee and tea, confined himself to a milk diet, resorted to bathing the body with cold water, stuffed himself with assafoetida, valerian and quinine; he even consented to leave the house and take strolls in the country when the days of rain came that make the roads silent and deserted; he forced himself to walk, to take exercise; as a last resource, he renounced reading altogether for the time being and, consumed with ennui, determined by way of filling up this time of enforced leisure to carry out a project the execution of which he had again and again postponed out of laziness and dislike of change since the first day of his settling at Fontenay.

No longer able to intoxicate himself afresh with the magical enchantments of style, to fall into an ecstasy over the delicious witchery of the rare and well chosen epithet that, while still definite and precise, yet opens infinite perspectives, to the imagination of the initiate he resolved to complete the decoration of his dwelling, to fill it with costly hothouse flowers and so procure himself a material occupation that should distract his thoughts, calm his nerves and rest his brain. Moreover, he had hopes that the sight of their strange and magnificent colors might console him somewhat for the loss of the fancied or real shades of literary style which his abstention from all reading was to make him forget for the moment or lose altogether.