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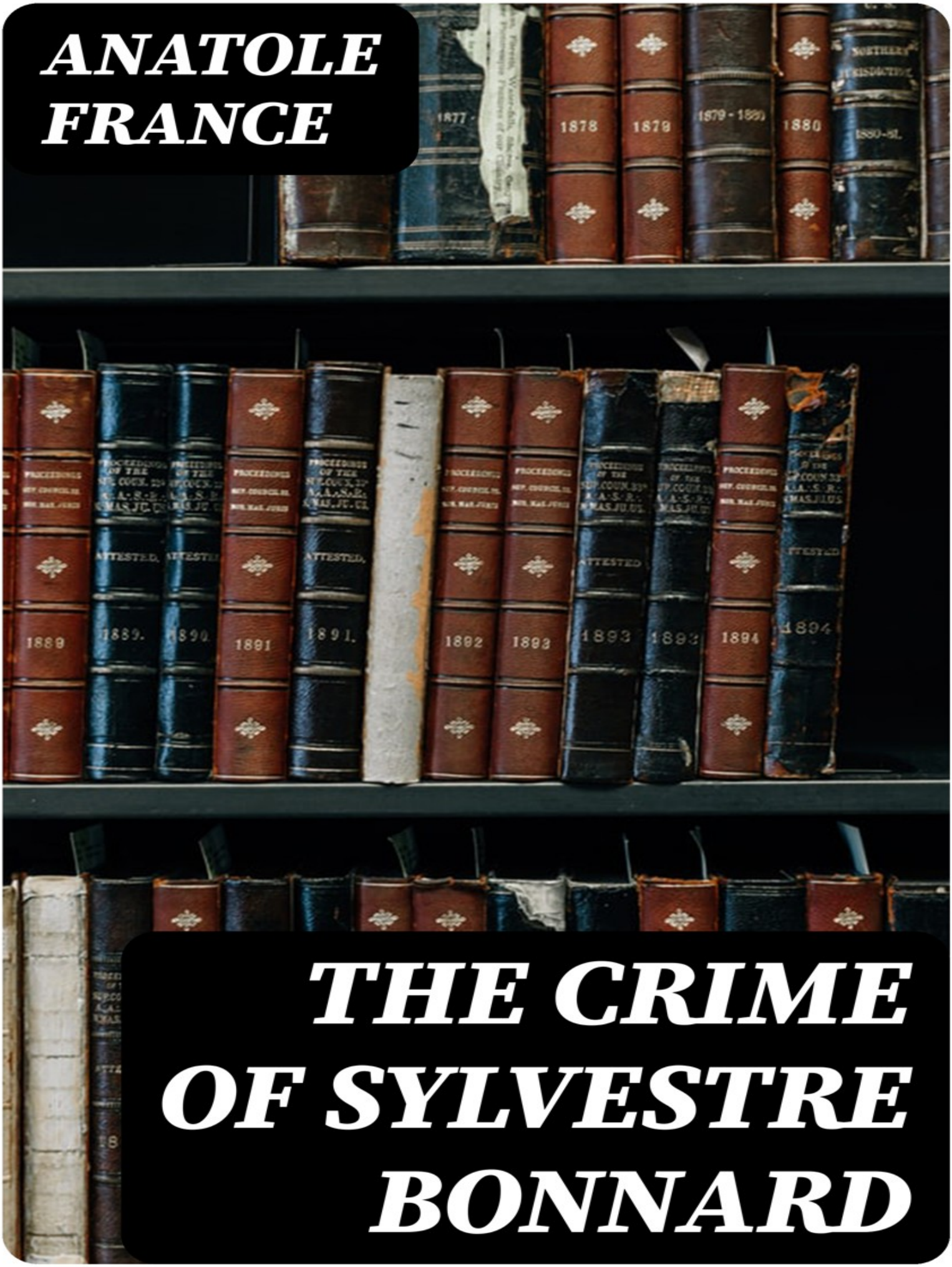

THE CRIME OF SYLVESTRE BONNARD

Anatole France

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

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PART I—THE LOG

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December 24, 1849.

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I had put on my slippers and my dressing-gown. I wiped away a tear with which the north wind blowing over the quay had obscured my vision. A bright fire was leaping in the chimney of my study. Ice-crystals, shaped like fern-leaves, were sprouting over the windowpanes and concealed from me the Seine with its bridges and the Louvre of the Valois.

I drew up my easy-chair to the hearth, and my table-volante, and took up so much of my place by the fire as Hamilcar deigned to allow me. Hamilcar was lying in front of the andirons, curled up on a cushion, with his nose between his paws. His think find fur rose and fell with his regular breathing. At my coming, he slowly slipped a glance of his agate eyes at me from between his half-opened lids, which he closed again almost at once, thinking to himself, “It is nothing; it is only my friend.”

“Hamilcar,” I said to him, as I stretched my legs —“Hamilcar, somnolent Prince of the City of Books—thou guardian nocturnal! Like that Divine Cat who combated the impious in Heliopolis—in the night of the great combat—

thou dost defend from vile nibblers those books which the old savant acquired at the cost of his slender savings and indefatigable zeal. Sleep, Hamilcar, softly as a sultana, in this library, that shelters thy military virtues; for verily in thy person are united the formidable aspect of a Tatar warrior and the slumbrous grace of a woman of the Orient. Sleep, thou heroic and voluptuous Hamilcar, while awaiting the moonlight hour in which the mice will come forth to dance before the Acta Sanctorum of the learned Bolandists!”

The beginning of this discourse pleased Hamilcar, who accompanied it with a throat-sound like the song of a kettle on the fire. But as my voice waxed louder, Hamilcar notified me by lowering his ears and by wrinkling the striped skin of his brow that it was bad taste on my part so to declaim.

“This old-book man,” evidently thought Hamilcar, “talks to no purpose at all while our housekeeper never utters a word which is not full of good sense, full of significance—containing either the announcement of a meal or the promise of a whipping. One knows what she says. But this old man puts together a lot of sounds signifying nothing.”

So thought Hamilcar to himself. Leaving him to his reflections, I opened a book, which I began to read with interest; for it was a catalogue of manuscripts. I do not know any reading more easy, more fascinating, more delightful than that of a catalogue. The one which I was reading—edited in 1824 by Mr. Thompson, librarian to Sir Thomas Raleigh—sins, it is true, by excess of brevity, and does not offer that character of exactitude which the archivists of my own generation were the first to introduce into works upon diplomatics and paleography. It leaves a good deal to be

desired and to be divined. This is perhaps why I find myself aware, while reading it, of a state of mind which in nature more imaginative than mine might be called reverie. I had allowed myself to drift away this gently upon the current of my thoughts, when my housekeeper announced, in a tone of ill-humor, that Monsieur Coccoz desired to speak with me.

In fact, some one had slipped into the library after her. He was a little man—a poor little man of puny appearance, wearing a thin jacket. He approached me with a number of little bows and smiles. But he was very pale, and, although still young and alert, he looked ill. I thought as I looked at him, of a wounded squirrel. He carried under his arm a green toilette, which he put upon a chair; then unfastening the four corners of the toilette, he uncovered a heap of little yellow books.

“Monsieur,” he then said to me, “I have not the honour to be known to you. I am a book-agent, Monsieur. I represent the leading houses of the capital, and in the hope that you will kindly honour me with your confidence, I take the liberty to offer you a few novelties.”

Kind gods! just gods! such novelties as the homunculus Coccoz showed me! The first volume that he put in my hand was “L’Histoire de la Tour de Nesle,” with the amours of Marguerite de Bourgogne and the Captain Buridan.

“It is a historical book,” he said to me, with a smile—“a book of real history.”

“In that case,” I replied, “it must be very tiresome; for all the historical books which contain no lies are extremely tedious. I write some authentic ones myself; and if you were unlucky enough to carry a copy of any of them from door to

door you would run the risk of keeping it all your life in that green baize of yours, without ever finding even a cook foolish enough to buy it from you.”

“Certainly Monsieur,” the little man answered, out of pure good-nature.

And, all smiling again, he offered me the “Amours d’Heloise et d’Abeilard”; but I made him understand that, at my age, I had no use for love-stories.

Still smiling, he proposed me the “Regle des Jeux de la Societe”—piquet, bezique, ecarte, whist, dice, draughts, and chess.

“Alas!” I said to him, “if you want to make me remember the rules of bezique, give me back my old friend Bignan, with whom I used to play cards every evening before the Five Academies solemnly escorted him to the cemetery; or else bring down to the frivolous level of human amusements the grave intelligence of Hamilcar, whom you see on that cushion, for he is the sole companion of my evenings.”

The little man’s smile became vague and uneasy.

“Here,” he said, “is a new collection of society amusements—jokes and puns—with a receipt for changing a red rose to a white rose.”

I told him that I had fallen out with the roses for a long time, and that, as to jokes, I was satisfied with those which I unconsciously permitted myself to make in the course of my scientific labours.

The homunculus offered me his last book, with his last smile. He said to me:

“Here is the Clef des Songes—the ‘Key of Dreams’—with the explanation of any dreams that anybody can have;

dreams of gold, dreams of robbers, dreams of death, dreams of falling from the top of a tower.... It is exhaustive."

I had taken hold of the tongs, and, brandishing them energetically, I replied to my commercial visitor:

"Yes, my friend; but those dreams and a thousand others, joyous or tragic, are all summed up in one—the Dream of Life; is your little yellow book able to give me the key to that?"

"Yes, Monsieur," answered the homunculus; "the book is complete, and it is not dear—one franc twenty-five centimes, Monsieur."

I called my housekeeper—for there is no bell in my room—and said to her:

"Therese, Monsieur Coccoz—whom I am going to ask you to show out—has a book here which might interest you: the 'Key of Dreams.' I shall be very glad to buy it for you."

My housekeeper responded:

"Monsieur, when one has not even time to dream awake, one has still less time to dream asleep. Thank God, my days are just enough for my work and my work for my days, and I am able to say every night, 'Lord, bless Thou the rest which I am going to take.' I never dream, either on my feet or in bed; and I never mistake my eider-down coverlet for a devil, as my cousin did; and, if you will allow me to give my opinion about it, I think you have books enough here now. Monsieur has thousands and thousands of books, which simply turn his head; and as for me, I have just tow, which are quite enough for all my wants and purposes—my Catholic prayer-book and my Cuisiniere Bourgeoise."

And with those words my housekeeper helped the little man to fasten up his stock again within the green toilette.

The homunculus Coccoz had ceased to smile. His relaxed features took such an expression of suffering that I felt sorry to have made fun of so unhappy a man. I called him back, and told him that I had caught a glimpse of a copy of the “Histoire d’Estelle et de Nemorin,” which he had among his books; that I was very fond of shepherds and shepherdesses, and that I would be quite willing to purchase, at a reasonable price, the story of these two perfect lovers.

“I will sell you that book for one franc twenty-five centimes, Monsieur,” replied Coccoz, whose face at once beamed with joy. “It is historical; and you will be pleased with it. I know now just what suits you. I see that you are a connoisseur. To-morrow I will bring you the Crimes des Papes. It is a good book. I will bring you the edition d’amateur, with coloured plates.”

I begged him not to do anything of the sort, and sent him away happy. When the green toilette and the agent had disappeared in the shadow of the corridor I asked my housekeeper whence this little man had dropped upon us.

“Dropped is the word,” she answered; “he dropped on us from the roof, Monsieur, where he lives with his wife.”

“You say he has a wife, Therese? That is marvelous! Women are very strange creatures! This one must be a very unfortunate little woman.”

“I don’t really know what she is,” answered Therese; “but every morning I see her trailing a silk dress covered with grease-spots over the stairs. She makes soft eyes at people.

And, in the name of common sense! does it become a woman that has been received here out of charity to make eyes and to wear dresses like that? For they allowed the couple to occupy the attic during the time the roof was being repaired, in consideration of the fact that the husband is sick and the wife in an interesting condition. The concierge even says that the pain came on her this morning, and that she is now confined. They must have been very badly off for a child!”

“Therese,” I replied, “they had no need of a child, doubtless. But Nature had decided that they should bring one into the world; Nature made them fall into her snare. One must have exceptional prudence to defeat Nature’s schemes. Let us be sorry for them and not blame them! As for silk dresses, there is no young woman who does not like them. The daughters of Eve adore adornment. You yourself, Therese—who are so serious and sensible—what a fuss you make when you have no white apron to wait at table in! But, tell me, have they got everything necessary in their attic?”

“How could they have it, Monsieur?” my housekeeper made answer. “The husband, whom you have just seen, used to be a jewellery-peddler—at least, so the concierge tells me—and nobody knows why he stopped selling watches, you have just seen that his is now selling almanacs. That is no way to make an honest living, and I never will believe that God’s blessing can come to an almanac-peddler. Between ourselves, the wife looks to me for all the world like a good-for-nothing—a Marie-couche toi-la. I think she would be just as capable of bringing up a child as I should be of playing the guitar. Nobody seems to know

where they came from; but I am sure they must have come by Misery’s coach from the country of Sans-souci.”

“Wherever they have come from, Therese, they are unfortunate; and their attic is cold.”

“Pardi!—the roof is broken in several places and the rain comes through in streams. They have neither furniture nor clothing. I don’t think cabinet-makers and weavers work much for Christians of that sect!”

“That is very sad, Therese; a Christian woman much less well provided for than this pagan, Hamilcar here!—what does she have to say?”

“Monsieur, I never speak to those people; I don’t know what she says or what she sings. But she sings all day long; I hear her from the stairway whenever I am going out or coming in.”

“Well! the heir of the Coccoz family will be able to say, like the Egg in the village riddle: Ma mere me fit en chantant. [“My mother sang when she brought me into the world.”] The like happened in the case of Henry IV. When Jeanne d’Albret felt herself about to be confined she began to sing an old Bearnaise canticle:

“Notre-Dame du bout du pont,
Venez a mon aide en cette heure!
Priez le Dieu du ciel
Qu’il me delivre vite,
Qu’il me donne un garcon!

“It is certainly unreasonable to bring little unfortunates into the world. But the thing is done every day, my dear Therese and all the philosophers on earth will never be able to reform the silly custom. Madame Coccoz has followed it,

and she sings. This is creditable at all events! But, tell me, Therese, have you not put the soup to boil to-day?”

“Yes, Monsieur; and it is time for me to go and skim it.”

“Good! but don’t forget, Therese, to take a good bowl of soup out of the pot and carry it to Madame Coccoz, our attic neighbor.”

My housekeeper was on the point of leaving the room when I added, just in time:

“Therese, before you do anything else, please call your friend the porter, and tell him to take a good bundle of wood out of our stock and carry it up to the attic of those Coccoz folks. See, above all, that he puts a first-class log in the lot—a real Christmas log. As for the homunculus, if he comes back again, do not allow either himself or any of his yellow books to come in here.”

Having taken all these little precautions with the refined egotism of an old bachelor, I returned to my catalogue again.

With what surprise, with what emotion, with what anxiety did I therein discover the following mention, which I cannot even now copy without feeling my hand tremble:

“LA LEGENDE DOREE DE JACQUES DE GENES (Jacques de Voragine);—traduction francaise, petit in-4.

“This MS. of the fourteenth century contains, besides the tolerably complete translation of the celebrated work of Jacques de Voragine, 1. The Legends of Saints Ferreol, Ferrution, Germain, Vincent, and Droctoveus; 2. A poem ‘On the Miraculous Burial of Monsieur Saint-Germain of Auxerre.’ This translation, as well as the legends and the poem, are due to the Clerk Alexander.

“This MS. is written upon vellum. It contains a great number of illuminated letters, and two finely executed miniatures, in a rather imperfect state of preservation:—one represents the Purification of the Virgin, and the other the Coronation of Proserpine.”

What a discovery! Perspiration moistened my forehead, and a veil seemed to come before my eyes. I trembled; I flushed; and, without being able to speak, I felt a sudden impulse to cry out at the top of my voice.

What a treasure! For more than forty years I had been making a special study of the history of Christian Gaul, and particularly of that glorious Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, whence issued forth those King-Monks who founded our national dynasty. Now, despite the culpable insufficiency of the description given, it was evident to me that the MS. of the Clerk Alexander must have come from the great Abbey. Everything proved this fact. All the legends added by the translator related to the pious foundation of the Abbey by King Childebert. Then the legend of Saint-Droctoveus was particularly significant; being the legend of the first abbot of my dear Abbey. The poem in French verse on the burial of Saint-Germain led me actually into the nave of that venerable basilica which was the umbilicus of Christian Gaul.

The “Golden Legend” is in itself a vast and gracious work. Jacques de Voragine, Definitor of the Order of Saint-Dominic, and Archbishop of Genoa, collected in the thirteenth century the various legends of Catholic saints, and formed so rich a compilation that from all the monasteries and castles of the time there arouse the cry: “This is the ‘Golden Legend.’” The

“Legende Doree” was especially opulent in Roman hagiography. Edited by an Italian monk, it reveals its best merits in the treatment of matters relating to the terrestrial domains of Saint Peter. Voragine can only perceive the greater saints of the Occident as through a cold mist. For this reason the Aquitanian and Saxon translators of the good legend-writer were careful to add to his recital the lives of their own national saints.

I have read and collated a great many manuscripts of the “Golden Legend.” I know all those described by my learned colleague, M. Paulin Paris, in his handsome catalogue of the MSS. of the Biblotheque du Roi. There were two among them which especially drew my attention. One is of the fourteenth century and contains a translation by Jean Belet; the other, younger by a century, presents the version of Jacques Vignay. Both come from the Colbert collection, and were placed on the shelves of that glorious Colbertine library by the Librarian Baluze—whose name I can never pronounce without uncovering my head; for even in the century of the giants of erudition, Baluze astounds by his greatness. I know also a very curious codex in the Bigot collection; I know seventy-four printed editions of the work, commencing with the venerable ancestor of all—the Gothic of Strasburg, begun in 1471, and finished in 1475. But no one of those MSS., no one of those editions, contains the legends of Saints Ferreol, Ferrution, Germain, Vincent, and Droctoveus; no one bears the name of the Clerk Alexander; no one, in find, came from the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Pres. Compared with the MS. described by Mr. Thompson, they are only as straw to gold. I have seen with my eyes, I

have touched with my fingers, an incontrovertible testimony to the existence of this document. But the document itself—what has become of it? Sir Thomas Raleigh went to end his days by the shores of the Lake of Como, whither he carried with him a part of his literary wealth. Where did the books go after the death of that aristocratic collector? Where could the manuscript of the Clerk Alexander have gone?

“And why,” I asked myself, “why should I have learned that this precious book exists, if I am never to possess it—never even to see it? I would go to seek it in the burning heart of Africa, or in the icy regions of the Pole if I knew it were there. But I do not know where it is. I do not know if it be guarded in a triple-locked iron case by some jealous biblomaniac. I do not know if it be growing mouldy in the attic of some ignoramus. I shudder at the thought that perhaps its tore-out leaves may have been used to cover the pickle-jars of some housekeeper.”

August 30, 1850

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The heavy heat compelled me to walk slowly. I kept close to the walls of the north quays; and, in the lukewarm shade, the shops of the dealers in old books, engravings, and antiquated furniture drew my eyes and appealed to my fancy. Rummaging and idling among these, I hastily enjoyed some verses spiritedly thrown off by a poet of the Pleiad. I

examined an elegant Masquerade by Watteau. I felt, with my eye, the weight of a two-handed sword, a steel gorgerin, a morion. What a thick helmet! What a ponderous breastplate—Seigneur! A giant’s garb? No—the carapace of an insect. The men of those days were cuirassed like beetles; their weakness was within them. To-day, on the contrary, our strength is interior, and our armed souls dwell in feeble bodies.

...Here is a pastel-portrait of a lady of the old time—the face, vague like a shadow, smiles; and a hand, gloved with an openwork mitten, retains upon her satiny knees a lap-dog, with a ribbon about its neck. That picture fills me with a sort of charming melancholy. Let those who have no half-effaced pastels in their own hearts laugh at me! Like the horse that scents the stable, I hasten my pace as I near my lodgings. There it is—that great human hive, in which I have a cell, for the purpose of therein distilling the somewhat acrid honey of erudition. I climb the stairs with slow effort. Only a few steps more, and I shall be at my own door. But I divine, rather than see, a robe descending with a sound of rustling silk. I stop, and press myself against the balustrade to make room. The lady who is coming down is bareheaded; she is young; she sings; her eyes and teeth gleam in the shadow, for she laughs with lips and eyes at the same time. She is certainly a neighbor, and a very familiar one. She holds in her arms a pretty child, a little boy—quite naked, like the son of a goddess; he has a medal hung round his neck by a little silver chain. I see him sucking his thumb and looking at me with those big eyes so newly opened on this old universe. The mother simultaneously looks at me in a

sly, mysterious way; she stops—I think blushes a little—and holds out the little creature to me. The baby has a pretty wrinkle between wrist and arm, a pretty wrinkle about his neck, and all over him, from head to foot, the daintiest dimples laugh in his rosy flesh.

The mamma shows him to me with pride.

“Monsieur,” she says, “don’t you think he is very pretty—my little boy?”

She takes one tiny hand, lifts it to the child’s own lips, and, drawing out the darling pink fingers again towards me, says,

“Baby, throw the gentleman a kiss.”

Then, folding the little being in her arms, she flees away with the agility of a cat, and is lost to sight in a corridor which, judging by the odour, must lead to some kitchen.

I enter my own quarters.

“Therese, who can that young mother be whom I saw bareheaded on the stairs just now, with a pretty little boy?”

And Therese replies that it was Madame Coccoz.

I stare up at the ceiling, as if trying to obtain some further illumination. Therese then recalls to me the little book-peddler who tried to sell me almanacs last year, while his wife was lying in.

“And Coccoz himself?” I asked.

I was answered that I would never see him again. The poor little man had been laid away underground, without my knowledge, and, indeed, with the knowledge of very few people, on a short time after the happy delivery of Madame Coccoz. I leaned that his wife had been able to console herself: I did likewise.

“But, Therese,” I asked, “has Madame Coccoz got everything she needs in that attic of hers?”

“You would be a great dupe, Monsieur,” replied my housekeeper, “if you should bother yourself about that creature. They gave her notice to quit the attic when the roof was repaired. But she stays there yet—in spite of the proprietor, the agent, the concierge, and the bailiffs. I think she has bewitched every one of them. She will leave the attic when she pleases, Monsieur; but she is going to leave in her own carriage. Let me tell you that!”

Therese reflected for a moment; and then uttered these words:

“A pretty face is a curse from Heaven.”

“Then I ought to thank Heaven for having spared me that curse. But here! put my hat and cane away. I am going to amuse myself with a few pages of Moreri. If I can trust my old fox-nose, we are going to have a nicely flavoured pullet for dinner. Look after that estimable fowl, my girl, and spare your neighbors, so that you and your old master may be spared by them in turn.”

Having thus spoken, I proceeded to follow out the tufted ramifications of a princely genealogy.

May 7, 1851

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I have passed the winter according to the ideal of the sages, in angello cum libello; and now the swallows of the Quai Malaquais find me on their return about as when they left me. He who lives little, changes little; and it is scarcely living at all to use up one’s days over old texts.

Yet I feel myself to-day a little more deeply impregnated than ever before with that vague melancholy which life distils. The economy of my intelligence (I dare scarcely confess it to myself!) has remained disturbed ever since that momentous hour in which the existence of the manuscript of the Clerk Alexander was first revealed to me.

It is strange that I should have lost my rest simply on account of a few old sheets of parchment; but it is unquestionably true. The poor man who has no desires possesses the greatest of riches; he possesses himself. The rich man who desires something is only a wretched slave. I am just such a slave. The sweetest pleasures—those of converse with some one of a delicate and well-balanced mind, or dining out with a friend—are insufficient to enable me to forget the manuscript which I know that I want, and have been wanting from the moment I knew of its existence. I feel the want of it by day and by night: I feel the want of it in all my joys and pains; I feel the want of it while at work or asleep.

I recall my desires as a child. How well I can now comprehend the intense wishes of my early years!

I can see once more, with astonishing vividness, a certain doll which, when I was eight years old, used to be displayed in the window of an ugly little shop of the Rue de Seine. I cannot tell how it happened that this doll attracted me. I

was very proud of being a boy; I despised little girls; and I longed impatiently for the day (which alas! has come) when a strong beard should bristle on my chin. I played at being a soldier; and, under the pretext of obtaining forage for my rocking-horse, I used to make sad havoc among the plants my poor mother delighted to keep on her window-sill. Manly amusements those, I should say! And, nevertheless, I was consumed with longing for a doll. Characters like Hercules have such weaknesses occasionally. Was the one I had fallen in love with at all beautiful? No. I can see her now. She had a splotch of vermilion on either cheek, short soft arms, horrible wooden hands, and long sprawling legs. Her flowered petticoat was fastened at the waist with two pins. Even now I cans see the black heads of those two pins. It was a decidedly vulgar doll—smelt of the faubourg. I remember perfectly well that, child as I was then, before I had put on my first pair of trousers, I was quite conscious in my own way that this doll lacked grace and style—that she was gross, that she was course. But I loved her in spite of that; I loved her just for that; I loved her only; I wanted her. My soldiers and my drums had become as nothing in my eyes, I ceased to stick sprigs of heliotrope and veronica into the mouth of my rocking-horse. That doll was all the world to me. I invented ruses worthy of a savage to oblige Virginie, my nurse, to take me by the little shop in the Rue de Seine. I would press my nose against the window until my nurse had to take my arm and drag me away. “Monsieur Sylvestre, it is late, and your mamma will scold you.” Monsieur Sylvestre in those days made very little of either scoldings or whippings. But his nurse lifted him up like a

feather, and Monsieur Sylvestre yielded to force. In after-years, with age, he degenerated, and sometimes yielded to fear. But at that time he used to fear nothing.

I was unhappy. An unreasoning but irresistible shame prevented me from telling my mother about the object of my love. Thence all my sufferings. For many days that doll, incessantly present in fancy, danced before my eyes, stared at me fixedly, opened her arms to me, assuming in my imagination a sort of life which made her appear at once mysterious and weird, and thereby all the more charming and desirable.

Finally, one day—a day I shall never forget—my nurse took me to see my uncle, Captain Victor, who had invited me to lunch. I admired my uncle a great deal, as much because he had fired the last French cartridge at Waterloo, as because he used to prepare with his own hands, at my mother's table, certain chapons-a-l'ail [Crust on which garlic has been rubbed], which he afterwards put in the chicory salad. I thought that was very fine! My Uncle Victor also inspired me with much respect by his frogged coat, and still more by his way of turning the whole house upside down from the moment he came into it. Even now I cannot tell just how he managed it, but I can affirm that whenever my Uncle Victor found himself in any assembly of twenty persons, it was impossible to see or to hear anybody but him. My excellent father, I have reason to believe, never shared my admiration for Uncle Victor, who used to sicken him with his pipe, give him great thumps in the back by way of friendliness, and accuse him of lacking energy. My mother, though always showing a sister's indulgence to the

Captain, sometimes advised him to fold the brandy-bottle a little less frequently. But I had no part either in these repugnances or these reproaches, and Uncle Victor inspired me with the purest enthusiasm. It was therefore with a feeling of pride that I entered into the little lodging he occupied in the Rue Guenegaud. The entire lunch, served on a small table close to the fireplace, consisted of cold meats and confectionery.

The Captain stuffed me with cakes and undiluted wine. He told me of numberless injustices to which he had been a victim. He complained particularly of the Bourbons; and as he neglected to tell me who the Bourbons were, I got the idea—I can't tell how—that the Bourbons were horse-dealers established at Waterloo. The Captain, who never interrupted his talk except for the purpose of pouring out wine, furthermore made charges against a number of dirty scoundrels, blackguards, and good-for-nothings whom I did not know anything about, but whom I hated from the bottom of my heart. At dessert I thought I heard the Captain say my father was a man who could be led anywhere by the nose; but I am not quite sure that I understood him. I had a buzzing in my ears; and it seemed to me that the table was dancing.

My uncle put on his frogged coat, took his bell shaped hat, and we descended to the street, which seemed to me singularly changed. It looked to me as if I had not been in it before for ever so long a time. Nevertheless, when we came to the Rue de Seine, the idea of my doll suddenly returned to my mind and excited me in an extraordinary way. My head was on fire. I resolved upon a desperate expedient. We

were passing before the window. She was there, behind the glass—with her red checks, and her flowered petticoat, and her long legs.

“Uncle,” I said, with a great effort, “will you buy that doll for me?”

And I waited.

“Buy a doll for a boy—sacrebleu!” cried my uncle, in a voice of thunder. “Do you wish to dishonour yourself? And it is that old Mag there that you want! Well, I must compliment you, my young fellow! If you grow up with such tastes as that, you will never have any pleasure in life; and your comrades will call you a precious ninny. If you asked me for a sword or a gun, my boy, I would buy them for you with the last silver crown of my pension. But to buy a doll for you—by all that’s holy!—to disgrace you! Never in the world! Why, if I were ever to see you playing with a puppet rigged out like that, Monsieur, my sister’s son, I would disown you for my nephew!”

On hearing these words, I felt my heart so wrung that nothing but pride—a diabolical pride—kept me from crying.

My uncle, suddenly calming down, returned to his ideas about the Bourbons; but I, still smarting under the weight of his indignation, felt an unspeakable shame. My resolve was quickly made. I promised myself never to disgrace myself—I firmly and for ever renounced that red-cheeked doll.

I felt that day, for the first time, the austere sweetness of sacrifice.

Captain, though it be true that all your life you swore like a pagan, smoked like a beadle, and drank like a bell-ringer, be your memory nevertheless honoured—not merely

because you were a brave soldier, but also because you revealed to your little nephew in petticoats the sentiment of heroism! Pride and laziness had made you almost insupportable, Uncle Victor!—but a great heart used to beat under those frogs upon your coat. You always used to wear, I now remember, a rose in your button-hole. That rose which you offered so readily to the shop-girls—that large, open-hearted flower, scattering its petals to all the winds, was the symbol of your glorious youth. You despised neither wine nor tobacco; but you despised life. Neither delicacy nor common sense could have been learned from you, Captain; but you taught me, even at an age when my nurse had to wipe my nose, a lesson of honour and self-abrogation that I shall never forget.

You have now been sleeping for many years in the Cemetery of Mont-Parnasse, under a plain slab bearing the epitaph:

CI-GIT
ARISTIDE VICTOR MALDENT,
Capitaine d’Infanterie,
Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur.

But such, Captain, was not the inscription devised by yourself to be placed above those old bones of yours—knocked about so long on fields of battle and in haunts of pleasure. Among your papers was found this proud and bitter epitaph, which, despite your last will none could have ventured to put upon your tomb:

CI-GIT
UN BRIGAND DE LA LOIRE

“Therese, we will get a wreath of immortelles to-morrow, and lay them on the tomb of the Brigand of the Loire.”...

But Therese is not here. And how, indeed, could she be near me, seeing that I am at the rondpoint of the Champs-Elysees? There, at the termination of the avenue, the Arc de Triomphe, which bears under its vaults the names of Uncle Victor's companions-in-arms, opens its giant gate against the sky. The trees of the avenue are unfolding to the sun of spring their first leaves, still all pale and chilly. Beside me the carriages keep rolling by to the Bois de Boulogne. Unconsciously I have wandered into this fashionable avenue on my promenade, and halted, quite stupidly, in front of a booth stocked with gingerbread and decanters of liquorice-water, each topped by a lemon. A miserable little boy, covered with rags, which expose his chapped skin, stares with widely opened eyes at those sumptuous sweets which are not for such as he. With the shamelessness of innocence he betrays his longing. His round, fixed eyes contemplate a certain gingerbread man of lofty stature. It is a general, and it looks a little like Uncle Victor. I take it, I pay for it, and present it to the little pauper, who dares not extend his hand to receive it—for, by reason of precocious experience, he cannot believe in luck; he looks at me, in the same way that certain big dogs do, with the air of one saying, "You are cruel to make fun of me like that!"

"Come, little stupid," I say to him, in that rough tone I am accustomed to use, "take it—take it, and eat it; for you, happier than I was at your age, you can satisfy your tastes without disgracing yourself."...And you, Uncle Victor—you, whose manly figure has been recalled to me by that gingerbread general, come, glorious Shadow, help me to