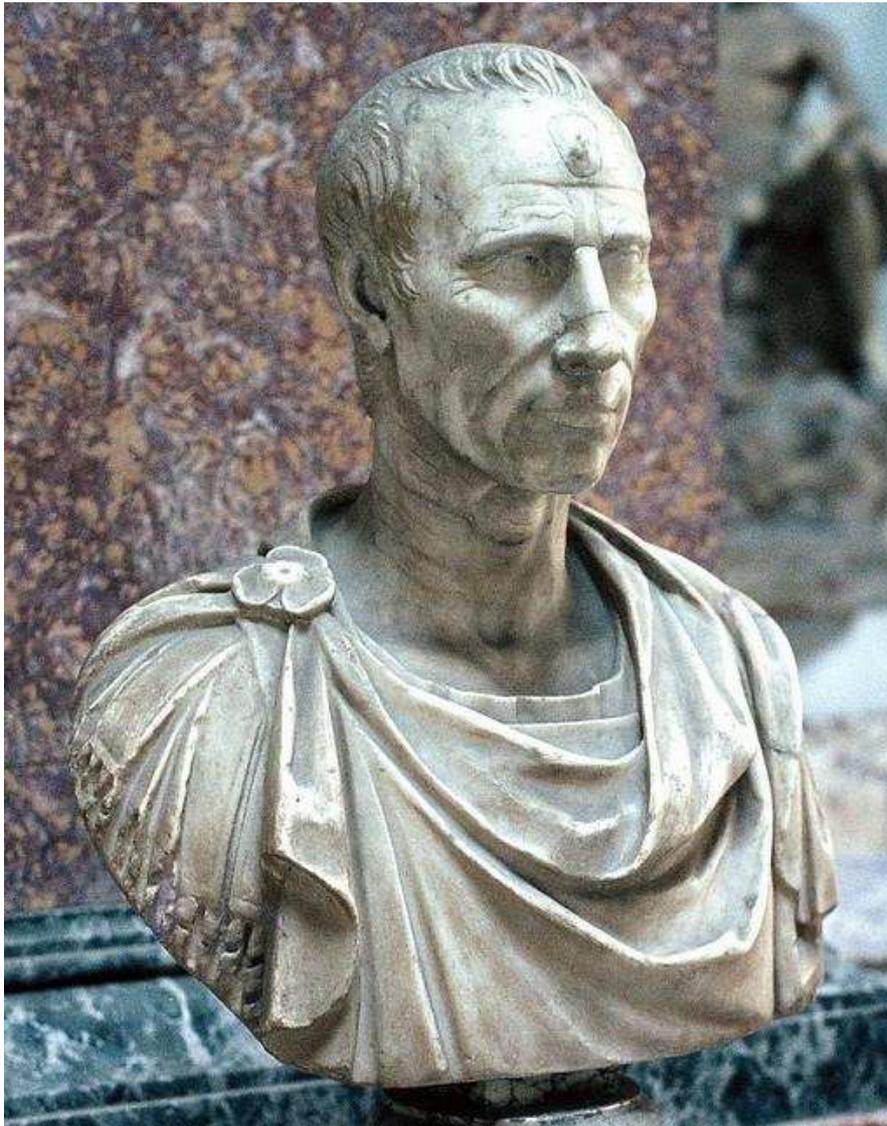


CAESAR OR NOTHING

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PROLOGUE

THE AUTHOR HOLDS FORTH IN REGARD TO THE CHARACTER OF HIS HERO

MORE OR LESS TRANSCENDENTAL DIGRESSIONS

The individual is the only real thing in nature and in life.

Neither the species, the genus, nor the race, actually exists; they are abstractions, terminologies, scientific devices, useful as syntheses but not entirely exact. By means of these devices we can discuss and compare; they constitute a measure for our minds to use, but have no external reality.

Only the individual exists through himself and for himself. I am, I live, is the sole thing a man can affirm.

The categories and divisions arranged for classification are like the series of squares an artist places over a drawing to copy it by. The lines of the squares may cut the lines of the sketch; but they will cut them, not in reality but only in the artist's eye.

In humanity, as in all of nature, the individual is the one thing. Only individuality exists in the realm of life and in the realm of spirit.

Individuality is not to be grouped or classified. Individuality simply cannot fit into a pigeon-hole, and it is all the further from fitting if the pigeon-hole is shaped according to an ethical principle. Ethics is a poor tailor to clothe the body of reality.

The ideas of the good, the logical, the just, the consistent, are too generic to be completely represented in nature.

The individual is not logical, or good, or just; nor is he any other distinct thing; and this through the force of his own fatal actions, through the influence of the deviation in the earth's axis, or for whatsoever other equally amusing cause. Everything individual is always found mixed, full of absurdities of perspective and picturesque contradictions,--contradictions and absurdities that shock us, because we insist on submitting individuals to principles which are not applicable to them.

If instead of wearing a cravat and a bowler hat, we wore feathers and a ring in our nose, all our moral notions would change.

People of today, remote from nature and nasal rings, live in an artificial moral harmony which does not exist except in the imagination of those ridiculous priests of optimism who preach from the columns of the newspapers. This imaginary harmony makes us abhor the contradictions, the incongruities of individuality, at least it forces us not to understand them.

Only when the individual discord ceases, when the attributes of an exceptional being are lost, when the mould is spoiled and becomes vulgarized and takes on a common character, does it obtain the appreciation of the multitude.

This is logical; the dull must sympathize with the dull; the vulgar and usual have to identify themselves with the vulgar and usual.

From a human point of view, perfection in society would be something able to safeguard the general interests and at the same time to understand individuality; it would give the individual the advantages of work in common and also the most absolute liberty; it would multiply the results of his labour and would also permit him some privacy. This would be equitable and satisfactory.

Our society does not know how to do either of these things; it defends certain persons against the masses, because it has injustice and privilege as its working system; it does not understand individuality,

because individuality consists in being original, and the original is always a disturbing and revolutionary element.

A perfect democracy would be one which, disregarding hazards of birth, would standardize as far as possible the means of livelihood, of education, and even the manner of living, and would leave free the intelligence, the will, and the conscience, so that they might take their proper places, some higher than others. Modern democracy, on the contrary, tends to level all mentalities, and to impede the predominance of capacity, shading everything with an atmosphere of vulgarity. At the same time it aids some private interests to take their places higher than other private interests.

A great part of the collective antipathy for individuality proceeds from fear. Especially in our Southern countries strong individualities have usually been unquiet and tumultuous. The superior mob, like the lower ones, does not wish the seeds of Caesars or of Bonapartes to flourish in our territories. These mobs pant for a spiritual levelling; for there is no more distinction between one man and another than a coloured button on the lapel or a title on the calling-card. Such is the aspiration of our truly socialist types; other distinctions, like valour, energy, virtue, are for the democratic steam-roller, veritable impertinences of nature.

Spain, which never had a complete social system and has unfolded her life and her art by spiritual convulsions, according as men of strength and action have come bursting forth, today feels herself ruined in her eruptive life, and longs to compete with other countries in their love for the commonplace and well-regulated and in their abhorrence for individuality.

In Spain, where the individual and only the individual was everything, the collectivist aspirations of other peoples are now accepted as indisputable dogmas. Today our country begins to offer a brilliant future to the man who can cry up general ideas and sentiments, even though these ideas and sentiments are at war with the genius of our race.

It would certainly be a lamentable joke to protest against the democratic-bourgeois tendency of the day: what is is, because it must be and because its determined moment has come; and to rebel against facts is, beyond dispute, childish.

I merely mention these characteristics of the actual epoch; and I point them out to legitimize this prologue I have written, which, for what I know, may after all give more clearness, or may give more obscurity to

my book.... BROTHER AND SISTER

Many years ago I was stationed as doctor in a tiny Basque town, in Cestona. Sometimes, in summer, while going on my rounds among the villages I used to meet on the highway and on the cross-roads passersby of a miserable aspect, persons with liver-complaint who were taking the waters at the neighbouring cure.

These people, with their leather-coloured skin, did not arouse any curiosity or interest in me. The middle-class merchant or clerk from the big towns is repugnant to me, whether well or ill. I would exchange a curt salute with those liverish parties and go my way on my old nag.

One afternoon I was sitting in a wild part of the mountain, among big birch-trees, when a pair of strangers approached the spot where I was. They were not of the jaundiced and disagreeable type of the valetudinarians. He was a lanky young man, smooth-shaven, grave, and melancholy; she, a blond woman, most beautiful.

She was dressed in white and wore a straw hat with large flowers; she had a refined and gracious manner, eyes of blue, a very dark blue, and flame-coloured hair.

I surmised that they were a young married couple; but he seemed too indifferent to be the husband of so pretty a woman. In any event, they were not recently wed.

He bowed to me, and then said to his companion:

"Shall we sit down here?"

"Very well."

They seated themselves on the half-rotten trunk of a tree.

"Are you on a trip?" he asked me, noticing my horse fastened to a branch.

"Yes. I am coming back from a visit."

"Ah! Are you the town doctor?"

"Yes."

"And do you live here, in Cestona?"

"Yes, I live here."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone."

"In an hotel?"

"No; in that house there down the road. Behold my house; that is it."

"It must be hard to live among so many invalids!" he exclaimed.

"Why?" she asked. "This gentleman may not have the same ideas as you."

"I believe I have. To my mind, he is right. It is very hard to live here."

"You can have nobody to talk to. That's evident."

"Absolutely nobody. Just imagine; there is not a Liberal in the town; there are nothing but Carlists and Integrists."

"And what has that to do with living contented?" she asked mockingly.

The woman was enchanting; I looked at her, a bit amazed to find her so merry and so coquettish; and she put several questions to me about my life and my ideas, with a tinge of irony.

I wanted to show that I was not exactly a farmer, and turning the talk to what might be done in a town like that, I threw myself into outlining utopian projects, and defending them with more warmth than it is reasonable to express in a conversation with unknown persons. The woman's mocking smile stirred me up and impelled me to talk.

"It would be worth seeing, what a little town like this would be," I said, indicating the village of Cestona, "with really human life in it, and, above all, without Catholicism. Every tenant might be a master in his own home, throughout his life. Here you have farm-land that produces two crops, you have woods, mountains, and a medicinal spring. The inhabitants of Cestona might have the entire produce of the land, the mountain to supply building-stone and fire-wood, and besides all that, the entrance-fees at the springs."

"And whose duty would it be to distribute the profits in this patriarchal republic? The municipality's?" he asked.

"Of course," said I. "The municipality could go ahead distributing the land, making the roads, cutting out useless middle-men; it could keep clean, inexpensive hotels for the foreigners, and get a good return from them."

"And then you would not admit of inheritance, doctor?"

"Inheritance? Yes, I would admit of it in regard to things produced by one person. I believe one ought to have the right to bequeath a picture, a book, a piece of craftsmanship; but not land, not a mountain."

"Yes; property-right in land is absurd," he murmured. "The one inconvenience that your plan would have," he added, "would be that people from poverty-stricken holes would pour into the perfect towns and upset the equilibrium."

"Then we should have to restrict the right of citizenship."

"But I consider that an injustice. The land should be free to all."

"Yes, that's true."

"And religion? None whatever? Like animals," she said ironically.

"Like animals, and like some illustrious philosophers, dear sister," he replied. "At the turn of a road, among the foliage, we would place a marble statue adorned with flowers. Don't you agree, doctor?"

"It seems to me a very good idea."

"Above all, for me the great thing would be to forget death and sorrow a little," he asserted. "Not so many church-bells should be heard. I believe that we ought even to suppress the maxim about love for one's neighbour. Make it the duty of the state or the municipality to take care of the sick and the crippled, and leave men the illusion of living healthy in a healthy world."

"Ah! What very ugly ideas you have!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, that one seems a bit hard to me," said I.

We were walking down toward the town by a steep and rocky path. It was beginning to grow dusk, the river shone with silvery reflections, and the toads broke the silence of the twilight with the sonorous, flute-like note of their croaking.

On arriving at the highway we said good-bye; they took the stage, which was passing at that moment in the direction of the springs, and I mounted my hack.

IN MY GARDEN

I had learned that the brother and sister were named Caesar and Laura, that she lived in Italy and was married.

Some days later, toward evening, they knocked at my house door. I let them in, showed them to my garden, and conducted them to a deserted summer-house, a few sticks put together, on the bank of the river.

Laura strolled through an orchard, gathered a few apples, and then, with her brother's aid and mine, seated herself on the trunk of a tree that leant over the river, and sat there gazing at it.

While she was taking it in, her brother Caesar started to talk. Without any preliminary explanation, he talked to me about his family, about his life, about his ideas and his political plans. He expressed himself with ease and strength; but he had the uneasy expression of a man who is afraid of something.

"I figure," he said, "that I know what there is to do in Spain. I shall be an instrument. It is for that that I am training myself. I want to create all my ideas, habits, prejudices, with a view to the rôle I am going to play."

"You do not know what Spain is like," said Laura. "Life is very hard here."

"I know that well. There is no social system here, there is nothing established; therefore it is easier to create one for oneself."

"Yes, but some protection is requisite."

"Oh, I will find that."

"Where?"

"I think those Church people we knew in Rome will do for me."

"But you are not a Clerical."

"No." "And do you want to start your career by deceiving people?"

"I cannot choose my means. Politics are like this: doing something with nothing, doing a great deal with a little, erecting a castle on a grain of sand."

"And do you, who have so many moral prejudices, wish to begin in that way?"

"Who told you that accepting every means is not moral?"

"I don't understand how it could be," replied Laura.

"I do," answered her brother. "What is individual morality today? Almost nothing. It almost doesn't exist. Individual morality can come to be collective only by contagion, by enthusiasm. And such things do not happen nowadays; every one has his own morality; but we have not arrived at a scientific moral code. Years ago notable men accepted the moral code of the categorical imperative, in lieu of the moral code based on sin; but the categorical imperative is a stoical morality, a wise man's morality which has not the sentimental value necessary to make it popular."

"I do not understand these things," she replied, displeased.

"The doctor understands me, don't you?" he said.

"Yes, I believe I do."

"For me," Caesar went on, "individual morality consists in adapting one's life to a thought, to a preconceived plan. The man who proposes to be a scientist and puts all his powers into achieving that, is a moral man, even though he steals and is a blackguard in other things."

"Then, for you," I argued, "morality is might, tenacity; immorality is weakness, cowardice."

"Yes, it comes to that. The man capable of feeling himself the instrument of an idea always seems to me moral. Bismarck, for instance, was a moral man."

"It is a forceful point of view," said I.

"Which, as I see, you do not share," he exclaimed.

"As things are today, no. For me the idea of morality is attached to the

idea of pity rather than to the idea of force; but I comprehend that pity is destructive."

"I believe that you and Caesar," Laura burst forth, "by force of wishing to see things clear, see them more vaguely than other people. I can see all this quite simply; it appears to me that we call every person moral who behaves well, and on the contrary, one that does wicked deeds is called immoral and is punished."

"But you prejudge the question," exclaimed Caesar; "you take it as settled beforehand. You say, good and evil exist...."

"And don't they exist?"

"I don't know."

"So that if they gave you the task of judging mankind, you would see no difference between Don Juan Tenorio and Saint Francis of Assisi?"

"Perhaps it was the saint who had the more pleasure, who was the more vicious."

"How atrocious!"

"No, because the pleasure one has is the criterion, not the manner of getting it. As for me, what is called a life of pleasure bores me."

"And judging from the little I know of it, it does me too," said I.

"I see life in general," he continued, "as something dark, gloomy, and unattractive."

"Then you gentlemen do not place the devil in this life, since this life seems unattractive to you. Where do you find him?"

"Nowhere, I think," replied Caesar; "the devil is a stupid invention."

AT TWILIGHT

The twilight was beginning.

"It is chilly here by the river," I said. "Let us go to the house."

We went up by a sloping path between pear-trees, and reached the

vestibule of the house. From afar we heard the sound of the stage-coach bells; a headlight gleamed, and we saw it pass by and afterwards disappear among the trees. "What a mistake to ask more of life than it can give!" suddenly exclaimed Laura. "The sky, the sun, conversation, love, the fields, works of art ... think of looking on all these as a bore, from which one desires to escape through some violent occupation, so as to have the satisfaction of not noticing that one is alive."

"Because noticing that one is alive is disagreeable," replied her brother.

"And why?"

"The idea! Why? Because life is not an idyll, not by a good deal. We live by killing, destroying everything there is around us; we get to be something by ridding ourselves of our enemies. We are in a constant struggle."

"I don't see this struggle. Formerly, when men were savages, perhaps.... But now!"

"Now, just the same. The one difference is that the material struggle, with the muscles, has been changed to an intellectual one, a social one. Nowadays, it is evident, a man does not have to hunt the bull or the wild boar in the prairies; he finds their dead bodies at the butcher's. Neither does the modern citizen have to knock his rival down to overcome him; nowadays the enemy is conquered at the desk, in the factory, in the editor's office, in the laboratory.... The struggle is just as infuriated and violent as it was in the depths of the forests, only it is colder and more courteous in form."

"I don't believe it. You won't convince me."

Laura plucked a branch of white blossoms from a wild-rose bush and put it into her bosom.

"Well, Caesar, let us go to the hotel," she said; "it is very late."

"I will escort you a little way," I suggested.

We went out on the highway. The night was palpitating as it filled itself with stars. Laura hummed Neapolitan songs. We walked along a little while without speaking, gazing at Jupiter, who shone resplendent.

"And you have the conviction that you will succeed?" I suddenly asked Caesar. "Yes. More than anything else I have the vocation for being an

instrument. If I win success, I shall be a great figure; if I go to pieces, those who know me will say: 'He was an upstart; he was a thief.' Or perhaps they may say that I was a poor sort, because men who have the ambition to be social forces never get an unprejudiced epitaph."

"And what will you do in a practical way, if you succeed?"

"Something like what you dream of. And how shall I do it? By destroying magnates, by putting an end to the power of the rich, subduing the middle-class... I would hand over the land to the peasants, I would send delegates to the provinces to make hygiene obligatory, and my dictatorship should tear the nets of religion, of property, of theocracy...."

"What nonsense!" murmured Laura.

"My sister doesn't believe in me," Caesar exclaimed, smiling.

"Oh, yes, *_bambino_*," she replied. "Yes, I believe in you. Only, why must you have such silly ambitions?"

We were getting near the bath establishment, and when we came in front of it we said good-bye.

Laura was starting the next day to Biarritz, and Caesar for Madrid.

We pressed one another's hands affectionately.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, doctor!"

"Good luck!"

They went along toward the establishment, and I returned home by the highway, envying the energy of that man, who was getting himself ready to fight for an ideal. And I thought with melancholy of the monotonous life of the little town.

I

THE PARIS-VENTIMIGLIA EXPRESS

MARSEILLES!

The fast Paris-Ventimiglia train, one of the Grand European Expresses, had stopped a moment at Marseilles.

It was about seven in the morning of a winter day. The huge cars, with their bevelled-glass windows, dripped water from all parts; the locomotive puffed, resting from its run, and the bellows between car and car, like great accordions, had black drops slipping down their corrugations.

The rails shone; they crossed over one another, and fled into the distance until lost to sight. The train windows were shut; silence reigned in the station; from time to time there resounded a violent hammering on the axles; a curtain here or there was raised, and behind the misted glass the dishevelled head of a woman appeared.

In the dining-car a waiter went about preparing the tables for breakfast; two or three gentlemen, wrapped in their ulsters, their caps pulled down, were seated at the tables by the windows and kept yawning.

At one of the little tables at the end Laura and Caesar had installed themselves.

"Did you sleep, sister?" he asked.

"Yes. I did. Splendidly. And you?"

"I didn't. I can't sleep on the train."

"That's evident."

"I look so bad, eh?" and Caesar examined himself in one of the car mirrors. "I certainly am absurdly pale."

"The weather is just as horrible as ever," she added.

They had left a Paris frozen and dark. During the whole night the cold had been most intense. One hadn't been able to put a head outside the car; snow and a furious wind had had their own violent way.

"When we reach the Mediterranean, it will change," Laura had said.

It had not; they were on the edge of the sea and the cold continued intense and the weather dark.

HOW BEAUTIFUL!

The train began its journey again; the houses of Marseilles could be seen through the morning haze; the Mediterranean appeared, greenish, whitish, and fields covered with hoar-frost.

"What horrid weather!" exclaimed Laura, shuddering. "I dislike the cold more and more all the time."

The dining-car waiter came and filled their cups with *_café-au-lait_*. Laura drew off her gloves and took one of the hot cups between her white hands.

"Oh, this is comforting!" she said.

Caesar began to sip the boiling liquid.

"I don't see how you can stand it. It's scalding."

"That's the way to get warm," replied Caesar, undisturbed.

Laura began to take her coffee by spoonfuls. Just then there come into the dining-car a tall blond gentleman and a young, charming lady, each smarter than the other. The man bowed to Laura with much formality.

"Who is he?" asked Caesar.

"He is the second son of Lord Marchmont, and he has married a Yankee millionairess."

"You knew him in Rome?"

"No, I knew him at Florence last year, and he paid me attention rather boldly."

"He is looking at you a lot now."

"He is capable of thinking that I am off on an adventure with you."

"Possibly. She is a magnificent woman."

"Right you are. She is a marvel. She is almost too pretty. She shows no character; she has no air of breeding." "There doesn't seem to be any

great congeniality between them."

"No, they don't get on very well. But come along, pay, let's go. So many people are coming in here."

Laura got up, and after her, Caesar. As she passed, one heard the swish of her silk petticoats. The travellers looked at her with admiration.

"I believe these people envy me," said Caesar philosophically.

"It's quite possible, *_bambino_*," she responded, laughing.

They entered their compartment. The train was running at full speed along the coast. The greenish sea and the cloudy sky stretched away and blotted out the horizon. At Toulon the bad weather continued; a bit beyond, the sun came out, pallid in the fog, circled with a yellowish halo; then the fog dispersed rapidly and a brilliant sun made the snow-covered country shine.

"Oh! How beautiful!" exclaimed Laura.

The dense pure snow had packed down. The grape-vines broke up this white background symmetrically, like flocks of crows settled on the earth; the pines held high their rounds of foliage, and the cypresses, stern and slim, stood out very black against all the whiteness.

On passing Hyères, as the train turned away from the shore, running inland, grim snowy mountains began for some while to be visible, and the sun vanished among the clouds; but when the train came out once more toward the sea, near San Rafael, suddenly,--as if a theatrical effect had been arranged,--the Mediterranean appeared, blue, flooded with sunshine, full of lights and reflections. The sky stretched radiant above the sea, without a cloud, without a shred of vapour.

"How marvellous! How beautiful!" Laura again exclaimed, contemplating the landscape with emotion. "These blessed countries where the sun is!"

"They have no other drawback, than that the men who inhabit them are a trifle vague," said Caesar.

"Bah!"

The air had grown milder; on the surface of the sea patterns of silver foam, formed by the beating of the waves, widened themselves out; the sun's reflection on the restless waters made shining spots and rays, flaming swords that dazzled the eye.

The train seemed to puff joyfully at submerging itself in this bland and voluptuous atmosphere; the palm-trees of Cannes came surging up like a promise of felicity, and the Côte d'Azur began to show its luminous and splendid beauty.

Caesar, tired of so much light, took a book from his pocket: *The Speculator's Manual* of Proudhon, and set to reading it attentively and to marking the passages that struck him as interesting.

THE ENGLISHMAN AND HIS WIFE

Laura, when she was not watching the landscape, was looking at those who came and went in the corridor.

"The Englishman is lying in wait," Laura observed.

"What Englishman?" asked Caesar.

"The son of the lord."

"Ah, yes."

Caesar kept on reading, and Laura continued to watch the landscape which hurried by outside the window. After a while she exclaimed:

"O Lord, what hideous things!"

"What things?"

"Those war-ships."

Caesar looked where his sister pointed. In a roadstead brilliant with sunlight he saw two men-of-war, black and full of cannons.

"That's the way one ought to be to face life, armed to the teeth," exclaimed Caesar.

"Why?" asked Laura.

"Because life is hard, and you have to be as hard as it is in order to win."

"You don't consider yourself hard enough?"

"No."

"Well, I think you are. You are like those rough, pointed rocks on the shore, and I am like the sea.... They throw me off and I come back."

"That is because, perhaps, when you get down to it, nothing makes any real difference to you."

"Oh, *bambino!*" exclaimed Laura, taking Caesar's hand with affectionate irony. "You always have to be so cruel to your mamma."

Caesar burst into laughter, and kept Laura's hand between both of his.

"The Englishman feels sad looking at us," he said. "He doesn't dream that I am your brother."

"Open the door, I will tell him to come in."

Caesar did so, and Laura invited the young Englishman to enter.

"My brother Caesar," she said, introducing them, "Archibaldo Marchmont."

They both bowed, and Marchmont said to Laura in French:

"You are very cruel, Marchesa."

"Why?"

"Because you run away from us people who admire and like you. My wife asked me to present her to you. Would you like her to come?"

"Oh, no! She mustn't disturb herself. I will go to her."

"Assuredly not. One moment."

Marchmont went out into the corridor and presented his wife to Laura and to Caesar.

An animated conversation sprang up among them, interrupted by Laura's exclamations of delight on passing one or another of the wonderful views along the Riviera.

"You are a Latin, Marchesa, eh?" said Marchmont.

"Altogether. This is our sea. Every time I look at it, it enchants me."

"You are going to stop at Nice?"

"No, my brother and I are on our way to Rome."

"But Nice will be magnificent...."

"Yes, that's true; but we have made up our minds to go to Rome to visit our uncle, the Cardinal."

The Englishman made a gesture of annoyance, which did not go unperceived by his wife or by Laura. On arriving at Nice, the Englishman and his Yankee wife got out, after promising that they would be in Rome before many days.

Laura and Caesar remained alone and chatted about their fellow-travellers. According to Laura, the couple did not get along well and they were going to separate.

IN ITALY

In the middle of the afternoon they arrived at Ventimiglia and changed trains.

"Are we in Italy now?" said Caesar.

"Yes."

"It seems untidier than France."

"Yes; but more charming."

The train kept stopping at almost all the little towns along the route. In a third-class car somebody was playing an accordeon. It was Sunday. In the towns they saw people in their holiday clothes, gathered in the square and before the cafés and the eating-places. On the roads little two-wheeled carriages passed quickly by.

It began to grow dark; in the hamlets situated on the seashore fishermen were mending their nets. Others were hauling up the boats to run them on to the beach, and children were playing about bare-footed and half-naked.

The landscape looked like a theatre-scene, the setting for a romantic play. They were getting near Genoa, running along by beaches. It was

growing dark; the sea came right up to the track; in the starry, tranquil night only the monotonous music of the waves was to be heard.

Laura was humming Neapolitan songs. Caesar looked at the landscape indifferently.

On reaching Genoa they had supper and changed trains.

"I am going to lie down awhile," said Laura.

"So am I."

Laura took off her hat, her white cape, and her jacket.

"Good-night, _bambino_," she said.

"Good-night. Shall I turn down the light?"

"As you like." Caesar turned down the light and stretched himself out. He couldn't sleep in trains and he got deep into a combination of fantastical plans and ideas. When they stopped at stations and the noise of the moving train was gone from the silence of the night, Caesar could hear Laura's gentle breathing.

A little before dawn, Caesar, tired of not sleeping, got up and started to take a walk in the corridor. It was raining; on the horizon, below the black, starless sky, a vague clarity began to appear. Caesar took out his Proudhon book and immersed himself in it.

When it began to be day they were already getting near Rome. The train was running through a flat, treeless plain of swampy aspect, covered with green grass; from time to time there was a poor hut, a hay-stack, on the uninhabited, monotonous stretch.

The grey sky kept on resolving itself into a rain which, at the impulse of gusts of wind, traced oblique lines in the air.

Laura had waked and was in the dressing-room. A little later she came out, fresh and hearty, without the least sign of fatigue.

They began to see the yellowish walls of Rome, and certain big edifices blackened by the wet. A moment more and the train stopped.

"It's not worth the trouble to take a cab," said Laura. "The hotel is here, just a step."

They gave a porter orders to attend to the luggage. Laura took her brother's arm, they went out on the Piazza Esedra, and entered the hotel.

II

AN EXTRAORDINARY FAMILY

JUAN GUILLÉN

The Valencian family of Guillén was really fecund in men of energy and cleverness. It is true that with the exception of Father Francisco Guillén and of his nephew Juan Fort, none of them became known; but in spite of the fact that the members of this family lived in obscurity in a humble sphere, they performed deeds of unheard-of valour, daring, and impertinence.

Juan Guillén, the first of the Guilléns whose memory is preserved, was a highwayman of Villanueva.

What motives for vengeance Juan Guillén had against the Peyró family is not known. The old folk of the period, two or three who are still alive, always say that these Peyrós devoted themselves to usury; and there is some talk of a certain sister of Juan Guillén's, ruined by one of the Peyrós, whom they made disappear from the town.

Whatever the motive was, the fact is that one day Peyró, the father, and his eldest son were found, full of bullet holes, in an orange orchard.

Juan Guillén was arrested; in court he affirmed his innocence with great tenacity; but after he had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, he said that there were still two Peyrós left to kill, whom he would put off until he got out of prison.

As it turned out, Guillén was set free after six years and returned to Villanueva. The two threatened Peyrós did their utmost to keep away from the revengeful Guillén; but it did not work. Juan Guillén killed one of the Peyrós while he was watering the flowers in the balcony of his house. The other took refuge in a remote farm-house rented to peasants in his confidence. This man, who was very crafty, always took great precautions about all the people that came there, and never forgot to close the doors and windows at night.

One morning he was found in bed with his head shot to pieces by a blunderbuss. No doubt death overtook him while he slept. It was said that Guillén had got in down the chimney, and going close to where Peyró lay asleep, had fired the blunderbuss right against him. Then he had gone tranquilly out by the door, without anybody's daring to stop him.

These two last deaths did not cause Guillén any trouble with the law. All the witnesses in the suit testified in his favour. When the trial was over, Guillén arranged to stay and live tranquilly in Villanueva.

There was a highwayman in the town, who levied small sums on the farms for cleaning young sneak-thieves out of the country, and for escorting rich persons when they travelled; Guillén requested him to give up his job and he did not offer the least resistance.

Juan Guillén married a peasant-girl, bought a truck-garden, and a wine-cave, had several children, and was one of the most respectable highwaymen in the district. He was the terror of the country, particularly to evil-doers; for him there were neither scruples nor perils; might was always right; his only limitation his blunderbuss.

To live in a continual state of war seemed to him a natural condition. Half in earnest, half in jest, it is told of the truck-gardeners of Valencia that the father always says to his wife or his daughter, when he is going to have an interview with somebody:

"Bring me my pistol, sweetheart, I am going out to talk to a man."

To Guillén it seemed indispensable that he should carry his blunderbuss when discussing an affair with anybody.

Juan's energy did not diminish with age; he kept on being as barbarous and brutal as when he was young. His barbarity did not prevent his being very fine and polite, because he was under the conviction that his life was a well-nigh exemplary life.

TENDER-HEARTED VICENTA

Of the highwayman's children, the eldest son studied for the priesthood, and the youngest daughter, Vicenta, got ruined.

"I should prefer to have her a man and in the penitentiary," Guillén used to say. Which was not at all strange, because for the highwayman

the penitentiary was like a school of determination and manhood.

Vicenta, the highwayman's youngest daughter, was a blond girl, noisy and restless, of a violent character that was proof against advice, reprimands, and beatings.

Vicenta had various beaux, all gentlemen, in spite of her father's opposition and his cane. None of these young gentlemen beaux dared to carry the girl off to Valencia, which was what she wanted, for fear of the highwayman and his blunderbuss.

So she made arrangements with an old woman, a semi-Celestina who turned up in town, and in her company ran off to Valencia.

The father roared like a wounded lion and swore by all the saints in heaven to take a terrible revenge; he went to the capital several times with the intention of dragging his daughter back home bodily; but he could not find her.

Vicenta Guillén, who was known in Valencia,--for what reason is not evident,--as the Tender-hearted, had her ups and her downs, rich lovers and poor, and was distinguished by her boldness and her spirit of adventure. It was said of her that she had taken part, dressed as a man, in several popular disturbances.

THE MONK

While the Tender-hearted was leading a life of scandal, her brother, Francisco, was studying in the College of the Escolapians in the village, and afterwards entered the Seminary at Tortosa. He did not distinguish himself there by his intelligence or by his good conduct; but by force of time and recommendations he succeeded in getting ordained and saying mass at Villanueva. His father's restless blood boiled in him: he was a rowdy, brutal and quarrelsome. As life in the village was uncomfortable for him, he went to America, ready to change his profession. He could not have found wide prospects among the laity, for after a few months he took the vows, and ten or twelve years later he returned to Spain, the Superior of his Order, and went to a monastery in the province of Castellón.

Francisco Guillén had changed his name, and was now called Fray José de Calasanz de Villanueva.

If Fray José de Calasanz, on his return from America, had not learned

much theology, at any rate he had learned more about life than in the early years of his priesthood, and had turned into a cunning hypocrite. His passions were of extraordinary violence, and despite his ability in concealing them, he could not altogether hide his underlying barbarity.

His name figured several times, in a scandalous manner, along with the name of a certain farmer's wife, who was a bit weak in the head.

These pieces of gossip, though they gave him a bad reputation with the town people, did not prevent him from advancing in his career, for pretty soon, and no one quite knew for what reason, he was found to have acquired importance and to wield influence of decisive weight, not only in the Order, but among the whole clerical element of the city.

At the same time that Father José de Calasanz was becoming so successful, the Tender-hearted took to the path of virtue and got married at Valencia to the proprietor of a little grocery shop in a lane near the market, his name being Antonio Fort.

The Tender-hearted, once married, wrote to her brother to get him to make her father forgive her. The monk persuaded the old bandit, and the Tender-hearted went to Villanueva to receive the paternal pardon. The Tender-hearted, being married, lived an apparently retired and devout life. Her husband was a poor devil of not much weight. The Tender-hearted gave a great impetus to the shop. After she began to run the establishment there was always a great influx of priests and monks recommended by her brother.

Some of them used to gather in the back-shop toward dusk for a *_tertulia_*, and it was said that one of the members of the *_tertulia_*--a youthful little priest from Murcia--had an understanding with the landlady.

The priests' *_tertulia_* at Fort's shop was a well-spring of riches and prosperity for the business. The little nuns of such-and-such a convent advised the ladies they knew to buy chocolate and sweets at Fort's; the friars of another convent gave them an order for sugar or cinnamon, and cash poured into the drawer.

The Tender-hearted had three children: Juan, Jerónimo, and Isabel.

When the two elder were of an age to begin their education, Father José de Calasanz made a visit in Valencia.

Father José had a powerful influence among the clergy, and he offered his support to his sister in case she found it well to dedicate one of

her sons to the church.

The Tender-hearted, who beginning to have great ambitions, considered that of her two sons, Juan, the elder, was the more serious and diligent, and she did not vacillate about sacrificing him to her ambitions.

JUAN FORT

Juan Fort was a boy of energy, very decided, although not very intelligent. His uncle, Fray José de Calasanz, when he knew him, grew fond of him. Fray José enjoyed great esteem in the Order that is called,--nobody knows whether it is in irony,--the Seraphic Order. Fray José consulted several competent persons and they advised him to send his nephew to study outside of Spain. It is known that among her ministers the Church prefers men without a country. Catholicism means universality, and the real Catholic has no other country than his religion, no other capital but Rome.

Juan Fort, snatched from among his comrades and from the bosom of his family, went weeping in his uncle's company to France, and entered the convent of Mont-de-Marson to pursue his studies.

In this convent he made his monastic novitiate, and like all the individuals of that Order, changed his name, being called from then on, Father Vicente de Valencia.

From Mont-de-Marson he passed to Toulouse, and when two years were up, he made a short stay in the monastery where his uncle was prior, and went to Rome.

When the Tender-hearted went to embrace her son, on his passage through Valencia, she could see that his affection for her had vanished. As happens with nearly all the young men that enter a religious Order, Juan Fort felt a deep antipathy for his family and for his native town.

The young Father Vicente de Valencia entered the convent of Araceli at Rome, and continued his studies there.

This was at the beginning of Leo XIII's pontificate. At that epoch certain naïve elements in the Eternal City tried to initiate anti-Jesuit politics inside the Church. Liberals and Ultramontanists struggled in the darkness, in the periodicals, and in the universities.

It was a phenomenon of this struggle,--which seems paradoxical,--that the partisans of tradition were the most liberal, and the partisans of Modernism the Ultramontanists. The lesser clergy and certain Cardinals felt vaguely liberal, and were searching for that something Christian, which, as people say, still remains in Catholicism. On the other hand, the Congregations, and above all the Jesuits, gave the note of radical Ultramontanism.

The sons of Loyola had solved the culinary problem of making a meat-stew without meat; the Jesuits were making their Company the most anti-Christian of the Societies in the silent partnership.

In Rome the prime defender of Ultramontanism had been the Abbé Perrone, an eloquent professor, whom the pressure of the traditional theologians obliged to read, before giving a lecture, a chapter of Saint Thomas on the point in question. Perrone, after offering, with gnashing of teeth, this tribute to tradition, used to say proudly: "And now, let us forget these old saws and get along."

Father Vicente de Valencia enrolled himself among the supporters of the Perronean Ultramontanism, and became, as was natural, considering his character, a furious authoritarian. This sombre man, whose vocation was repugnant to him, who had not the least religious feeling, who could perhaps have been a good soldier, took a long time to make himself perfectly at home in monastic life, struggled against the chains that chafed him, rebelled inwardly, and at last, not only did not succeed in breaking his fetters, but even considered them his one happiness.

Little by little he dominated his rebelliousness, and he made himself a great worker and a tireless intriguer.

The fruits of his will were great, greater than those of his intellect.

Father Vicente wrote a theological treatise in Latin, rather uncouth, so the intellectual said, and which had the sole distinction of representing the most rabid of reactionary tendencies.

The Theological Commentaries of Father Vicente de Valencia did not attract the attention of the men who follow the sport of occupying themselves with such things, whether or no; the presses did not groan printing criticisms of the book; but the Society of Jesus took note of the author and assisted Fort with all its power.

A fanatic and a man of mediocre intelligence, that monk might perhaps be a considerable force in the hands of the Society.

A short while after the publication of his *Commentaries*, Father Vicente accompanied the general of his Order on a canonical visit to the monasteries in Spain, France, and Italy; later he was appointed successively Visitor General for Spain, Consultor of the monastic province of Valencia, Definer of the Order, and a voting councillor in the government of the Order.

The news of these honours reached the Fort family in vague form; the haughty monk gave no account of his successes. He considered himself to be without a country and without a family.

THE CARDINAL'S NEPHEW AND NIECE

The Tender-hearted died without having the consolation of seeing her son again; Jerónimo Fort, the youngest child, became head of the shop, Isabel married a soldier, Carlos Moncada, with whom she went to live in Madrid.

Isabel Fort lived there a long time without remembering her monk brother, until she learned, to her great surprise, that they had made him a Cardinal.

Father Vicente left off calling himself that and changed into Cardinal Fort. The darkness that surrounded him turned to light, and his figure stood out strongly.

"Cardinale Forte," they called him in Rome. He was known to be one of the persons that guided the Vatican camarilla, and one of those who impelled Leo XIII to rectify the slightly liberal policy of the first years of his pontificate.

Cardinal Fort filled high posts. He was a Consultor in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, afterwards in that of Rites and in that of the Holy Office, and on special occasions was confessor to Leo XIII.

Certainly having a Cardinal in the family is something that makes a showing; and Isabel, as soon as she knew it, wrote by the advice of the family, to her brother, so as to renew relations with him.

The Cardinal replied, expressing interest in her husband and her children. Isabel sent him their pictures, and phrases of affection were cordially interchanged.

After that they kept on writing to each other, and in one letter the

Cardinal invited Isabel to come to Rome. She hesitated; but her husband convinced her that she ought to accept the invitation. They all of them went, and the Cardinal received them very affectionately.

Juan Fort was living at that time in a monastery, like the other monks. He enjoyed an enormous influence in Rome and in Spain. Isabel wanted her husband promoted, and the Cardinal obtained that in a moment.

Then Fort talked to his sister of the propriety of dedicating Caesar to the Church. He would enter the College of Nobles, then he would pass to the Nunciature, and in a short while he would be a potentate.

Doña Isabel told this to her husband; but the idea didn't please him. They talked among themselves, they discussed it, and the small boy, then twelve years old, settled the question himself, saying that he would kill himself rather than be a priest or a monk, because he was a Republican.

The Cardinal was not enthusiastic over this rebellious youngster who dared to speak out what he, in his childhood, would not have been bold enough to insinuate; but if Caesar did not appeal to him, on the other hand he was very much taken with Laura's beauty and charm.

The Moncada family returned to Spain after spending some months in Rome. Two years later Doña Isabel's husband died, and she, recalling the offers of her brother, the Cardinal, left Caesar in an Escolapian college in Madrid, and went to Rome, taking Laura with her.

The Cardinal, in the meanwhile, had changed his position and his domicile; he was now living in the Palazzo Altemps in the Via di S. Apellinare, and leading a more sumptuous life.

They reproached him in Rome for his exclusiveness and at the same time for his tendency to ostentation. They said that if he was silent about himself, it was not through modesty, but because that is the best method to arrive at being a candidate for the tiara.

They added that he was very fond of showing himself in his red robes, and in fine carriages, and this ostentatious taste was explained among the Italians by saying: "It's simple enough; he is Spanish."

Publicly it was said that he was a great theologian, but privately he was considered a strong man, although of mediocre intelligence.

"A Fort is always strong," they said of him, making a pun on his name. "He is one of the Spanish Eminences who rule the Pope," a great English

periodical stated, referring to him.

On receiving his sister and his niece, the Cardinal put all his influence with the Black Party in play so that they should be accepted by the aristocratic society of Rome. He achieved that without much difficulty. Laura and her mother were naturally distinguished and tactful, and they succeeded in forming a circle.

The Cardinal felt proud of his family; and accompanying the two women gave him occasion for visiting many people.

Roman slander calumniated Fort, assuming him to be having a love affair with his niece. Juan Fort showed an affection for Laura which seemed unheard of by those that knew him.

The Cardinal was a man of exuberant pride, and he knew how to control himself. He felt a great fondness for Laura; but if there was anything more in this fondness than tranquil fatherly affection, if there was any passion, only he knew it; the fire lurked very deep in his overshadowed soul.

Laura made, socially speaking, a good marriage. She married the Marquis of Vaccarone, a babbling Neapolitan, insubstantial and light. In a short while, seeing that they were not congenial, she arranged for an amicable separation and the two lived independent.

III

CAESAR MONCADA

AT THE ESCOLAPIANS

Caesar studied in Madrid in an Escolapian college in the Calle de Hortaleza, where he was an intern all the time he was taking his bachelor's degree.

His mother had gone to live in Valencia, after marrying Laura off, and Caesar passed his vacations with her at a country-place in a neighbouring village.

Several times a year Caesar received letters and photographs from his sister, and one winter Laura came to Valencia. She retained a great

fondness for Caesar; he was fond of her too, although he did not show it, because his character was little inclined to affectionate expansion.

At college Caesar showed himself to be a somewhat strange and absurd youth. As he was slight and of a sickly appearance, the teachers treated him with a certain consideration.

One day a teacher noticed that Caesar creaked when he moved, as if his clothes were starched.

"What are you wearing?" he asked him.

"Nothing."

"Nothing, indeed! Unbutton your jacket."

Caesar turned very pale and did not unbutton it; but the master, seizing him by a lapel, unbuttoned his jacket and his waistcoat, and found that the student was covered with papers.

"What are these papers? For what purpose are you keeping them here?"

"He does it," one of his fellow students replied, laughing, "because he is afraid of catching cold and becoming consumptive." They all made comments on the boy's eccentricity, and a few days later, to show that he was not a coward, he tried to go out on the balcony on a cold winter night, with his chest bare.

Among his fellow-students Caesar had an intimate friend, Ignacio Alzugaray, to whom he confided and explained his prejudices and doubts. Alzugaray was not a boarder, but a day-scholar.

Ignacio brought anti-clerical periodicals to school, which Caesar read with enthusiasm. His sojourn in a religious college was producing a frantic hatred for priests in young Moncada.

Caesar was remarkable for the rapidity of his decisions and the lack of vacillation in his opinions. He felt no timidity about either affirming or denying.

His convictions were absolute; when he believed in the exact truth of a thing, he did not vacillate, he did not go back and discuss it; but if his belief faltered, then he changed his opinion radically and went ahead stating the contrary of his previous statements, without recollecting his abandoned ideas.

His other fellow-students did not care about discussions with a lad who appeared to have a monopoly of the truth.

"Professor So-and-So is a beast; What-you-call-him is a talented chap; that fellow is a thick-witted chap. This kid is all right; that one is not."

In this rail-splitting manner did young Moncada announce his decisions, as if he held the secret explanation of all things tight between his fingers.

Alzugaray seldom shared his friend's opinions; but in spite of this divergence they understood each other very well.

Alzugaray came of a modest family; his mother, the widow of a government clerk, lived on her pension and on the income from some property they owned in the North.

Ignacio Alzugaray was very fond of his mother and his sister, and was always talking about them. Caesar alone would listen without being impatient to the meticulous narratives Ignacio told about the things that happened at home.

Alzugaray was of a very Catholic and very Carlist family; but like Caesar, he was beginning to protest against such ideas and to show himself Liberal, Republican, and even Anarchistic. Ignacio Alzugaray was a nephew of Carlos Yarza, the Spanish author, who lived in Paris, and who had taken part in the Commune and in the Insurrection of Cartagena.

Caesar, on hearing Alzugaray recount the doings of his uncle Carlos Yarza various times, said to his fellow-student:

"When I get out of this college, the first thing I am going to do is to go to Paris to talk with your uncle."

"What for?"

"I have to talk to him."

As a matter of fact, once his course was finished, Caesar left the college, took a third-class ticket, went to Paris, and from there wrote to his mother informing her what he had done. Carlos Yarza, Alzugaray's uncle, received him very affectionately. He took him to dine and explained a good many things. Caesar asked the old man no end of questions and listened to him with real avidity.

Carlos Yarza was at that time an employee in a bank. At this epoch his forte was for questions of speculation. He had put his mind and his will to the study of these matters and had the glimmering of a system in things where everybody else saw only contingencies without any possible law.

Caesar accompanied Yarza to the Bourse and was amazed and stirred at seeing the enormous activity there.

Yarza cleared away the innumerable doubts that occurred to the boy.

In the short time Caesar spent in Paris he came to a most important conclusion, which was that in this life one had to fight terribly to get anywhere.

One day, on awakening in the shabby little room where he lodged, he found that the arms of a very smart woman were around his neck. It was Laura, very contented and joyful to surprise her madcap brother.

"Mamma is alarmed," Laura told him. "What are you doing here all this time? Are you in love?" "I? Bah!"

"Then what have you been doing?"

"I've been going to the Bourse."

SOUNDING-LINES IN LIFE

Laura burst out laughing, and she accompanied her brother back to Valencia. Caesar's mother wished the lad to take his law course there, but Caesar decided to do it in Madrid.

"A provincial capital is an insupportable place," he said.

Caesar went to Madrid and rented a study and a bed-room, cheap and unrestricted.

He boarded in one house and lodged at another. Thus he felt more free.

Caesar believed that it was not worth the trouble to study law seriously; and he imagined moreover that to study so many routine conceptions, which may be false, such as the conception of the soul, of equity, of responsibility, etc., would bring him to a shyster lawyer's vulgar and affected idea of life. To counteract this tendency he devoted

himself to studying zoology at the University, and the next year he took a course in physiology at San Carlos.

At the same time he did not neglect the stock exchange; his great pride was to acquaint himself thoroughly with the details of the speculations made and to talk in the crowds.

As a student he was mediocre. He learned the secret of passing examinations well with the minimum of effort, and practised it. He found that by knowing only a couple of things under each heading of the program, it was enough for him to answer and to pass well. And so, from the beginning of each course, he marked in the text the two or three lines of every page which seemed to him to comprise the essential, and having learned those, considered his knowledge sufficient.

Caesar had a deep contempt for the University and for his fellow-students; all their rows and manifestations seemed to him repulsively flat and stupid.

Alzugaray was studying law too, and had obtained a clerkship in a Ministry. Alzugaray got drunk on music. His great enthusiasm was for playing the 'cello. Caesar used to call on him at his office and at home.

The clerks at the Ministry seemed to Caesar to form part of an inferior human race.

At Alzugaray's house, Caesar felt at home. Ignacio's mother, a lady with white hair, was always making stockings, and after dinner she recited the rosary with the maid; Alzugaray's sister, Celedonia, a tall ungainly lass, was often ill.

All the family thought a great deal of Caesar; his advice was followed at that house, and one of the operations on 'change that he recommended making with some Foreign bonds that Ignacio's mother was holding at the time of the Cuban War, gave everybody in the house an extraordinary idea of young Moncada's financial talents.

Caesar kept his balance among his separate activities; one set of studies complemented others. This diversity of points of view kept him from taking the false and one-sided position that those who preoccupy themselves with one branch of knowledge exclusively get into.

The one-sided position is most useful to a specialist, to a man who expects to remain satisfied in the place where chance has put him; but it is useless for one who proposes to enter life with his blood afire.

As almost always occurs, the projecting of ideas of distinct derivation and of different orders into the same plane, carried Caesar into absolute scepticism, scepticism about things, and especially scepticism about the instrument of knowledge.

His negation had no reference,--far from it,--to women, to love, or to friends, things where the pedantic and ostentatious scepticism of literary men of the Larra type usually finds its fodder; his nihilism was much more the confusion and discomposure of one that explores a region well or badly, and finds no landmarks there, no paths, and returns with a belief that even the compass is not exact in what it shows.

"Nothing absolute exists," Caesar told himself, "neither science nor mathematics nor even the truth, can be an absolute thing."

Arriving at this result surprised Caesar a good deal. On finding that he was not successful in lighting on a philosophical system which would be a guide to him and which could be reasoned out like a theorem, he sought within the purely subjective for something that might satisfy him and serve as a standard.

A PHILOSOPHY

Toward the end of their course Caesar presented himself one day in his friend Alzugaray's office.

"I think," he said, "that I am getting my philosophy into shape."

"My dear man!"

"Yes. I have tacked some new contours on to my Darwinian pragmatism."

Alzugaray, in whom every treasure-trove of his friend's always produced great surprise, stood staring naïvely at him.

"Yes, I am building up my system," Caesar went on, "a system within relative truth. It is clear."

"Let's hear what it is."

"In regard to us," said Caesar, as if he were speaking of something that had happened in the street a few minutes before, "our uncertain

instrument of knowledge makes two apparent states of nature seem real to us; one, the static, in which things are perceived by us as motionless; the other, the dynamic, wherein these same things are found in motion. It is clear that in reality everything is in motion; but within the relative truth of our ideas we are able to believe that there are some things in repose and others in action. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. That is, I think so," replied Alzugaray, who was beginning to wonder if the whole earth was trembling under his feet.

"Good!" Caesar continued. "I am going to pass from nature to life: I am going to assume that life has a purpose. Where can this purpose be found? We don't know. But what can be the machinery of this purpose? Only movement, action. That is to say, struggle. This assertion once made, I am going to take a hand in carrying it out. The things we call spiritual also are dynamic. Who says anything whatsoever says matter and force; who says force affirms attraction and repulsion; attraction and repulsion are synonymous with movement, with struggle, with action. Now I am inside of my system. It will consist of putting all the forces near me into movement, into action, into struggle. What pleasure may there be in this? First, the pleasure of doing, the pleasure, we might call it, of efficiency; secondly, the pleasure of seeing, the pleasure of observing.... What do you think of it?"

"Fine, man! The things you start are always good." "Then there is the moral point. I think I have settled that too."

"That too?"

"Yes. Morals should be nothing more than the true, fitting, and natural law of man. Man considered solely as a spiritual machine? No. Considered as an animal that eats and drinks? Not that either. Man considered as a complete whole. Isn't that so?"

"I believe it is."

"I proceed. In nature laws become more obscure, according as more complicated objects of knowledge turn up. We all clearly see the law of the triangle, and the law of oxygen or of carbon with the same clearness. These laws appear to us as being without exception. But then comes the mineral, and we begin to see variations; in this form it exerts one attraction, in that form a different one. We ascend to the vegetable and find a sort of surprise-package. The surprises are centupled in the animal; and are raised to an unknown degree in man. What is the law of man, as man? We do not know it, probably we shall never know it. Right and justice may be truths, but they will always

be fractional truths. Traditional morality is a pragmatism, useful and efficacious for social life, for well-ordered life; but at the bottom, without reality. Summing all this up: first, life is a labyrinth which has no Ariadne's thread but one,--action; secondly, man is upheld in his high qualities by force and struggle. Those are my conclusions."

"Clever devil! I don't know what to say to you."

Alzugaray asserted that, without taking it upon him to say whether his friend's ideas were good or bad, they had no practical value; but Caesar insisted once and many times on the advantages he saw in his metaphysics.

ENCHIRIDION SAPIENTIAE

Caesar remained in the same sphere during the whole period of his law course, always seeking, according to his own words, to add one wheel more to his machine.

His life contained few incidents; summers he went to Valencia, and there, in the villa, he read and talked with the peasants. His mother, devoted solely to the Church, bothered herself little about her son.

Caesar ended his studies, and on his coming of age, they gave him his share of his father's estate.

Incontinently he took the train, he went to Paris, he looked up Yarza. He explained to him his vague projects of action. Yarza listened attentively, and said:

"Perhaps it will appear foolish to you, but I am going to give you a book I wrote, which I should like you to read. It's called *_Enchiridion Sapientiae_*. In my youth I was something of a Latinist. In these pages, less than a hundred, I have gathered my observations about the financial and political world. It might as well be called *_Contribution to Common-sense, or Neo-Machiavellianism_*. If you find that it helps you, keep it."

Caesar read the book with concentrated attention.

"How did it strike you?" said Yarza.

"There are many things in it I don't agree with; I shall have to think over them again."

"All right. Then keep my *_Enchiridion_* and go on to London. Paris is a city that has finished. It is not worth the trouble of losing one's time staying here."

Caesar went to London, always with the firm intention of going into something. From time to time he wrote a long letter to Ignacio Alzugaray, telling him his impressions of politics and financial questions.

While he was in London his sister joined him and invited him to go to Florence; two years later she begged him to accompany her to Rome. Caesar had always declined to visit the Eternal City, until, on that occasion, he himself showed a desire to go to Rome with his sister.

IV

PEOPLE WHO PASS CLOSE BY

THE SAN MARTINO YOUNG LADIES

Arrived at Rome, Laura and Caesar went up to the hotel, and were received by a bald gentleman with a pointed moustache, who showed them into a large round salon with a very high ceiling.

It was a theatrical salon, with antique furniture and large red-velvet arm-chairs with gilded legs. The enormous mirrors, somewhat tarnished by age, made the salon appear even larger. On the consoles and cabinets gleamed objects of majolica and porcelain.

The big window of this salon opened on the Piazza Esedra di Termini. Caesar and Laura looked out through the glass. It was beginning to rain again; the great semi-circular extent of the square was shining with rain.

The passing trams slipped around the curve in the track; a caravan of tourists in ten or twelve carriages in file, all with their umbrellas open, were preparing to visit the monuments of Rome; strolling peddlars were showing them knick-knacks and religious gewgaws.

Caesar's and Laura's rooms were got ready and the manager of the hotel asked them again if they had need of nothing else.

"What are you going to do?" said Laura to her brother.

"I am going to stretch myself out in bed for a while."

"Lunch at half-past twelve."

"Good, I will get up at that time."

"Good-bye, *_bambino_*. Have a good rest. Put on your black suit to come to the table."

"Very well." Caesar stretched himself on the bed, slept off and on, somewhat feverish from fatigue, and at about twelve he woke at the noise they made in bringing his luggage into the room. He got up to open the trunks, washed and dressed, and when the customary gong resounded, he presented himself in the salon.

Laura was chatting with two young ladies and an older lady, the Countess of San Martino and her daughters. They were in Rome for the season and lived regularly in Venice.

Laura introduced her brother to these ladies, and the Countess pressed Caesar's hand between both of hers, very affectionately.

The Countess was tiny and dried-up: a mummy with the face of a grey-hound, her skin close to her bones, her lips painted, little penetrating blue eyes, and great vivacity in her movements. She dressed in a showy manner; wore jewels on her bosom, on her head, on her fingers.

The daughters looked like two little blond princesses: with rosy cheeks, eyebrows like two golden brush-strokes, almost colourless, clear blue eyes of a heavenly blue, and such small red lips, that on seeing them, the classical simile of cherries came at once to one's mind.

The Countess of San Martino asked Caesar like a shot if he was married and if he hadn't a sweetheart. Caesar replied that he was a bachelor and that he had no sweetheart, and then the Countess came back by asking if he felt no vocation for matrimony.

"No, I believe I don't," responded Caesar.

The two young women smiled, and their mother said, with truly diverting familiarity, that men were becoming impossible. Afterwards she added that she was anxious for her daughters to marry.

"When one of these children is married and has a *_bambino_*, I shall be more contented! If God sent me a *_cheru-bino del cielo_*, I shouldn't be more so."

Laura laughed, and one of the little blondes remarked with aristocratic indifference: "Getting married comes first, mamma."

To this the Countess of San Martino observed that she didn't understand the behaviour of girls nowadays.

"When I was a young thing, I always had five or six beaux at once; but my daughters haven't the same idea. They are so indifferent, so superior!"

"It seems that you two don't take all the notice you should," said Caesar to the girls in French.

"You see what a mistake it is," answered one of them, smiling.

The last round of the gong sounded and various persons entered the salon. Laura knew the majority of them and introduced them, as they came, to her brother.

OBSERVATIONS BY CAESAR

The waiter appeared at the door, announced that lunch was ready, and they all passed into the dining-room.

Laura and her brother were installed at a small table beside the window.

The dining-room, very large and very high, flaunted decorations copied from some palace. They consisted of a tapestry with garlands of flowers, and medallions. In each medallion were the letters S.P.Q.R. and various epicurean phrases of the Romans: "*_Carpe diem. Post mortem nulla voluptas_*" et cetera.

"Beautiful decoration, but very cold," said Caesar. "I should prefer rather fewer mottoes and a little more warmth."

"You are very hard to please," retorted Laura.

Shortly after getting seated, everybody began to talk from table to table and even from one end of the room to the other. There was none of that classic coolness among the people in the hotel which the English

have spread everywhere, along with underdone meat and bottled sauces.

Caesar devoted himself for the first few moments to ethnology.

"Even from the people you find here, you can see that there is a great diversity of ethnic type in Italy," he said to Laura. "That blond boy and the Misses San Martino are surely of Saxon origin; the waiter, on the other hand, swarthy like that, is a Berber."

"Because the blond boy and the San Martines are from the North, and the waiter must be Neapolitan or Sicilian.

"Besides, there is still another type: shown by that dark young woman over there, with the melancholy air. She must be a Celtic type. What is obvious is that there is great liveliness in these people, great elegance in their movements. They are like actors giving a good performance."

Caesar's observations were interrupted by the arrival of a dark, plump woman, who came in from the street, accompanied by her daughter, a blond girl, fat, smiling, and a bit timid.

This lady and Laura bowed with much ceremony.

"Who is she?" asked Caesar in a low tone.

"It is the Countess Brenda," said Laura.

"Another countess! But are all the women here countesses?"

"Don't talk nonsense."

At the other end of the dining-room a young Neapolitan with the expression of a Pulcinella and violent gestures, raised his sing-song voice, talking very loud and making everybody laugh.

After lunching, Caesar went out to post some cards, and as it was raining buckets, he took refuge in the arcades of the Piazza Esedra.

When he was tired of walking he returned to the hotel, went to his room, turned on the light, and started to continue his unfinished perusal of Proudhon's book on the speculator.

And while he read, there came from the salon the notes of a Tzigane waltz played on the piano.

ART, FOR DECEIVED HUSBANDS

Caesar was writing something on the margin of a page when there came a knock at his door. "Come in," said Caesar.

It was Laura.

"Where are you keeping yourself?" she asked.

"Here I am, reading a little."

"But my dear man, we are waiting for you."

"What for?"

"The idea, what for? To talk."

"I don't feel like talking. I am very tired."

"But, _bambino; Benedetto_. Are you going to live your life avoiding everybody?"

"No; I will come out tomorrow."

"What do you want to do tonight?"

"Tonight! Nothing."

"Don't you want to go to the theatre?"

"No, no; I have a tremendously weak pulse, and a little fever. My hands are on fire at this moment."

"What foolishness!"

"It's true."

"So then you won't come out?"

"No."

"All right. As you wish."

"When the weather is good, I will go out."

"Do you want me to fetch you a Baedeker?"

"No, I have no use for it."

"Don't you intend to look at the sights, either?"

"Yes, I will look willingly at what comes before my eyes; it wouldn't please me if the same thing happened to me that took place in Florence."

"What happened to you in Florence?"

"I lost my time lamentably, getting enthusiastic over Botticelli, Donatello, and a lot of other foolishness, and when I got back to London it cost me a good deal of work to succeed in forgetting those things and getting myself settled in my financial investigations again. So that now I have decided to see nothing except in leisure moments and without attaching any importance to all those fiddle-faddles." "But what childishness! Is it going to distract you so much from your work, from that serious work you have in hand, to go and see a few pictures or some statues?"

"To see them, no, not exactly; but to occupy myself with them, yes. Art is a good thing for those who haven't the strength to live, in realities. It is a good form of sport for old maids, for deceived husbands who need consolation, as hysterical persons need morphine...."

"And for strong people like you, what is there?" asked Laura, ironically.

"For strong people!... Action."

"And you call lying in bed, reading, action?"

"Yes, when one reads with the intentions I read with."

"And what are they? What is it you are plotting?"

"I will tell you."

Laura saw that she could not convince her brother, and returned to the salon. A moment before dinner was announced Caesar got dressed again in black, put on his patent-leather shoes, looked at himself offhandedly in the mirror, saw that he was all right, and joined his sister.

V

THE ABBE PRECIOZI

THE BIG BIRDS IN ROME

The next day Caesar awoke at nine, jumped out of bed, and went to breakfast. Laura had left word that she would not eat at home. Caesar took an umbrella and went out into the street. The weather was very dark but it held off from rain.

Caesar took the Via Nazionale toward the centre of town. Among the crowd, some foreigners with red guide-books in their hands, were walking with long strides to see the sights of Rome, which the code of worldly snobbishness considers it indispensable to admire.

Caesar had no settled goal. On a plan of the city, hung in a newspaper kiosk, he found the situation of the Piazza Esedra, the hotel and the adjacent streets, and continued slowly ahead.

"How many people there must be who are excited and have an irregular pulse on arriving for the first time in one of these historic towns," thought Caesar. "I, for my part, was in that situation the first time I clearly understood the mechanism of the London Exchange."

Caesar continued down the Via Nazionale and stopped in a small square with a little garden and a palm. Bounding the square on one side arose a greenish wall, and above this wall, which was adorned with statues, stretched a high garden with magnificent trees, and among them a great stone pine.

"A beautiful garden to walk in," said Caesar. "Perhaps it is an historic spot, perhaps it isn't. I am very happy that I don't know either its name or its history, if it really has one." From the same point in the Via Nazionale, a street with flights of steps could be seen to the left, and below a white stone column.

"Nothing doing; I don't know what that is either," thought Caesar; "the truth is that one is terribly ignorant. To make matters even, what a well of knowledge about questions of finance there is in my cranium!"

Caesar continued on to the Piazza Venezia, contemplated the palace of the Austrian Embassy, yellow, battlemented; and stopped under a big

white umbrella, stuck up to protect the switchman of the tramway.

"Here, at least, the weight of tradition or history is not noticeable. I don't believe this canvas is a piece of Brutus's tunic, or of Pompey's campaign tent. I feel at home here; this canvas modernizes me."

The square was very animated at that moment: groups of seminarians were passing in robes of black, red, blue, violet, and sashes of contrasting colours; monks of all sorts were crossing, smooth-shaven, bearded, in black, white, brown; foreign priests were conversing in groups, wearing little dishevelled hats adorned with a tassel; horrible nuns with moustaches and black moles, and sweet little white nuns, with a coquettish air.

The clerical fauna was admirably represented. A Capuchin friar, long-bearded and dirty, with the air of a footpad, and an umbrella by way of a blunderbuss or musket under his arm, was talking to a Sister of Charity.

"Undoubtedly religion is a very picturesque thing," murmured Caesar. "A spectacular impressario would not have the imagination to think out all these costumes."

Caesar took the Corso. Before he reached the Piazza Colonna it began to rain. The coachmen took out enormous umbrellas, all rolled up, opened them and stood them in iron supports, in such a way that the box-seat was as it were under a campaign tent.

Caesar took refuge in the entrance to a bazaar. The rain began to assume the proportions of a downpour. An old friar, with a big beard, a white habit, and a hood, armed with an untamable umbrella, attempted to cross the square. The umbrella turned inside out in the gusts of wind, and his beard seemed to be trying to get away from his face.

"Pavero frate!" said one of the crowd, smiling.

A priest passed hidden under an umbrella. A tough among the refugees in the bazaar-doorway said that you couldn't tell if it was a woman or a priest, and the cleric, who no doubt heard the remark, threw a severe and threatening look at the group.

It stopped raining, and Caesar continued his walk along the Corso. He went a bit out of his way to throw a glance at the Piazza di Spagna. The great stairway in that square was shining, wet with the rain; a few seminarians in groups were going up the steps toward the Pincio.

Caesar arrived at the Piazza del Popolo and stopped near some ragamuffins who were playing a game, throwing coins in the air. A tattered urchin had written with charcoal on a wall: "Viva Musolino!" and below that he was drawing a heart pierced by two daggers.

"Very good," murmured Caesar. "This youngster is like me: an advocate of action."

It began to rain again; Caesar decided to turn back. He took the same route and entered a café on the Corso for lunch. The afternoon turned out magnificent and Caesar went wandering about at random.

THE CICERONE

At twilight he returned to his inn, changed, and went to the salon. Laura was conversing with a young abbé. "The Abbé Preciozi.... My brother Caesar."

The Abbé Preciozi was one of the household of Cardinal Fort, who had sent him to the hotel to act as cicerone to his nephew.

"Uncle has sent the abbé so that he can show you Rome." "Oh, many thanks!" answered Caesar. "I will make use of his knowledge; but I don't want him to neglect his occupations or to put himself out on my account." "No, no. I am at your disposition," replied the abbé, "His Eminence has given me orders to wait on you, and it will not put me out in the least."

"You will have dinner with us, Preciozi?" said Laura.

"Oh, Marchesa! Thank you so much!"

And the abbé bowed ceremoniously.

The three dined together, and afterwards went to the salon to chat. One of the San Martino young ladies played the viola and the other the piano, and people urged them to exhibit their skill.

The talkative Neapolitan turned over the pieces of music in the music-stand, and after discussing with the two _contessinas_, he placed on the rack the "Intermezzo" from _Cavalleria Rusticana_.

The two sisters played, and the listeners made great eulogies about their ability.

Laura presented Caesar and the Abbé Preciozi to the Countess Brenda and to a lady who had just arrived from Malta.

"Did you know Rome before?" the Countess asked Caesar in French.

"No."

"And how does it strike you?"

"My opinion is of no value," said Caesar. "I am not an artist. Imagine; my specialty is financial questions. Up to the present what has given me the greatest shock is to find that Rome has walls."

"You didn't know it?" asked Laura.

"No."

"Dear child, I find that you are very ignorant."

"What do you wish?" replied Caesar in Spanish. "I am inclined to be ignorant of everything I don't get anything out of."

Caesar spoke jokingly of a square like a hole in the ground, out of which rises a white column similar to the one in Paris in the Place Vendôme.

"What does he mean? Trajan's column?" asked Preciozi. "It must be," said Laura. "I have a brother who's a barbarian. Weren't you in the Forum, too?"

"Which is the Forum? An open space where there are a lot of stones?"

"Yes."

"I passed by there; there were a good many tourists, crowds of young ladies peering intently into corners and a gentleman with a bag over his shoulder who was pointing out some columns with an umbrella. Afterwards I saw a ticket-window. 'That doubtless means that one pays to get in,' I said, and as the ground was covered with mud and I didn't care to wet my feet, I asked a young rascal who was selling post-cards what that place was. I didn't quite understand his explanation, which I am sure was very amusing. He confused Emperors with the Madonna and the saints. I gave the lad a lira and had some trouble in escaping from there, because he followed me around everywhere calling me Excellency."

"I think Don Caesar is making fun of us," said Preciozi.

"No, no."

"But really, how did Rome strike you, on the whole?" asked the abbe.

"Well, I find it like a mixture of a monumental great city and a provincial capital."

"That is possible," responded the abbe. "Undoubtedly the provincial city is more of a city than the big modern capitals, where there is nothing to see but fine hotels on one hand and horrible hovels on the other. If you came from America, like me, you would see how agreeable you would find the impression of a city that one gets here. To forget all the geometry, the streets laid out with a compass, the right angles...."

"Probably so."

The abbe seemed to have an interest in gaining Caesar's friendship. Caesar said to him that, if he wished, they could go to his room to chat and smoke. The abbe accepted with gusto, and Caesar, being a suspicious person, wondered if the Cardinal might have sent the abbe to find out what sort of man he was. Then he considered that his ideas must be of no importance whatsoever to his uncle; but on the chance, he set himself to throwing the abbé off the scent, talking volubly and emitting contradictory opinions about everything.

After chattering a long while and devoting himself to free paradox, Caesar thought that for the first session he had not done altogether badly. Preciozi took leave, promising to come back the next day.

"If he reports our conversation to my uncle, the man won't know what to think of me," reflected Caesar, on going to bed. "It would not be too much to expect, if His Eminence became interested and sent to fetch me. But I don't believe he will; my uncle cannot be intelligent enough to have the curiosity to know a man like me."

VI

THE LITTLE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE IN A ROMAN HOTEL

INTIMACIES

During some days the main interest of the people in the hotel was the growing intimacy established between the Marchesa Sciacca, who was the lady from Malta, and the Neapolitan with the Pulcinella air, Signor Carminatti.

The Maltese must have been haughty and exclusive, to judge from the queenly air she assumed. Only with the handsome Neapolitan did she behave amiably.

In the dining-room the Maltese sat with her two children, a boy and a girl, at the other end from where Caesar and Laura were accustomed to sit. At her side, at a table close by, chattered and jested the diplomatic Carminatti.

The Marquis of Sciacca was ill with diabetes; he had come to Rome to take a treatment, and during these days he did not come to the dining-room.

The Marchesa was one of those mixed types, unharmonious, common among mongrel races. Her black hair shone like jet, her lips looked like an Egyptian's, and her eyes of a very light blue showed off in a curious way in her bronzed face. She powdered her face, she painted her lips, she shaded her eyes with kohl. Her appearance was that of a proud, revengeful woman.

She ate with much nicety, opening her mouth so little that she could put no more than the tip of her spoon between her lips; with her children she talked English and Italian in equal perfection, and when she heard young Carminatti's facetious remarks she laughed with marked impudence. Signer Carminatti was tall, with a black moustache, a hooked nose, well-formed languid eyes, lively and somewhat clownish gestures; he was at the same time sad and merry, melancholy and smiling, he changed his expression every moment. He was in the habit of appearing in the salon in a dinner-jacket, with a large flower in his button-hole and two or three fat diamonds on his chest. He would come along dragging his feet, would bow, make a joke, stand mournful; and this fluency of expression, and these gesticulations, gave him a manner halfway between woman and child.

When he grew petulant, especially, he seemed like a woman. "Macché!" he would say continually, with an acrid voice and the disgusted air of an hysterical dame.

In spite of his frequent petulant fits, he was the person most esteemed by the ladies of the hotel, both young and married.

"He is the darling of the ladies," the Countess Brenda said of him, mockingly.

Laura had not the least use for him.

"I know that type by heart," she asserted with disdain.

During lunch and dinner Signor Carminatti did not leave off talking for a moment with the Maltese. The Marchesa Sciacca's children often wanted to tell their mother something; but she hushed them so as to be able to hear the bright sayings of the handsome Neapolitan.

The San Martino young ladies and the Countess Brenda's daughter kept trying to find a way to steal Carminatti for their group; but he always went back to the Maltese, doubtless because her conversation was more diverting and spicy.

THE CONTESSINA BRENDA

The Countess Brenda's daughter, Beatrice Brenda, in spite of her pea-hen air, was always endeavouring to stir up the Neapolitan and to start a conversation with him; but Carminatti in his light-hearted way would reply with a jest or a fatuous remark and betake himself again to the Marchesa Sciacca, who would make her disturbing children hush because they often prevented her from catching what the Neapolitan was saying.

She was not to be despised, not by a long shot, was Signorina Bice, not in any respect; besides being very rich, she was a beautiful girl and promised to be more beautiful; she had the type of Titian's women, an opaline white skin, as though made of mother-of-pearl, plump milky arms, and dark eyes. The one thing lacking in her was expression.

She used frequently to go about in the company of an aristocratic old maid, very ugly, with red hair and a face like a horse, but very distinguished, who ate at the next table to Laura and Caesar.

One day Carminatti brought another Neapolitan home to dinner with him, a fat grotesque person, whom he instigated to emit a series of improprieties about women and matrimony. Hearing the scandalous sallies of the rustic, the ladies said, with an amiable smile:

"He is a benedetto."

The Contessina Brenda, fascinated by the Neapolitan, went to the Marchesa Sciacca's table. As she passed, Carminatti arose with his napkin in one hand, and gesticulating with the other, said:

"Contessina. Allow me to present to you Signor Cappagutti, a merchant from Naples."

Signor Cappagutti remained leaning back tranquilly in his chair, and the Contessina burst out laughing and began to move her arms as if somebody had put a horse-fly on her skirt. Then she raised her hand to her face, to hide her laughter, and suddenly sat down.

DANCING

As it rained a great deal the majority of the guests preferred not to go out. In the evenings they had dances. Caesar did not appear at the first one; but his sister told him he ought to go. Caesar was at the second dance, so as not to seem too much of an ogre. As he had no intention of dancing, he installed himself in a corner; and while the dance went on he kept talking with the Countesses Brenda and San Martino.

Various young men had arrived in the room. They exhibited that Southern vivacity which is a trifle tiresome to the onlooker, and they all listened to themselves while they spoke. The Neapolitan and two or three of his friends were introduced to Caesar; but they showed him a certain rather ostentatious and impertinent coolness.

Signor Carminatti exchanged a few words with the Countess Brenda, and purposely acted as if he did not notice Caesar's presence.

The Neapolitan's chatter did not irritate Caesar in the slightest, and as he had no intention of being his rival, he listened to him quite entertained.

Caesar noted that the San Martino ladies and some friends of theirs had a predilection for types like Carminatti, swarthy, prattling, and boastful South Italians.

The ladies showed an affectionate familiarity with the girls; they caressed them and kissed them effusively.

YOU ARE AN INQUISITOR

Laura, who was dancing with an officer, approached her brother, who was wedged into a corner, behind two rows of chairs.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him, stopping and informing her partner that she was going to sit down a moment.

"Nothing," answered Caesar, "I am waiting for this waltz to finish, so that I can get away."

"You are not enjoying yourself?"

"Pish!"

"Nevertheless, there are amusing things about it."

"Ah, surely. Do you know what happened to me with the Countess Brenda?"

"What did happen?"

"When she came in and gave me her hand, she said: 'How hot your hands are; mine are frozen.' And she held my hands between hers. That was comical."

"Comical! Why?"

"How do I know?"

"It is comical to you, because you see only evil motives. She held your hand. Who knows what she may be after? Who knows if she wants to get something out of you? She has an income of eighty or ninety thousand lire, perhaps she wants to borrow money from you."

"No, I know she doesn't."

"Then, what are you afraid of?"

"Afraid! Afraid of nothing! Only it surprised me."

"That's because you look at everything with the eye of an inquisitor. One must be suspicious: be always on one's guard, always on the watch. It's the attitude of a savage."

"I don't deny it. I have no desire to be civilized like these people. But what does come to me is that the husband of our illustrious and wealthy friend wears in his breast that *porte-bonheur*, which I believe

is called horns."

"Of course; and you haven't discovered that his family is a family of assassins? How Spanish! What a savage Spaniard I have for a brother!"

Caesar burst into laughter, and taking advantage of the moment when everybody was going to the buffet, left the room. In the corridor, one of the San Martino girls, the more sweet and angelic of the two, was in a corner with one of the dancers, and there was a sound like a kiss.

The little blonde made an exclamation of fright; Caesar behaved as if he had noticed nothing and kept on his way.

"The devil!" exclaimed Caesar, "that angelic little princess hides in corners with one of these *_briganti_*. And their mother has the face to say that they don't know how to bait a hook! I don't know what more she could wish. Although it is possible that this is the educational scheme of the future for marriageable girls."

In the entrance-hall of the hotel were the Marchesa Sciacca's two children, attended by a sleeping maid; the little girl, seated on a sofa, was watching her brother, who walked from one side to the other with a roll of paper in his hand. In the entrance hall, opposite the hotel door, there was a bulletin, which was changed every day, to announce the different performances that were to be given that night at the theatres of Rome.

The small boy walked back and forth in front of the poster, and addressing himself to a public consisting of the sleeping maid and the little girl, cried:

"Step up, gentlemen! Step up! Now is the time. We are about to perform *_La Geisha_*, the magnificent English operetta. Walk right in! Walk right in!"

While the mother was dancing with the Neapolitan in the ball-room, the children were amusing themselves thus alone.

"The truth is that our civilization is an absurdity. Even the children go mad," thought Caesar, and took refuge in his room.

During the whole night he heard from his bed the notes of the waltzes and two-steps, and dancers' laughter and shouts and shuffling feet.

THEY ARE JUST CHILDREN

The next day, Laura, before going out to make a call, appeared at lunch-time most elegantly dressed, with a gown and a hat from Paris, in which she was truly most charming.

She had a great success: the San Martinos, the Countess Brenda, the other ladies congratulated her. The hat, above all, seemed ideal to them.

Carminatti was in raptures.

"E bello, bellissimo_" he said, with great enthusiasm, and all the ladies agreed that it was bellissimo, lengthening the "s" and nodding their heads with a gesture of admiration.

"And you don't say anything to me, bambino?" Laura inquired of Caesar.

"I say you are all right."

"And nothing more?"

"If you want me to pay you a compliment, I will tell you that you are pretty enough to make incest legitimate." "What a barbarian!" murmured Laura, half laughing, half blushing.

"What has he been saying to you?" two or three people inquired.

Laura translated his words into Italian, and Carminatti found them admirable.

"Very appropriate! Very witty!" he exclaimed, laughing, and gave Caesar a friendly slap on the shoulder.

The Marchesa Sciacca looked at Laura several times with reflective glances and a rancorous smile.

"The truth is that these Southern people are just children," thought Caesar, mockingly. "What an inveterate preoccupation they have in the beautiful."

The Neapolitan was one of those most preoccupied with esthetics.

Caesar had a room opposite Signor Carminatti's, and the first few days he had thought it was a woman's room. Toilet flasks, sprays, boxes of powder; the room looked like a perfumery shop.