

FLAMMARION CAMILLE

LUMEN

Camille Flammarion

Lumen

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Lumen

FIRST CONVERSATION RESURRECTIO PRÆTERITI

I

Quærens. You promised, dear Lumen, to describe to me that supremest of moments which immediately succeeds death, and to relate to me how, by a natural law, singular though it may seem, you lived again your past life, and penetrated a hitherto-unrevealed mystery.

Lumen. Yes, my old friend, I will now keep my word; and I trust that, thanks to the life-long communion of our souls, you will be able to understand the phenomenon you deem so strange.

Life and death

There are many conceptions which a mortal mind finds difficult to grasp. Death, which has delivered me from the weak and easily-tired senses of the body, has not yet touched you with its liberating hand; you still belong to the living world, and in spite of your isolation in this retreat of yours amid the royal towers of the Faubourg St. Jaques, you still belong to the life of Earth, and are occupied with its petty distinctions. You must not, therefore, be surprised if, whilst I am explaining to you this mystery, I beg of you to isolate yourself still further from outer things, and to give me the most *fixed attention* of which your mind is capable.

Quærens. My one desire is to listen to your revelations; speak, therefore, without fear and to the point, and deign to acquaint me with those impressions, as yet to me unknown, which are experienced upon the cessation of life.

Lumen. From what point do you wish me to begin my recital?

Quærens. If you can recall it, I shall be pleased if you will begin at the moment when my trembling hands closed your eyes.

Death

Lumen. The separation of the thinking principle from the nervous system leaves no remembrance. It is as though the impressions made upon the brain which constitute memory were entirely effaced, to be renewed afterwards in another form. The first sensation of identity felt after death resembles that which is felt during life on awakening in the morning, when still confused with the visions of the night, the mind, wavering between the past and the future, endeavours to recover itself, and at the same time to retain the vanishing dreams, the pictures and events of which are still passing before it. At times when thus absorbed in the recollection of a delightful dream, the eyelids close, and in a half slumber the visions reappear. It is thus that our thinking faculty is divided at death, between a reality that it does not yet comprehend and a dream which has completely disappeared. The most conflicting impressions mingle in and confuse the mind, and if, overwhelmed by perishable feelings, a regret comes into the mind for the world that has been left behind, a sense of indefinable sadness weighs upon and darkens the imagination and hinders clearness of vision.

Quærens. Did you feel these sensations immediately after death?

No such thing as death

Not death, but change

Lumen. After death? There is no such thing as death. What you call death – the separation of the body from the soul – is not, strictly speaking, effected in a material form like the chemical separation of a combination of elements such as one sees in the world of matter. One is no more conscious of this final separation, which seems to you so cruel, than the new-born babe is aware of his birth. We are born into the heavenly life as unconsciously as we were born into the earthly; only the soul, no longer enveloped by its bodily covering, acquires more rapidly the consciousness of its individuality and of its powers. This faculty of perception varies essentially between one soul and another. There are those who, during their earthly life, never lift their souls toward heaven, and never feel a desire to penetrate the laws of creation; these, being still dominated by fleshly appetites, remain long in a troubled and semi-conscious state. There are others whose aspirations have happily flown upwards towards the eternal heights; to these the moment of separation comes with calmness and peace. They know that progress is the law of being, and that the life to come will be better than that which they have quitted. They follow, step by step, that lethargy which reaches at last to the heart, and when, slowly and insensibly, the last pulsation ceases, the departed are already above the body whose falling asleep they have been watching. Freeing themselves from the magnetic bonds, they feel themselves swiftly borne, by an unknown force, toward the point of creation, to which their sentiments, their aspirations, and their hopes have drawn them.

Quærens. The conversation into which I have drawn you, my dear master, recalls to my memory the dialogues of Plato on the immortality of the soul; and as Phædrus asked his master, Socrates, on the day he had to drink the hemlock in obedience to the iniquitous sentence of the Athenians, I ask you – you who have passed the dread boundary – what is the essential difference which distinguishes the soul from the body, since the latter dies, whilst the former cannot die?

Life viewed scientifically

Lumen. I shall not imitate Socrates by giving a metaphysical answer to this question, nor shall I, with the theologians, reply in a dogmatic way; but I will give you instead a scientific answer, for you, like myself, accept only as of real value the results of positive knowledge.

Renewal of the body

Atoms and molecules

We find in the human being three principles, *different, and yet in complete union*: 1. The body; 2. The vital energy; 3. The soul. I name them thus in order that I may follow the *a posteriori* method. The body is an association of molecules which are themselves formed of groups of atoms. The atoms are inert, passive, immutable, and indestructible. They enter into the organism by means of respiration and alimentation; they renew the tissues incessantly, and are continually replaced by others, and when cast out from the body go to form other bodies. In a few months the human body is entirely renewed, and neither in the blood, nor in the flesh, nor in the brain, nor in the bones, does an atom remain of those which constituted the body a few months before. The atoms travel without ceasing from body

to body, chiefly by the grand medium of the atmosphere. The molecule of iron is the same whether it be incorporated in the blood which throbs in the temples of an illustrious man, or form part of a fragment of rusty iron; the molecule of oxygen is the same in the blush raised by a loving glance, or when in union with hydrogen it forms the flame of one of the thousand jets of gas that illuminate Paris by night, or when it falls from the clouds in the shape of a drop of water. The bodies of the living are formed of the ashes of the dead, and if all the dead were to be resuscitated, the last comers might find the material for their bodies wanting, owing to their predecessors having appropriated all that was available. Moreover, during life many exchanges are made between enemies and friends, between men, animals, and plants, which amaze the analyst who looks at them with the eyes of science. That which you breathe, eat, and drink, has been breathed, drunk, and eaten millions of times before. Such is the human body, an assemblage of molecules of matter which are constantly being renewed. The principle by which these molecules are grouped according to a certain form so as to produce an organism, is the vital energy of life. The inert, passive atoms, incapable of guiding themselves, are ruled by vital force, which calls them, makes them come, takes hold of them, places and disposes of them according to certain laws, and forms this marvellously-organised body, which the anatomist and the physiologist contemplate with wonder.

Atoms indestructible

Vital energy or force in nature and man

Vital force has limits

The atoms are indestructible; vital force is not: atoms have no age; vital force is born, grows old, and dies. Why is an octogenarian older than a youth of twenty, since the atoms of which his body is composed have only belonged to his frame a few months, and since atoms are neither old nor young? The constituent elements of his body when analysed have no age, and what is old in him is solely his vital energy, which is but one of the forms of the general energy of the universe, and which in his case has become exhausted. Life is transmitted by generation, and sustains the body instinctively, and, as it were, unconsciously. It has a beginning and an end. It is an unconscious physical force, which organises and maintains the body of which it is the preserving element. The soul is an intellectual, thinking, immaterial being. The world of ideas in which the soul lives is not the world of matter. It has no age, it does not grow old. It is not changed in a few months like the body; for after months, years, dozens of years, we feel that we have preserved our identity – that our *ego*, ourself, is always ours. On the other hand, if the soul did not exist, and if the faculty of thinking were only a function of the brain, we should no longer be able to say that *we have* a body, for it would be our body, our brain, *that would have us*. Besides, from time to time our consciousness would change; we should no longer have a feeling of identity, and we should no longer be responsible for the resolutions, secreted by the molecules, which had passed through the brain many months before. The soul is not the vital force; for that is limited and is transmitted by generation, has no consciousness of itself, is born, grows up, declines, and dies. All these states are opposed to those of the soul, which is immaterial, unlimited, not transmissible, conscious.

The soul has no limits

The development of the vital force may be represented geometrically by a spindle, which swells out gradually to the middle, and decreases again to a point. When the soul reaches the middle of life, it does not become less, like a spindle, and dwindle down to the end, but follows its parabolic curve into the infinite. Moreover, the mode of existence of the soul is essentially different from that of the vital force. It lives in a spiritual way. The conceptions of the soul, such as the sentiments of justice or injustice, of truth or falsehood, of good and evil, as well as knowledge, mathematics, analysis, synthesis, contemplation, admiration, love, affection or hatred, esteem or contempt – in a word, the occupations of the soul, whatever they may be, are of an intellectual and moral order, which neither the atoms nor the physical forces can apprehend, and which have as real an existence as the physical order of things. The chemical or mechanical work of cerebral cells, however subtle they may be, can never produce an intellectual judgment, such, for instance, as the knowledge of the fact that four multiplied by four is equal to sixteen, or that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.

The soul survives the body

These three elements of the human being are reproduced in the universe at large: 1. The atoms, the material world inert, passive; 2. The physical forces which regulate the world, and which are continually transformed into one another or into others; 3. God, the eternal and infinite spirit, the *intellectual* organiser of the *mathematical* laws which these forces obey, the unknown being in whom reside the supreme principles of truth, of beauty, of goodness. The soul can be attached to the body only by means of the vital force. When life is extinct the soul naturally separates from the organism and ceases to have any immediate connection with time and space. After death the soul remains in that part of the universe where the Earth happens to be at the moment of its separation from the body. You know that the Earth is a planet in the heavens like Venus and Jupiter. The Earth continues to run in its orbit at the rate of 12,700 kilometres an hour, so that the soul an hour after death is at that distance from its body because of its immobility in space, when no longer subject to the laws of matter. Thus we are in the heavens immediately after death, where, however, we have also been during the whole of our lives; but we then had weight which held us to the Earth. I must add, however, that as a rule the soul takes some time to disengage itself from the nervous organism, and that it occasionally remains many days, and even many months, magnetically connected with the old body, which it is reluctant to forsake. Moreover, it has special faculties by means of which it can transport itself from one point of space to another.

Quærens. Now for the first time I am able to understand death as a natural process, and to comprehend the individual existence of the soul, its independence of the body and of life, its personality, its survival, and its obvious position in the universe. This synthetic theory has prepared me, I hope, to understand and appreciate your revelation. But you said that a singular event struck you on your entrance into the eternal life; at what moment did that take place?

The hour of death

Last impressions of the parting soul

Separation of the soul

Lumen. Well, my dear friend, let me go on with my story. Midnight had just struck, you will remember, on the sonorous bell of my old timepiece, and the full Moon shed its pale light on my dying bed, when my daughter, my grandson, and other friends withdrew to take some rest. You wished to remain with me, and you promised my daughter not to leave me till the morning. I would thank you for your warm and tender devotion if we were not so truly brothers. We had been alone about half-an-hour, for the star of night was declining, when I took your hand and told you that life had already abandoned my extremities. You assured me that it was not so; but I was calmly observing my physiological state, and I knew that in a few moments I should cease to breathe. You moved gently towards the room where my children were sleeping, but concentrating my powers by an extreme effort I stopped you. Returning with tears in your eyes, you said to me, "You are right; you have given them your last wishes, and to-morrow morning will be time enough to send for them." There was in these words a contradiction that I felt without expressing it to you. Do you remember that then I asked you to open the window. It was a beautiful night in October; more beautiful than those of the Scottish bards sung by Ossian. Not far from the horizon, just level with my eyes, I could distinguish the Pleiades, veiled by mist, whilst Castor and Pollux floated triumphantly a little higher up. Above, forming a triangle with them, shone the beautiful star with rays of gold, which, on maps of the zodiac, is marked "Capella." You see how clearly I remember it all. When you had opened the window the perfume of the roses, sleeping under the wings of night, ascended upwards to me and mingled with the silent rays of the stars. I cannot express to you how sweet were these last impressions that I received from the Earth; language fails me to describe what I felt. In the hours of my sweetest happiness, of my tenderest love, I never felt such an intensity of joy, so glorious a serenity, such real bliss, as I experienced then in the ecstatic enjoyment of the perfumed breath of the flowers and the tender gleam of the distant stars... When you bent over me I seemed to return to the outer world, and with my hands clasped over my breast, my sight and my thoughts, united in prayer, together took flight into space. Before my ears closed for ever I heard the last words as they fell from my lips: "Adieu! my old friend, I feel that death is bearing me away to those unknown regions where I trust we shall one day meet. When the dawn effaces these stars, only my mortal body will be here. Repeat then to my daughter my last wish: to bring up her children in the contemplation of the eternal goodness." And whilst you wept, as you knelt by my bed, I added, "Recite the beautiful prayer of Jesus," and you began with trembling voice, "Our Father... Forgive us.. our trespasses... as we.. forgive those.. that.. trespass.. against us.." These were the last thoughts that passed through my soul by means of the senses; my sight grew dim as I looked at the star Capella, and immediately I became unconscious.

Time does not exist outside the Earth

Years, days, and hours are constituted by the movements of the Earth. In space, outside these movements time *does not exist*; indeed, it is impossible to have any notion of time. I think, however, that the event I am now going to describe to you occurred on the very day of my death, for, as you will see presently, my body was not yet buried when this vision appeared to my soul.

Sight of the soul in the heavens

As I was born in 1793, I was then, in 1864, in my seventy-second year, so I was not a little surprised to find myself animated by a vivacity of mind as ardent as in the prime of my life. I had no body, and yet I was not incorporeal; I felt and saw that I was constituted of a substance which, however, bore no analogy to the material form of terrestrial bodies. I know not how I traversed the celestial spaces, but by some unknown force I soon found that I was approaching a magnificent golden sun, the splendour of which did not, however, dazzle me. I perceived that it was surrounded by a number of worlds, each enveloped in one or more rings. By the same unconscious force I was driven towards one of these rings, and was a spectator of the marvellous phenomena of light, for the starry spaces were crossed everywhere by rainbow bridges. I lost sight of the golden sun, and I found myself in a sort of night coloured with hues of a thousand shades. The sight of my soul far exceeded that of my body, and, to my surprise, this power of sight appeared to be subject to my will. The sight of the soul is so marvellous that I must not stop to-day to describe it. Suffice it to say that instead of seeing the stars in the heavens as you see them on the Earth, I could distinguish clearly the worlds revolving round each other; and strange to say, when I desired to examine more closely these worlds, and to avoid the brilliance of the central sun, it disappeared from my sight, and left me under the most favourable conditions for observing any one of them I wished.¹ Further, when my attention was concentrated on one particular world, I could distinguish its continents and its seas, its clouds and its rivers, although they did not appear to become larger, as objects seen through a telescope do. I saw any special thing that I fixed my sight upon, such as a town or a tract of country, with perfect clearness and distinctness.

The soul clothed in a new body

When I reached this ringed world I found myself clothed in a form like that of its inhabitants. It appeared that my soul had attracted to itself the constituent atoms of a new body. Living bodies on the Earth are composed of molecules which do not touch one another, and which are constantly renewed by respiration, by nutrition, and by assimilation. The envelope of the soul is formed more quickly in that far-off world. I felt myself more alive than the supernatural beings whose passions and sorrows Dante celebrates. One of the special faculties of this new world is that of seeing very far.

Quærens. But pardon a rather simple remark. Is it not likely that the worlds or planets that revolve round each star must mingle in a distant view with their central sun; for instance, when you see our Sun from afar with the planets of his system, is it possible for you to distinguish our Earth amongst them?

The soul's powers of vision

Lumen. You have raised the single geometrical objection which seems to contradict all previous experience. In point of fact, at a certain distance the planets are absorbed in their suns, and our terrestrial eyes would have difficulty in distinguishing them. You know that from Saturn the Earth is invisible. But you must remember that this discrepancy arises as much from the imperfection of our sight as from the geometrical law of the decrease of surfaces. Now, in the world on which I had just landed, the inhabitants are not incarnated in a gross form, as we are here below, but are free beings,

¹ Physiological anatomy would probably explain this fact by suggesting that a sort of *punctum cæcum* is displaced in order to conceal the object that one does not wish to see.

and endowed with eminently powerful faculties of perception. They can, as I have told you, *isolate* the source of light from the object lighted, and, moreover, they can perceive distinctly details which at that distance would be absolutely hidden from the eyes of those dwelling upon this Earth.

Quærens. Do they make use, then, of instruments superior to our telescopes?

Lumen. Well, if, in order to realise this marvellous faculty, you find it easier to suppose that they possess such instruments, you may do so, in theory. Imagine a telescope which, by a succession of lenses and an arrangement of diaphragms, brings near in succession these distant worlds, and isolates each one in the field of view in order to study it separately. I should also inform you that these beings are endowed with a special sense by which they can regulate at will the powers of their marvellous organs of sight.

And you must further understand that this power and this regulation of vision are natural in those worlds, and not supernatural. In order to conceive of the faculties possessed by these ultra-terrestrial beings, reflect for a moment upon the eyes of some insects – of those, for instance, which have the power to draw in, to lengthen out, or to flatten the crystalline lens so as to make it magnify in different degrees; or of those which can concentrate on the field of view a multitude of eyes in order to bring them to bear upon the desired object.

Quærens. Yes, I can imagine it to be possible. Then you are able to see the Earth, and to distinguish from above even the towns and villages of our lower world?

Lumen on a star world

Lumen. Let me proceed with my description. I found myself then upon the ring-shaped world, the size of which I told you is great enough to make two hundred worlds like yours. The mountain on which I stood was covered with trees woven into arboreal palaces. These fairy-like chateaux seemed to me either to grow naturally, or else to be produced by a skilful arrangement of branches and of tall flowering plants. The town, where I entered it, was thickly peopled, and on the summit of the mountain I noticed a group of old men, twenty or thirty in number, who were looking with the most fixed and anxious attention at a beautiful star in the southern constellation of the Altar on the confines of the Milky Way. They did not observe my arrival amongst them, so absorbed were they in observing and examining this star, or perhaps one of the worlds belonging to its system.

Lumen learns the language of spirits

As for myself, I became aware, on arriving in this atmosphere, that I was clothed in a body resembling that of its inhabitants, and to my still greater surprise I heard these old men speaking of the Earth – yes, of the Earth in that universal spirit-language which all beings comprehend from the seraphim to the trees of the forest. And not only were they talking about the Earth, but about France. "What can be the meaning of these legal massacres?" they said. "Is it possible that brute force reigns supreme there? Will civil war decimate these people, and will rivers of blood run in this capital, at one time so magnificent and so gay?"

I could not follow the drift of this speech, I who had just come from the Earth with the swiftness of thought, and who but yesterday had breathed in the heart of this tranquil and peaceful capital. I joined the group, fixing my eyes, as they did, on the beautiful star, and I tried at the same time to understand what they were talking about. Presently I saw to the left of the star a pale-blue sphere – that was the Earth.

The Solar System in the heavens

You are aware, my friend, that, notwithstanding the apparent paradox, the Earth is really a star in the sky, as I reminded you just now. Seen from one of the stars comparatively near to your system, it appears to the spiritual sight, of which I have told you, like a family of stars composed of eight principal worlds crowding round the Sun, which is itself reduced to a star. Jupiter and Saturn first arrest the attention, because of their great size; then one notices Uranus and Neptune, and at length, quite near to the Sun-star, Mars and the Earth. Venus is very difficult to make out. Mercury remains invisible because of its too great proximity to the Sun. Such is the appearance of the planetary system in the heavens.

The Earth as seen from the heavens

My attention was fixed exclusively on the little terrestrial sphere by the side of which I perceived the Moon. I soon remarked the white snow of the North Pole, the yellow triangle of Africa, and the outlines of the Ocean. Whilst my attention was concentrated on our planet, the Sun-star became eclipsed before my eyes. Then I was able to distinguish, in the midst of an expanse of azure, a brown cleft or hollow, and pursuing my investigations I discovered a town in the midst of this cleft. I had no difficulty in recognising that this continental hollow was France, and that the town was Paris. The first sign by which I recognised it was the silver ribbon of the Seine, that describes so many graceful convolutions to the west of the great town. By the use of my new optical organs I could see it in detail. At the eastern side of the city I saw the nave and towers of Notre Dame in the form of a Latin cross. The Boulevards wound round the north. To the south I recognised the gardens of the Luxembourg and the Observatory. The cupola of the Pantheon covered like a grey hood the Mount of Ste. Geneviève. To the west the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées formed a straight line. Farther on I could distinguish the Bois de Boulogne, the environs of St. Cloud, the Wood of Meudon, Sèvres, Ville d'Avray, and Montretout.

Paris

The whole scene was lighted up by splendid sunshine; but, strange to say, the hills were covered with snow as in the month of January, whilst I had left it in October when the country was perfectly green. I was fully convinced that I was looking at Paris; but as I could not understand the exclamations of my companions, I endeavoured to ascertain more details.

Old Paris

No Arc de Triomphe visible

No Column Vendôme

No obelisk in the Place de la Concorde

My eyes were fixed with most interest upon the Observatory. It was my favourite quarter, and for forty years I had scarcely left it for more than a few months. Judge, therefore, of my surprise when I came to look more closely at it to find that the magnificent avenue of chestnuts between the Luxembourg and the Observatory was nowhere to be seen, that in its place were the gardens of convents. My indignation as an artist was aroused against these municipal misdeeds, but it was quickly suspended by still stranger feelings. I beheld a monastery in the midst of our beautiful orchard. The Boulevard St. Michel did not exist, nor did the Rue de Medici; instead I saw a confused mass of little streets, and I seemed to recognise the former Rue de l'Est and the Place St. Michel, where an ancient fountain used to supply water to the people of the faubourg, and I made out a number of narrow lanes which existed long ago. The cupolas and the two side wings of the Observatory had disappeared. By degrees, as I continued my observations, I discovered that Paris was indeed much changed. The Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, and all the brilliant avenues that meet there, had disappeared. There was no Boulevard de Sébastopol, no Station de l'Est, nor any other station, and no railway. The tower of St. Jaques was enclosed in a court of old houses, and the Column of Victory was reached that way. The Column of the Bastille was also absent, for I should easily have recognised the figure upon it. An equestrian statue filled the place of the Vendôme Column. The Rue Castiglione was an old green convent. The Rue de Rivoli had disappeared. The Louvre was either unfinished or partly pulled down. Between the Court of Francis I. and the Tuileries there were tumble-down old hovels. There was no obelisk in the Place de la Concorde; but I saw a moving crowd, though I was unable at first to distinguish the figures. The Madeleine and the Rue Royal were invisible. Behind the Isle of St. Louis I saw a small island. Instead of the outer Boulevards there was only an old wall, and the whole was enclosed by fortifications. In short, although I recognised the capital of France by some familiar buildings, I was aware of a marvellous metamorphosis, which had completely changed its aspect.

Time merely relative

At first I fancied that, in place of having just come from the Earth, I must have been many years *en route*. As the notion of time is essentially relative, and there is nothing real or absolute in the measure of duration, having once left the Earth, I had lost all standard of measure, and I said to myself that years, centuries indeed, might have passed over my head without my perceiving it, and that the time had seemed short to me because of the great interest I had taken in my aerial voyage – a commonplace idea which shows how merely relative is our notion of time. Not having any means of assuring myself of the facts of the case, I should undoubtedly have concluded that I was separated by many centuries from the terrestrial life which was now going on before my eyes in Paris, and I imagined that I saw the period of the twentieth or twenty-first century until I penetrated more deeply into the details of the life picture and examined all its features. Eventually I succeeded in identifying

the aspect of the town, and I gradually recognised the sites of the streets and of the public buildings which I had known in my early youth. The Hôtel de Ville appeared to be decorated with flags, and I could distinguish the square central dome of the Tuileries.

Lumen sees a scene in his past life

A little further examination recalled everything to me; and then I saw, in an old convent garden, a summer-house which made me tremble with joy. It was in that spot that I met in my youth the woman who loved me so deeply, my Sylvia, so tender and so devoted, who gave up everything to unite her life to mine. I saw the little cupola of the terrace where we loved to saunter in the evenings and to study the constellations. Oh, with what joy I greeted those promenades where we had walked, keeping step with one another, those avenues where we took refuge from the curious eyes of intruders! You can fancy how, as I looked at this summer-house, the sight of it alone was enough to assure me, absolutely and convincingly, that I had before my eyes not, as it was natural to suppose, the Paris of long *after my death*, but in reality the Paris *of the past*, old Paris of the beginning of this century or of the end of last century. But, in spite of all, you can easily imagine that I could scarcely believe my eyes. It seemed so much more natural to think that Paris had grown old and had suffered these transformations since my departure from the Earth – an interval of time absolutely unknown to me. It was so much easier to think that I beheld the city of the future. I continued my observations carefully, in order to ascertain if it was really the old Paris, now partly demolished, that I was looking at, or if, by a phenomenon still more incredible, it was another Paris, another France, another world.

II

In the star Capella

Quærens. What an extraordinary discovery for an analytical mind like yours, dear Lumen! By what means did you satisfy yourself that your conclusions were correct?

The French Terror visible in Capella

Old men in Capella watch the doings on the Earth

Lumen. While I was gradually arriving at the conviction of which I have told you, the old men around me on the mountain continued their conversation. Suddenly the oldest of them, a venerable Nestor whose aspect commanded both admiration and respect, called out, in a loud and mournful voice "On your knees, my brethren; let us pray for forbearance to the universal God. That world, that nation, that city continues to revel in blood. A fresh head, that of a king this time, is about to fall." His companions seemed to understand, for they knelt down on the mountain, and prostrated their white faces to the ground. For myself, I had not yet succeeded in distinguishing men in the streets and squares of Paris, and not being able to verify the observations of these old men, I remained standing, but I pursued my examination of the scene before me carefully. "Stranger," said the old man to me, "do you blame the action of your brothers since you do not join your prayers to theirs?" "Senator," I replied, "I neither approve nor blame what I do not comprehend. Having only just arrived on this mountain, I do not know the cause of your righteous indignation." I then drew near the old man, and while his companions were rising and entering into conversation in groups, I asked him to describe the situation to me. He informed me that the order of spirits inhabiting this world are gifted by intuition with the power of seeing and apprehending events in the neighbouring worlds, and that they each possess a sort of magnetic relation with the stars and systems around them. These neighbour-worlds, or stars, are twelve or fifteen in number. Outside that limit the perceptions become confused. They have therefore a vague but distinct knowledge of the state of humanity in the planets of our Sun, and of the relative elevation in the intellectual and moral order of their inhabitants. Moreover, when a great disturbance takes place, either in the physical or the moral realm, they feel a sort of inner agitation, like that of a musical chord which vibrates in unison with another chord at a distance.

For a year (a year of this world is equal to ten of our years) they had felt themselves drawn by special attraction towards the terrestrial planet, and had observed with unusual interest and anxiety the march of events in that world. They had beheld the end of a reign and the dawn of glorious liberty, the conquest of the rights of man and the assertion of the great principles of human dignity. Then they had seen the cause sacred to liberty placed in peril by those who should have been the first to defend it, and brute force substituted for reason and justice.

I saw that he was describing the great Revolution of 1789, and the fall of the old political world before the new régime. Very mournfully they had followed the events of the Reign of Terror and the tyranny of that bloody time. They trembled for the future of the Earth, and felt doubtful of the progress of a humanity which, when emancipated, so soon lost the treasure it had just acquired. I took care not to let the senator know that I had just arrived from the Earth myself, and that I had lived there seventy-two years. I do not know whether he was aware of this, but I was so much surprised by this vision before me that it completely absorbed my mind and I did not think of myself.

Lumen witnesses the scenes of the French Revolution

At last my sight was fully developed, and I perceived the spectacle in all its details. I could distinguish, in the midst of the Place de la Concorde, a scaffold, surrounded by a formidable array of war, drums, cannon, and a motley crowd armed with pikes. A cart, led by a man in red, bore the remains of Louis XVI. in the direction of the Faubourg St. Honoré. An intoxicated mob lifted their fists to heaven. Some horsemen, sabre in hand, mournfully followed. Towards the Champs-Élysées there were ditches into which the curious stumbled. But the agitation was concentrated in this region. It did not extend into the town, which appeared dead and deserted; the terror had thrown it into a state of lethargy.

I was not present during the events of 1793, since that was the year of my birth, and I felt an inexpressible interest in being thus a witness of these scenes of which I had read in history. I have often discussed and debated the vote of the Convention, but I confess to you I see no excuse of state in the execution of such men as Lavoisier, the creator of chemistry, Bailly, the historian of astronomy, André Chenier, the sweet poet, or the condemnation of Condorcet, the philosopher. These have roused my indignation much more than the punishment of Louis XVI. I was intensely interested at being thus a witness of this vanished epoch. But you may imagine how much greater was my surprise, and how much more I was astonished, *that I beheld in 1864 events actually present before me which had taken place at the end of the last century.*

Quærens. In truth, it seems to me that this feeling of its impossibility ought to have awakened doubt in you. Visions are essentially illusory. We cannot admit their reality even though we see them.

Lumen. Yes, my friend, it was as you say, impossible! Now can you understand my experience in seeing with my own eyes this paradox realised? The common saying is, "One cannot believe one's own eyes." That was just my position. It was impossible to deny what I saw, and equally impossible to admit it.

Quærens. But was it not a conception of your own mind, a creation of your imagination, or perhaps a reminiscence of your memory? Are you sure it was a reality, not a strange reflection from your memory?

Not a paradox

Lumen. That was my first idea; but it was so obvious that I saw before me the Paris of '93, and the events of January 21, that I could no longer be in any doubt about it. Besides, this explanation was anticipated by the fact that the old men of the mountain had preceded me in observing these phenomena, and they had seen, and analysed, and conversed on them as actual facts without knowing anything of the history of our world, and were quite unaware of my knowledge of that history. Further, we had before our eyes *a present fact*, not a past event.

Quærens. But, on the other hand, if the past can be thus merged into the present, if reality and vision can be allied in this way, if persons long since dead can be seen again acting on the scene of life, if new structures and metamorphoses in a city like Paris can disappear and give place to the aspect of the city as it was formerly – in short, if the present can vanish and the past be re-created, what certainty can we have of anything? What becomes of the science of observation? What becomes of deductions and theories? On what solid foundation can we base our knowledge? If these things are true, ought we not henceforth to doubt everything, or else to believe everything?

A reality

Lumen. Yes, my friend, these considerations and many others occupied my mind and tormented me, but they did not do away with the reality which I was observing. When I had assured myself that we had *present* before our eyes the events of the year 1793, it immediately occurred to me that science, instead of conflicting with these facts, ought to furnish an explanation of them, for two truths can never be opposed to one another. I investigated the physical laws, and I discovered the solution of the mystery.

Quærens. What! the facts were real?

Explanation of the apparent paradox

Lumen ascertains the place where he was in space

Lumen. They were not only real, but comprehensible and capable of demonstration. You shall have an astronomical explanation of them. In the first place, I examined the position of the Earth in the constellation of the Altar as I have told you; I took the bearings of my position relatively to the Polar star and to the Zodiac. I remarked that the constellations were not very different from those we see from the Earth, and that except in the case of a few particular stars, their positions were evidently the same. Orion still reigned in the ultra-equatorial region, the Great Bear pursuing his circular course still pointing to the north. In comparing the apparent movements, and co-ordinating them scientifically, I calculated that the point where I saw the group of the Sun, the Earth, and the planets, marked the 17th hour of right ascension, that is to say, about the 256th degree, or nearly so. I had no instrument to take exact measurements. I observed, in the second place, that it was on the 44th degree from the South Pole. I made these observations to ascertain the star on which I then was, and I was led to conclude that I was on a star situated on the 76th degree of right ascension, and the 46th degree of north declination. On the other hand, I knew from the words of the old man that the star on which we were was not far from our Sun, since he considered it to be one of the neighbouring stars. From these data I had no difficulty in recalling the star that stands in the position I had determined. One only answered to it, that of the first magnitude, Alpha in the constellation of Auriga, named also *Capella*, or the *Goat*.

There was no doubt about this. Thus I was certain that I was on one of the planetary worlds of the sun Capella. From thence our Sun looks like a simple star, and appears in perspective to be in the constellation of the Altar, just opposite that of Auriga, as seen from the Earth.

Then I tried to remember what was the parallax of this star. I recalled that a friend of mine, a Russian astronomer, had made a calculation, which had been confirmed, of this parallax. It was proved to be 0,"046. – When I had thus solved the mystery my heart beat with joy. Every geometrician knows that parallax indicates mathematically the distance in units of the magnitude employed in the calculation. I sought then to recall exactly the distance which separated this star from the Earth, in order to prove the accuracy of the calculation. I only needed to find out what number corresponded to 0,"046.²

² Every one knows that the farther an object is, the smaller it appears. An object which is seen under an angle of one second, is at a distance of 206,265 times its own diameter, whatever it may be; because as there are 1,296,000 seconds in the circumference, the ratio between the circumference and its diameter being $314,159 \times 2$, it follows that this object is at a distance equal to 206,265 times its own diameter. As Capella sees the semi-diameter of the terrestrial orbit only under an angle 22 times smaller, its distance is 22 times greater. Capella is therefore at a distance of 4,484,000 times the radius of the terrestrial orbit. Future micrometrical measurements

The velocity of light

Expressed in millions of leagues, this number is 170,392,000, and so, from the star on which I was, the Earth was distant 170 billions 392 thousand millions of leagues. The principle was thus established, and the problem was three parts solved. Now, here is the main point, to which I call your special attention, for you will find in it an explanation of the most marvellous realities. Light, you know, does not cross instantaneously from one place to another, but in successive waves. If you throw a stone into a pool of tranquil water, a series of undulations form around the point where the stone fell. In the same way, sound undulates in the air when passing from one point to another, and thus, also, light travels in space – it is transmitted in successive undulations. The light of a star takes a certain time to reach the Earth, and this time naturally depends on the distance which separates the star from the Earth.

How the heavenly bodies are seen

Sound travels 340 metres in a second. A cannon shot is heard immediately by those who fire it, a second later by persons who are at a distance of 340 metres, in three seconds by those who are a kilometre off, twelve seconds after the shot at four kilometres. It takes two minutes to reach those who are ten times farther off, and those who live at a distance of a hundred kilometres hear this human thunder in five minutes. Light travels with much greater swiftness, but it is not transmitted instantaneously, as the ancients supposed. It travels at the rate of 300,000 kilometres per second, and if it could revolve, might encircle the Earth eight times in a second. Light occupies one second and a quarter to come from the Moon to the Earth, eight minutes and thirteen seconds to come from the Sun, forty-two minutes to come from Jupiter, two hours to come from Uranus, and four hours to come from Neptune. Therefore, we see the heavenly bodies not as they are at the moment we observe them, but as they were when the luminous ray which reaches us left them. If a volcano were to burst forth in eruption on one of the worlds I have named, we should not see the flames in the Moon till a second and a quarter had elapsed, if in Jupiter not till forty-two minutes, in Uranus two hours after, and we should not see it in Neptune till four hours after the eruption. The distances are incomparably more vast outside our planetary system, and the light is still longer in reaching us. Thus, a luminous ray coming from the star nearest to us, Alpha, in Centaurus, takes four years in coming. A ray from Sirius is nearly ten years in crossing the abyss which separates us from that sun. The star Capella, being the distance above mentioned from the Earth, it is easy to calculate, at the rate of 300,000 kilometres the second, what time is needed to cross this distance. The calculation amounts to seventy-one years, eight months, and twenty-four days. The luminous ray, therefore, which came from Capella to the Earth, traversed space without interruption seventy-one years, eight months, and twenty-four days before it was visible on the Earth. In like manner, the ray of light which leaves the Earth can only arrive at Capella in the same period of time.

Time occupied in the transmission of light

Quærens. If the luminous ray which comes from that star takes nearly seventy-two years to reach us, it follows that we see the star as it was nearly seventy-two years ago?

Lumen. You are quite right, and this is the fact that I want you take note of specially.

may modify these results concerning the parallax of this star, but they cannot change the principle upon which the conception of this work is grounded.

A belated courier

Quærens. In other words, the ray of light is like a courier who brings despatches from a distant country, and having been nearly seventy-two years on the way, his news is of events that occurred at the time of his departure seventy-two years ago.

Lumen. You have divined the mystery. Your illustration shows me that you have lifted the veil which shrouded it. In order to be still more exact, the light represents a courier who brings, not written news, but photographs, or, strictly speaking, *the real aspect* of the country from whence he came. We see this living picture such as it appeared, in all its aspects, at the moment when the luminous rays shot forth from the distant orb. Nothing is more simple, nothing more indubitable. When we examine the surface of a star with a telescope we see, not the actual surface as it was at the time of our observation, but such as it was when the light was emitted from that surface.

Quærens. This being so, if a star, the light of which takes ten years to reach us, were to be annihilated to-day, we should continue to see it for ten years, since its last ray would not reach us before ten years had elapsed.

We see the past, not the present, aspect of the stars

Lumen. It is precisely so. In short, the rays of light that proceed from the stars do not reach us instantaneously, but occupy a certain time in crossing the distance which separates us from them, and show us those stars not as they are now, but such as they were at the moment in which those rays set out to transmit the aspect of the stars to us. Thus we behold a wondrous *transformation of the past into the present*. In the star we observe we see the past, which has already disappeared, while to the observer it is the present, the actual. Strictly speaking, the past of the star is positively the present of the observer. As the aspect of the worlds change from year to year, almost from day to day, one can imagine these aspects emerging into space and advancing into the infinite, and thus revealing their phases in the sight of far-distant spectators. Each aspect or appearance is followed by another, and so on in endless sequence. Thus a series of undulations bears from afar the past history of the worlds which the observer sees in its various phases as they successively reach him. The events which we see in the stars at present are already past, and that which is actually happening there we cannot as yet see. Realise to yourself, my friend, this presentation of an actual fact, for it is of importance to you to comprehend the precession of the waves of light and to understand the essential nature of this undoubted truth. The appearance of things, borne to us by light, shows us those things not as they are at present, but as they were in that period of the past which preceded the interval of time needed for the light to traverse the distance which separates us from those events.

We do not see any of the stars such as they are, but such as they were when the luminous rays that reach us left them.

The planet Earth as seen from afar

It is not the actual condition of the heavens that is visible, but their past history. Moreover, there are distant stars which have been extinct for ten thousand years, but which we can see still, because the rays of light from them had set out before they were extinguished. Some of the double stars, the nature and movements of which we seek with care and toil, ceased to exist long before astronomers began to make observations. If the visible heavens were to be annihilated to-day we should still see stars to-morrow, even next year, and for a hundred years, a thousand years, and even for fifty and a hundred thousand years, or more, with the exception only of the nearest stars, which would disappear

successively as the time needed for their luminous rays to reach us expired. Alpha of Centaur would go out first, in four years, Sirius in ten years, and so on.

Now, my friend, you can easily apply a scientific theory in explanation of these strange facts of which I was witness. If from the Earth one sees the star Capella, not as it is at the moment of observation, but as it was seventy-two years before, in the same way from Capella one would see the Earth as it was seventy-two years earlier, for light takes the same time to traverse the distance either way.

Quærens. Master, I have followed your explanation attentively. But, I ask you, does the Earth shine like a star? Surely she is not luminous?

The other planets seen from afar

Lumen. She reflects in space the light of the Sun; the greater the distance the more our planet resembles a star. All the light that radiates from the Sun on its surface is condensed into a disc that becomes smaller and smaller. Seen from the Moon our Earth appears fourteen times more luminous than the full Moon, because she is fourteen times larger than the Moon. Seen from the planet Venus the Earth appears as bright as Jupiter appears to us. From the planet Mars the Earth is the morning and the evening star, presenting phases like those of Venus to us. Thus, although our Earth is not luminous herself, she shines afar like the Moon and the planets, by the light that she receives from the Sun, and reflects into space.

Now the events taking place on Neptune, if seen from the Earth, would have a delay of four hours; in like manner the view of life on the Earth could only reach Neptune in the same time; nearly seventy-two years, therefore, separate Capella and the Earth.

Quærens. Although these views are new and strange to me, I now understand perfectly how, since the light was nearly seventy-two years in traversing the abyss which separates the Earth from Capella, you beheld not the Earth as it was in October 1864, the date of your death, but as it appeared in January 1793. And I comprehend quite as clearly that what you saw was neither a phenomenon of memory, nor a supernatural experience, but an actual, positive, and incontestable fact, and that in very truth what had long passed away on the Earth was only then present to an observer at that distance. But permit me to ask you an incidental question. In coming from the Earth to Capella did you cross that distance even more quickly than light?

Thought swifter than light

Lumen. Have I not already anticipated your question in telling you that I crossed this distance with the swiftness of thought. On the very day of my death I found myself on this star, which I had admired and loved so much all my life on the terrestrial globe.

Quærens. Ah, Master, although everything is thus explained, your vision is not the less wonderful. Truly it is an astonishing phenomenon that of seeing thus at once the *past in the present* in this extraordinary manner. Not less marvellous is the thought of seeing the stars, not such as they are when one makes the observation, nor as they have been simultaneously, but as they have been at different epochs according to their distances, and the time that the light of each has taken in coming to the Earth!

Light

Lumen. I venture to say that the natural astonishment that you feel in contemplating this truth is only the prelude to the things which I have now to unfold to you. Undoubtedly, it appears at first

sight very extraordinary, that by removing to a distance in space, one can become a witness of long past events, and remount as it were the stream of time. But this is not more strange than what I have yet to communicate to you, and which will appear to you still more imaginary if you can listen a little longer to the narrative of that day which followed my death.

Quærens. Go on, I beg of you, I am eager to hear you.

III

Lumen sees his own life on Earth

Lumen. On turning away from the sanguinary scenes of the Place de la Révolution, my eyes were attracted towards a habitation of somewhat an antique style, situated in front of Notre Dame, and occupying the place of the present square in front of the cathedral. I saw a group of five persons before the entrance of the cathedral, who were reclining on wooden benches in the sunshine, with their heads uncovered. When they rose and crossed the square, I perceived that one was my father, younger than I could remember him, another my mother, still younger, and a third a cousin of mine who died the same year as my father, now nearly forty years ago. I found it difficult at first to recognise these persons, for instead of facing them, I saw them only from on high above their heads. I was not a little surprised at this unlooked-for meeting, but then I remembered that I had heard that my parents lived in the Place Notre Dame before my birth. I cannot tell you how profoundly I was affected by this sight; my perception seemed to fail me, and a cloud appeared to obscure Paris from my view. I felt as though I had been carried off by a whirlwind; for, as you are aware, I had lost all sense of time. When I began again to see objects distinctly, I noticed a troop of children running across the Place de Panthéon. They looked like school children coming out of class; for they had their portfolios and books in their hands, and were apparently going to their homes, gambolling and gesticulating. Two of them attracted me especially, for I saw they were quarrelling and just preparing to fight, and another little fellow was advancing to separate them when he received a blow on the shoulder and was thrown down. In an instant a woman ran to help him; this was my own mother. Words fail me to tell my amazement when I perceived that the child to whose rescue my mother came was *my own self*. Never in my seventy-two years of earthly life, with all the unlooked-for changes and strange events with which it was crowded, never in all its surprises and chances have I felt such emotion as this sight caused me; I was completely overcome when in this child I recognised —*myself!*

Quærens. You saw yourself?

Lumen. Yes, myself, with the blond curls of six years of age, with my little collar embroidered by my mother's hands, my little blouse of light blue colour, and the cuffs always rumpled. There I was, the very same as you have seen in the half-effaced miniature that stood on my mantelpiece. My mother came over to me, and sharply reproving the other boys, took me up in her arms, and then led me by the hand into the house, which was close to the Rue d'Ulm. There I saw that, after passing through the house, we reappeared in the garden in the midst of a numerous company.

Quærens. Master, pardon me a criticism. I confess to you that it appears to me impossible that you could see yourself; you could not be two persons; and since you were seventy-two years old, your infancy was passed, and had totally disappeared. You could not see a thing that no longer existed. I cannot comprehend how when an old man you could see yourself as an infant.

Lumen. Why cannot you admit this point on the same grounds as the preceding ones?

Quærens. Because you cannot see yourself double, an infant and an old man, at the same time.

A logical inference

Lumen. Look at the matter more closely, my friend. You admit the general fact, but you do not sufficiently observe, that this last particular is logically inferred from that fact. You admit that the view I had of the Earth was seventy-two years in coming to me, do you not? that events reached me only at that interval of time after they had taken place? in short, that I saw the world as it was at

that epoch? You admit, likewise, that as I saw the streets of that time I saw also the children running in those streets? You admit all this?

Quærens. Yes, decidedly.

Lumen. Well, then, since I saw this troop of children, and myself amongst them, why do you say I could not see myself as well as the others?

Quærens. But you were no longer there amongst them!

Lumen. Again, I repeat, this whole troop of children has ceased to exist. But I saw them such as they were at the moment the ray of light left the Earth, which only reached me at the present time. And as I could distinguish the fifteen to eighteen children in the group, there was no reason why I should disappear from amongst them because I myself was the distant spectator. Since any other observer could see me in company with my comrades, why should I form an exception? I saw them all, and I saw myself amongst them.

Quærens. I had not fully taken in the idea. It is evident, in short, that seeing a troop of children, of whom you were one, you could not fail to see yourself as well as you saw the others.

Lumen sees himself a child

Lumen. Now you can understand into what a state of surprise I was thrown. This child was really myself, flesh and bones, as the vulgar expression has it – myself, at the age of six years. I saw myself as well as the company in the garden who were playing with me saw me. It was no mirage, no vision, no spectre, no reminiscence, no image; it was reality, positively myself, my thought and my body. I was there before my eyes. If my other senses had the perfection of my sight, it seemed as though I should have been able to touch and hear myself. I jumped about the garden and ran round the pond, which had a balustrade around it. Some time after my grandfather took me on his knees and made me read in a big book. It is not possible for me to describe my astonishment. I must leave you to imagine what it was to me, and to realise the fact, now that you understand upon what it was based. Suffice it to say, that I had never received such a surprise in my life. One reflection especially puzzled me. I said to myself, this child is really me, he is alive, he will grow up, and he ought to live sixty-six years longer. It is undoubtedly myself. And on the other hand, here I am, having lived seventy-two years of the terrestrial life. I who now think and see these things, I am still myself, and this child is me also. *Am I then two beings*, one there below, on the Earth, and the other here in space – two complete persons and yet quite distinct? An observer, placed where I am, could see this child in the garden, as I see him, and at the same time see me here. I must be two – it is incontestable. My soul is in this child; it is no less here. It is the same soul, my own soul. How can it animate two beings? What a strange reality! For I cannot say that I delude myself, or that what I see is an optical illusion, for both according to nature, and by the laws of science, I see at once a child and an old man – the one there beyond, the other here where I am, the former joyous and free-hearted, the other pensive and agitated.

Quærens. In truth it is strange!

Lumen sees himself a young man

Lumen witnesses the events of the Hundred Days

Lumen. Yes, but no less true. You may search through all creation and not find such a paradox. Well, to proceed with my history, I saw myself grow up in this vast city of Paris, I saw myself enter college in 1804, and perform my first military exercises when the First Consul was crowned Emperor.

One day as I passed by the Carrousel I got a glimpse of the domineering and thoughtful face of Napoleon. I could not remember having seen him in my life, and it was interesting to see him thus pass across my field of view. In 1810 I saw myself promoted to the Polytechnic School, and there I was talking of the course of studies with François Arago, the best of comrades. He already belonged to the institute, and had replaced Monge at the school, because the Emperor had complained of the Jesuitism of Binet. I saw myself, in like manner, all through the brilliant years of my youth, full of projects of travels for scientific exploration, in company with Arago and Humboldt, travels which only the latter decided to undertake. Later on I saw myself during the Hundred Days, crossing quickly the little wood of the old Luxembourg, and then the Rue de l'Est and the avenue of the garden of the Rue St. Jaques, and hastening to meet my beloved under the lilac-trees. Sweet meetings all to ourselves, the confidences of our hearts, the silences of our souls, the transports of our evening conversations, were all presented to my astonished sight, no longer veiled by distance, but actually before my eyes. I was present again at the combat with the Allies on the Hill of Montmartre, and saw their descent into the capital, and the fall of the statue in the Place Vendôme, when it was drawn through the streets with cries of joy. I saw the camp of the English and the Prussians in the Champs-Élysées, the destruction of the Louvre, the journey to Ghent, the entrance of Louis XVIII.

Napoleon at St. Helena

The flag of the island of Elba floated before my eyes, and later on I sought out the far Atlantic isle where the eagle, with his wings broken, was chained. The rotation of the Earth soon brought before my eyes the Emperor in St. Helena sadly musing at the foot of a sycamore-tree.

Historical events appear in succession

Thus the events of the years as they passed were revealed to me in following my own career – my marriage, my various enterprises, my connections, my travels, my studies, and so on. I witnessed at the same time the development of contemporary history. To the restoration of Louis XVIII. succeeded the brief reign of Charles X. I saw the barricades of the days of July 1830, and not far from the throne of the Duke of Orleans I saw the Column of the Bastille arise. Passing rapidly over eighteen years, I perceived myself at the Luxembourg at the time when that magnificent avenue was opened, that avenue I loved so much, and which has been threatened by a recent decree. I saw Arago again, this time at the Observatory, and I beheld the crowd before the door of the new amphitheatre. I recognised the Sorbonne of Cousin and of Guizot. Then I shuddered as I saw my mother's funeral pass. She was a stern woman, and perhaps a little too severe in her judgments, but I loved her dearly, as you know. The singular and brief revolution of 1848 surprised me as much as when I first witnessed it. On the Place de la Bourse I saw Lamoricière, who was buried last year, and in the Champs-Élysées, Cavaignac, who has been dead five or six years. The 2nd of December found me an observer on my solitary tower, and from thence I witnessed many striking events which passed before me, and many others which were unknown to me.

Quærens. Did the event pass rapidly before you?

Lumen. I had no perception of time; but the whole retrospective panorama appeared to me in successive scenes – in less than a day, perhaps in a few hours.

Quærens. Then I do not understand you at all. Pardon your old friend this interruption, a little too abrupt perhaps. As I took it, you saw the real events of your life, not merely images of them. But, in view of the time necessary for the passage of light, these events appeared to you after they had happened. If, then, seventy-two terrestrial years had passed before your eyes, they should have taken seventy-two years to appear to you, and not a few hours. If the year 1793 appeared to you only in 1864, the year 1864, consequently, should only in 1936 appear to you.

The anachronism explained

Lumen. You have grounds for your fresh objection, and this proves to me that you have perfectly comprehended the theory of this fact. I fully appreciate your belief in me; indeed its consciousness helps me in my explanations. Thus it is not necessary that seventy-two years should be needed in which to review my life, for under the impulse of an involuntary force all its events passed before me in less than a day. Continuing to follow the course of my existence, I reached its later years, rendered memorable by the striking changes which had come over Paris. I saw our old friends, and you yourself; my daughter and her charming children; my family, and circle of acquaintances; and last of all I saw myself lying dead upon my bed, and I was present at the final scene. Yes; I tell you I had returned to the Earth. Drawn by the contemplation which absorbed my soul, I had quickly forgotten the mountain, the old men, and Capella. Even as a dream all faded from my mind.

I did not at first perceive the strange vision which captivated all my faculties. I cannot tell you either by what law or by what power souls can be transported with such rapidity from one place to another. Suffice it to say, *I had returned to the Earth* in less than a day, and I had entered my chamber even at the moment of my decease. Also in this returning voyage I had travelled faster than the rays of light, hence the various phases of my life on Earth had unrolled themselves to my sight in their successive stages as they occurred. When I reached half-way I saw the rays of light arriving only thirty-six years behind time, showing me the Earth, not as it appeared seventy-two years ago, but thirty-six. When I had travelled three-quarters of the way I saw things as they had been eighteen years ago; at the half of the last quarter, as they were nine years previously; until finally the whole acts of my life were condensed into less than one day because of the rapid rate at which my soul had travelled, which far surpassed the velocity of the rays of light.

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