

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

THE TEMPTATION OF ST.
ANTHONY

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The Temptation of St. Anthony

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Gustave Flaubert

The Temptation of St. Anthony

INTRODUCTION

It was at some period between 1875 and 1876 that Lafcadio Hearn – still a "cub" reporter on a daily paper in Cincinnati – began his translation of Flaubert's "Temptation of St. Anthony." The definitive edition of the work, over which the author had laboured for thirty years, had appeared in 1874.

Hearn was, in his early youth, singularly indifferent to the work of the Englishmen of the Victorian period. Though he knew the English masterpieces of that epoch, their large, unacademic freedom of manner awakened no echoes in his spirit. His instinctive taste was for the exquisite in style: for "that peculiar kneading, heightening, and recasting" which Matthew Arnold thought necessary for perfection. Neither did the matter, more than the manner of the Victorians appeal to him. The circumstances of his life had at so many points set him out of touch with his fellows that the affectionate mockery of Thackeray's pictures of English society were alien to his interest. The laughing heartiness of Dickens' studies of the man in the street hardly touched him. Browning's poignant analyses of souls were too rudely robust of manner to move him. Before essaying journalism Hearn had served for a while as an assistant in the Public Library, and there he had found and fallen under the spell, of the great Frenchman of the Romantic School of the '30's – that period of rich flowering of the Gallic genius. Gautier's tales of ancient weirdnesses fired his imagination. The penetrating subtleties of his verse woke in the boy the felicitous emotions which the virtuoso knows in handling cameos and enamellings by hands which have long been dust. So, also, Hugo's revivals of the passions and terrors of the mediæval world stirred the young librarian's eager interest. But most of all his spirit leapt to meet the tremendous drama of the "Temptation." He comprehended at once its large significance, its great import, and in his enthusiastic recognition of its value and meaning he set at once about giving it a language understood of the people of his own tongue.

Tunison tells of the little shy, shabby, half-blind boy – the long dull day of police reporting done – labouring at his desk into the small hours, with the flickering gas jet whistling overhead, and his myopic eyes bent close to the papers which he covered with beautiful, almost microscopic characters – escaping thus from the crass, raw world about him to delicately and painstakingly turn into English stories of Cleopatra's cruel, fantastic Egyptian Night's Entertainment. Withdrawing himself to transliterate tales of pallid beautiful vampires draining the veins of ardent boys: of lovely faded ghosts of great ladies descending from shadowy tapestries to coquette with romantic dreamers; or to find an English voice for the tragedy of the soul of the Alexandrian cenobite.

It was in such dreams and labours that he found refuge from the environment that was so antipathetic to his tastes, and in his immersion in the works of these virtuosos of words, in his passionate search for equivalents of the subtle nuances of their phrases, he developed his own style. A style full of intricate assonances, of a texture close woven and iridescent.

"One of Cleopatra's Night's" – a translation of some of Gautier's tales of glamour – was issued in 1882, but at "The Temptation of St. Anthony" the publishers altogether balked. The manuscript could not achieve even so much as a reading. America had in the '70's just begun to emerge from that state of provincial propriety in which we were accused of clothing even our piano legs in pantelettes. The very name of the work was sufficient to start modest shivers down the spine of all well regulated purveyors of books. It was largely due to the painters' conceptions of the nature of the hermit's trials that the story of Saint Anthony's spiritual struggle aroused instinctive terrors in all truly modest natures. The painters – who so dearly love to display their skill in drawing legs and busts – had been

went to push the poor old saint into the obscure of the background, and fill all the foreground with ladies of obviously the very lightest character, in garments still lighter, if possible. What had reputable American citizens to do with such as these jades? More especially such jades as seen through a French imagination! That Flaubert had brushed aside the gross and jejune conceptions of the painters the publishers would not even take the pains to learn.

It is amusing now to recall the nervous, timid proprieties of those days. At the time Hearn failed to see the laughable side of it. He was then too young and earnest, too passionate and too melancholy to have a sense of its humours.

He had brought his unfinished manuscript from Cincinnati to New Orleans, and had continued to work upon it in strange lodgings in gaunt, old half-ruined Creole houses; at the tables of odd little French cafés, or among the queer dishes in obscure Spanish and Chinese restaurants. He had snatched minutes for it amidst the reading and clipping of exchanges in a newspaper office; had toiled drippingly over it in the liquifying heats of tropic nights; had arisen from the "inexpugnable langours" of yellow fever to complete its last astounding pages.

I can remember applauding, with ardent youthful sympathy, his tirades against the stultifying influence of blind puritanism upon American literature. I recall his scornful mocking at the inconsistency which complacently accepted the vulgar seduction, and the theatrical Brocken revels of Faust, while shrinking piously from Flaubert's grim story of the soul of man struggling to answer the riddle of the universe. He had however an almost equal contempt for the author's countrymen, who received with eager interest and pleasure the deliberate analysis – in *Madame Bovary* – of a woman's degradation and ruin, while they yawned over the amazing history of humanity's tremendous spiritual adventures. Hearn's own sensitiveness shrank in pain from the cold insight which uncovered layer by layer the brutal squalour of a woman's moral disintegration. But he was moved and astounded by the revelation, in *St. Anthony*, of the tragedy and pathos of man's long search for some body of belief or philosophy by which he could explain to himself the strange great phenomena of life and death, and the inscrutable cruelties of Nature. The young translator was filled with a sort of astonished despair at his inability to make others see the book as he did – not realizing, in his youthful impatience, that the average mind clings to the concrete, and is puzzled and terrified by outlines of thought too large for its range of vision; that the commonplace intelligence cannot "see the wood for the trees," and becomes confused and over-weighted when confronted with the huge outlines of so great a picture as that drawn by Flaubert in his masterpiece.

There were many points of resemblance between Lafcadio Hearn and the grandson of the French veterinary. A resemblance rather in certain qualities of the spirit than in social conditions and physical endowments. Flaubert, born in 1821, was the son of a surgeon. His father was long connected with the Hôtel Dieu of Rouen, in which the boy was born, and in which he lived until his eighteenth year, when he went to Paris to study law. One of the friends of his early Parisian days describes him as "a young Greek. Tall, supple, and as graceful as an athlete. He was charming, *mais un peu farouche*. Quite unconscious of his physical and mental gifts; very careless of the impression he produced, and entirely indifferent to formalities. His dress consisted of a red flannel shirt, trousers of heavy blue cloth, and a scarf of the same colour drawn tight about his slender waist. His hat was worn 'any how' and often he abandoned it altogether. When I spoke to him of fame or influence... he seemed superbly indifferent. He had no desire for glory or gain... What was lacking in his nature was an interest in *les choses extérieures, choses utiles*." ...

One who saw him in 1879 found the young Greek athlete – now close upon sixty, and having in the interval created some of the great classics of French literature – "a huge man, a tremendous old man. His long, straggling gray hair was brushed back. His red face was that of a soldier, or a sheik – divided by drooping white moustaches. A trumpet was his voice, and he gesticulated freely ... the colour of his eyes a bit of faded blue sky."

The study of the law did not hold Flaubert long. It was one of those *choses extérieures, choses utiles* to which he was so profoundly indifferent. Paris bored him. He longed for Rouen, and for his little student chamber. There he had lain upon his bed whole days at a time; apparently as lazy as a lizard; smoking, dreaming; pondering the large, inchoate, formless dreams of youth.

In 1845 his father died, and in the following year he lost his sister Caroline, whom he had passionately loved, and for whom he grieved all his life. He rejoined his mother, and they established themselves at Croisset, near Rouen, upon a small inherited property. It was an agreeable house, pleasantly situated in sight of the Seine. Flaubert nourished with pleasure a local legend that Pascal had once inhabited the old Croisset homestead, and that the Abbé Prevost had written *Manon Lescaut* within its walls. Near the house – now gone – he built for himself a pavilion to serve as a study, and in this he spent the greater portion of the following thirty-four years in passionate, unremitting labour.

He made a voyage to Corsica in his youth; one to Brittany, with Maxime du Camp, in 1846; and spent some months in Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, and Greece in 1849. This Oriental experience gave him the most intense pleasure, and was the germ of *Salamambo*, and of the *Temptation of St. Anthony*. He never repeated it, though he constantly talked of doing so. He nursed a persistent, but unrealized dream of going as far as Ceylon, whose ancient name, Taprobana, he was never weary of repeating; utterance of its melifluous syllables becoming a positive *tic* with him. Despite these yearnings he remained at home. Despite his full-blooded physique he would take no more exercise than his terrace afforded, or an occasional swim in the Seine. He smoked incessantly, and for months at a stretch worked fifteen hours out of the twenty-four at his desk. Three hundred volumes might be annotated for a page of facts. He would write twenty pages, and reduce these by exquisite concisions, by fastidious rejections to three; would search for hours for the one word that perfectly conveyed the colour of his thought, and would – as in the case of the *Temptation* – wait fifteen years for a sense of satisfaction with a manuscript before allowing it to see the light. To Maxime du Camp, who urged him to hasten the completion of his book in order to take advantage of a favourable opportunity, he wrote angrily:

"Tu me parais avoir à mon endroit un tic ou vice rédhibitoire. Il ne m'embête pas; n'aie aucune crainte; mon parti est pris là-dessus depuis long temps. Je te dirai seulement que tous ces mots; *se dépêcher, c'est le moment, place prise, se poser, ...* sont pour moi un vocabulaire vide de sens..."

In one of his letters he says that on occasion he worked violently for eight hours to achieve one page. He endeavoured never to repeat a word in that page, and tried to force every phrase to respond to a rhythmic law. Guy de Maupassant, his nephew and pupil, says that to ensure this rhythm Flaubert "prenait sa feuille de papier, relevait à la hauteur du regard et, s'appuyant sur un coude, déclamaient, d'une voix mordant et haute. Il écoutait la rythme de sa prose, s'arrêtait comme pour saisir une sonorité fuyant, combinait les tons, éloignait les assonances, disposait les virgules avec conscience, comme les haltes d'un long chemin." ...

Flaubert said himself, "une phrase est viable quand elle correspond à toutes les nécessités de respiration. Je sais qu'elle est bonne lorsqu'elle peut être lu tout haut."

Henry Irving used to say of himself that it was necessary he should work harder than other actors because nature had dowered him with flexibility of neither voice nor feature, and Faguet says that Flaubert was forced to this excessive toil and incessant watchfulness because he did not write well naturally. Nevertheless Flaubert's work did not smell of the lamp. Whatever shape his ideas may have worn at birth when full grown they moved with large classic grace and freedom, simple, sincere, and beautiful in form. François Coppée calls him "the Beethoven of French prose."

So conscientious a workman, so laborious and self-sacrificing an artist had a natural attraction for Lafcadio Hearn, who even in boyhood began to feel his vocation as "a literary monk." The whole tendency of his tastes prepared him to understand the true importance of Flaubert's masterpiece, fitted him especially of all living writers to turn that masterpiece into its true English equivalent. The two men had much in common. Both were proud and timid. Both had a fundamental indifference to

choses extérieures, choses utiles. Both were realists of the soul. Actions interested each but slightly; the emotions from which actions sprung very much. To both stupidity was even more antipathetic than wickedness, because each realized that nearly all cruelty and vice have their germ in ignorance and stupidity rather than in innate rascality. Flaubert declared, with a sort of rage, that "la bêtise entre dans mes pores." He might too have been speaking for Hearn when he said that the grotesque, the strange, and the monstrous had for him an inexplicable charm. "It corresponds," he says, "to the intimate needs of my nature – it does not cause me to laugh, but to dream long dreams." Hearn, however, mixed with this triste interest a quality that Flaubert seemed almost wholly to lack – a great tenderness for all things humble, feeble, ugly and helpless. Both from childhood were curious of poignant sensations, of the sad, the mysterious and the exotic. And for both the tropics had an irresistible fascination. Flaubert says, in one of his letters:

"I carry with me the melancholy of the barbaric races, with their instincts of migration, and their innate distaste of life, which forced them to quit their homes in order to escape from themselves. They loved the sun, all those barbarians who came to die in Italy; they had a frenzied aspiration toward the light, toward the blue skies, toward an ardent existence... Think that perhaps I will never see China, will never be rocked to sleep by the cadenced footsteps of camels ... will never see the shine of a tiger's eyes in the forest... You can treat all this as little worthy of pity, but I suffer so much when I think of it ... as of something lamentable and irremediable."

This is the nostalgia for the strange, for the unaccustomed, that all born wanderers know. Fate arranges it for many of them that their lives shall be uneventful, passed in dull, provincial narrowness; but behind these bars the clipped wings of their spirit are always flutteringly spread for flight. They know not what they seek, what desire drives them, but a sense of "the great adventure" unachieved keeps them restless until they die. It is such as these, these *voyageurs empassionés*, when condemned by fortune to a static existence – who find their outlet in mental wanderings amid the unusual, the grotesque, and the monstrous. Hearn and Flaubert both were at heart nomads, seekers of the unaccustomed; stretching toward immensities of space and time, toward the ghostly, the hidden, the unrealized. Like that wild fantastic *Chimera* of the "Temptation" each such soul declares "*je cherche des parfums nouveaux, des fleurs plus large, des plaisirs inédits.*"

Flaubert was but twenty-six when the first suggestion of his masterpiece came to him. For *La Tentation de St. Antoine*, it is coming to be understood, is his masterpiece; is one of the greatest literary achievements of the French mind. *Madame Bovary* is more widely famous and popular, but Flaubert himself always deeply resented this preference, and was always astonished at the comparative indifference of the world to the "Temptation." He, too, found it difficult to realize how hardly the average mind is awakened to an interest in the incorporeal; how surely cosmic generalizations escape the grasp of the commonplace intelligence.

Wagner waited a lifetime before the world was dragged reluctantly and resentfully up to a point from which it could discern the superiority of the tremendous finale of the *Götterdämmerung* to the Christmas-card chorus of angels chanting "*Âme chaste et pure*" to the beatified Marguerite. The whole prodigious structure of Wagner's dramatic and musical thought might have remained a mere adumbration in the soul of one German had chance not set a mad genius upon the throne of Bavaria. The bourgeoisie would – lacking this royal bullying – have continued to prefer Goethe and Gounod. Flaubert's great work unfortunately failed of such patronage.

It was in 1845 that an old picture by Breughel, seen at Genoa, first inspired Flaubert to attempt the story of St. Anthony. He sought out an engraving of this conception of Peter the Younger (surnamed "Hell-Breughel" for his fondness for such subjects), hung it on his walls at Croisset, and after three years of brooding upon it began, May 24, 1848, *La Tentation de St. Antoine*. In twelve months he had finished the first draught of the work, which bulked to 540 pages. It was laid aside for "Bovary," and a second version of the "Temptation" was completed in 1856, but this time the manuscript had been reduced to 193 pages, and the "blazing phrases, the jewelled words, the

turbulence, the comedy, the mysticism" of the first version had been superseded by a larger, more dramatic conception. In 1872 he made still a new draught, and by this time it had shrunk to 136 pages. He even then eliminated three chapters, and finally gave to the world in 1874 "this wonderful coloured panorama of philosophy, this Gulliver-like travelling amid the master ideas of the antique and early Christian worlds."

Faguet says, "In its primitive and legendary state the temptation of St. Anthony was nothing more than the story of a recluse tempted by the Devil through the flesh, by all the artifices at the Devil's disposal. In the definite thought of Flaubert the temptation of St. Anthony has become man's soul tempted by all the illusions of human thought and imagination. St. Anthony to the eyes of the first naive hagiologists is a second Adam, seduced by woman, who was inspired by Satan. St. Anthony conceived by Flaubert is a more thoughtful Faust; a Faust incapable of irony, not a Faust who could play with illusions and with himself – secretly persuaded that he could withdraw when he chose to give himself the trouble to do so – rather a Faust who approached, accosted, caressed all possible forms of universal illusions."

Flaubert's studies for the "Temptation" were tremendous. For nearly thirty years he touched and retouched, altered, enlarged, condensed. He kneaded into its substance the knowledge, incessantly sought, of all religions and philosophies; of all the forms man's speculations had taken in his endless endeavours to explain to himself Life and Fate; humanity's untiring, passionate effort to find the meaning of its mysterious origin and purpose, and final destiny. How terrible, how naive, how fantastic, bloody, grovelling, and outrageous were most of the solutions accepted, the gigantic panorama of the book startlingly sets forth. What gory agonies, what mystic exaltations, what dark cruelties, frenzied abandons, and inhuman self denials have marked those puzzled gropings for light and truth are revealed as by lightning flashes in the crowding scenes of the epic. For the Temptation of St. Anthony is an epic. Not a drama of man's actions, as all previous epics have been, but a drama of the soul. All its movement is in the adventure and conflict of the spirit. St. Anthony remains always in the one place, almost as moveless as a mirror. His vision – clarified of the sensual and the actual by his fastings and macerations – becomes like the surface of an unruffled lake. A lake reflecting the aberrant forms of thoughts that, like clouds, drift between man and the infinite depths of knowledge. Clouds of illusion forever changing, melting, fusing; assuming forms grotesque, monstrous, intolerable; until at last the writhing mists of speculation and ignorance are drunk up by the widening light of wisdom and the fogs and phantasms vanish, leaving his consciousness aware, in poignant ecstasy, of the cloudless deeps of truth. The temptation of the flesh is but a passing episode. An eidolon of Sheba's queen offers him luxury, wealth, voluptuous beauty, power, dainty delights of eye and palate in vain. Man has never found his most dangerous seductions in the appetites. More lamentable disintegration has grown from his attempts to pierce beyond the body's veil. The parched and tortured saint is whirled by vertiginous visions through cycles of man's straining efforts to know why, whence, whither. He assists at the rites of Mithira, the prostrations of serpent-and-devil-worshippers, worshippers of fire, of light, of the Greeks' deified forces of nature; of the northern enthronement of brute force and war. He is swept by the soothing breath of Quietism, plunges into every heresy and philosophy, sees the orgies, the flagellations, the self mutilations, the battles and furies of sects, each convinced that it has found the answer at last to the Great Question, and endeavouring to constrain the rest of humanity to accept the answer. He meets the Sphinx – embodied interrogation – and the Chimera – the simulacrum of the fantasies of the imagination – dashing madly about the stolid querist.

Lucifer – spirit of doubt of all dogmatic solutions – mounts with Anthony into illimitable space. They rise beyond these struggles and furies into the cold uttermost of the universe; among innumerable worlds; worlds yet vaguely forming in the womb of time, newly come to birth, lustily grown to maturity; worlds dying, decaying, crumbling again into atomic dust. Overcome by the intolerable Vast, Anthony sinks once more to his cell, and Lucifer, who has shown him the

macrocosm, opens to him the equal immensity of the microcosm. Makes him see the swarming life that permeates the seas, the earth and atmosphere, the incredible numerousness of the invisible lives that people every drop of water, every grain of sand, every breath of air. The unity of life dawns upon him, and his heart, withered by dubiety, melts into joyousness and peace. As the day dawns in gold he beholds the face of Christ.

Flaubert's Lucifer has no relation to the jejune Devil of man's early conception of material evil, nor does he resemble Goethe's Mephistopheles; embodiment of the Eighteenth Century's spirit of sneering disbeliefs and negation. He is rather our own tempter – Science. He is the spirit of Knowledge: Nature itself calling us to look into the immensities and read just our dogmas by this new and terrible widening of our mental and moral horizons. This last experience of the Saint reproduces the spiritual experiences of the modern man; cast loose from his ancient moorings, and yet finding at last in his new knowledge a truer conception of the brotherhood of all life in all its forms, and seeing still, in the growing light, the benignant eyes of God.

It is not remarkable that Flaubert resented the banality, the dull grossness of the reception of his work, or that Hearn shared his amazement and bitterness. Even yet the world wakes but slowly to the true character of this masterpiece; this epic wrought with so great a care and patience, so instinct with genius, dealing perhaps more profoundly than any other mind has ever done with the Great Adventure of humanity's eternal search for Truth.

ELIZABETH BISLAND.

ARGUMENT

FRAILITY

Sunset in the desert. Enfeebled by prolonged fasting, the hermit finds himself unable to concentrate his mind upon holy things. His thoughts wonder; memories of youth evoke regrets that his relaxed will can no longer find strength to suppress, – and, remembrance begetting remembrance, his fancy leads him upon dangerous ground. He dreams of his flight from home, – of Ammonaria, his sister's playmate, – of his misery in the waste, – his visit to Alexandria with the blind monk Didymus, – the unholy sights of the luxurious city.

Involuntarily he yields to the nervous dissatisfaction growing upon him. He laments his solitude, his joylessness, his poverty, the obscurity of his life; grace departs from him; hope burns low within his heart. Suddenly revolting against his weakness, he seeks refuge from distraction in the study of the Scriptures.

Vain effort! An invisible hand turns the leaves, placing perilous texts before his eyes. He dreams of the Maccabees slaughtering their enemies, and desires that he might do likewise with the Arians of Alexandria; – he becomes inspired with admiration of King Nebuchadnezzar; – he meditates voluptuously upon the visit of Sheba's queen of Solomon; – discovers a text in the Acts of the Apostles antagonistic to principles of monkish ascetism, – indulges in reveries regarding the riches of Biblical kings and holy men. The Tempter comes to tempt him with evil hallucinations for which the Saint's momentary frailty has paved the way; and with the Evil One come also

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Phantom gold is piled up to excite Covetousness; shadowy banquets appear to evoke Gluttony. The scene shifts to aid the temptations of Anger and of Pride...

Anthony finds himself in Alexandria, at the head of a wild army of monks slaughtering the heretics and the pagans, without mercy for age or sex. In fantastic obedience to the course of his fancy while reading the Scriptures a while before, and like an invisible echo of his evil thoughts, the scene changes again. Alexandria is transformed into Constantinople.

Anthony finds himself the honoured of the Emperor. He beholds the vast circus in all its splendour, the ocean of faces, the tumult of excitement. Simultaneously he beholds his enemies degraded to the condition of slaves, toiling in the stables of Constantine. He feels joy in the degradation of the Fathers of Nicæa. Then all is transformed.

It is no longer the splendour of Constantinople he beholds under the luminosity of a Greek day; but the prodigious palace of Nebuchadnezzar by night. He beholds the orgies, the luxuries, the abominations; – and the spirit of Pride enters triumphantly into him as the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar...

Awaking as from a dream, he finds himself again before his hermitage. A vast caravan approaches, halts; and the Queen of Sheba descends to tempt the Saint with the deadliest of all temptations. Her beauty is enhanced by oriental splendour of adornment; her converse is a song of withcraft. The Saint remains firm... The Seven Deadly Sins depart from him.

THE HERESIARCHS

But now the tempter assumes a subtler form. Under the guise of a former disciple of Anthony, – Hilarion, – the demon, while pretending to seek instruction, endeavours to poison the mind of

Anthony with hatred of the fathers of the church. He repeats all the scandals amassed by ecclesiastical intriguers, all the calumnies created by malice; – he cites texts only to foment doubt, and quotes the evangels only to make confusion. Under the pretext of obtaining mental enlightenment from the wisest of men, he induces Anthony to enter with him into a spectral basilica, wherein are assembled all the Heresiarchs of the third century. The hermit is confounded by the multitude of tenets, – horrified by the blasphemies and abominations of Elkes, Corpocrates, Valentinus, Manes, Cerdo, – disgusted by the perversions of the Paternians, Marcosians, Montanists, Serptians, – bewildered by the apocryphal Gospels of Eve and of Judas, of the Lord, and of Thomas.

And Hilarion grows taller.

THE MARTYRS

Anthony finds himself in the dungeons of a vast amphitheatre, among Christians condemned to the wild beasts. By this hallucination the tempter would prove to the Saint that martyrdom is not always suffered for purest motives. Anthony finds the martyrs possessed by bigotry and insincerity. He sees many compelled to die against their will; many who would forswear their faith could it avail them aught. He beholds heretics die for their heterodoxy more nobly than orthodox believers.

And he finds himself transported to the tombs of the martyrs. He witnesses the meetings of Christian women at the sepulchres. He beholds the touching ceremonies of prayer, change into orgies, – lamentations give place to amorous dalliance.

THE MAGICIANS

Then the Tempter seeks to shake Anthony's faith in the excellence and evidence of miracles. He assumes the form of a Hindoo[Pg xxviii] Brahmin, terminating a life of wondrous holiness by self-cremation; – he appears as Simon Magus and Helen of Tyre, – as Appollonius of Tyans, greatest of all thaumaturgists, who claims superiority to Christ. All the marvels related by Philostratus are embodied in the converse of Apollonius and Damis.

THE GODS

Hilarion reappears taller than ever, growing more gigantic in proportion to the increasing weakness of the Saint. Standing beside Anthony he evokes all the deities of the antique world. They defile before him in a marvellous panorama: – Gods of Egypt and India, Chaldea and Hellas, Babylon and Ultima Thule, – monstrous and multiform, phallic and ithyphallic, fantastic or obscene. Some intoxicate by their beauty; others appall by their foulness. The Buddha recounts the story of his wondrous life; Venus displays the rounded daintiness of her nudity; Isis utters awful soliloquy. Lastly the phantom of Jehovah appears, as the shadow of a god passing away forever.

Suddenly the stature of Hilarion towers to the stars; he assumes the likeness and luminosity of Lucifer; he announces himself as

SCIENCE

And Anthony is lifted upon mighty wings and borne away beyond the world, above the solar system, above the starry arch of the Milky Way. All future discoveries of Astronomy are revealed to him. He is tempted by the revelation of innumerable worlds, – by the refutation of all his previous ideas of the nature of the Universe, – by the enigmas of infinity, – by all the marvels that conflict with

faith. Even in the night of immensity the demon renews the temptation of reason: Anthony wavers upon the verge of pantheism.

LUST AND DEATH

Anthony abandoned by the spirit of Science comes to himself in the desert. Then the Tempter returns under a two-fold aspect: as the Spirit of Lust and the Spirit of Destruction. The latter urges him to suicide, – the former to indulgence of sense. They inspire him with strong fancies of palingenesis, of the illusion of death, of the continuity of life. The pantheistic temptation intensified.

THE MONSTERS

Anthony in reveries meditates upon the monstrous symbols painted upon the walls of certain ancient temples. Could he know their meaning he might learn also something of the secret lien between Matter and Thought. Forthwith a phantasmagoria of monsters commence to pass before his eyes: – the Sphinx and the Chimera, the Blemmyes and Astomi, the Cynocephali and all creatures of mythologic creation. He beholds the fabulous beings of Oriental imagining, – the abnormities described by Pliny and Herodotus, the fantasticalities to be later adopted by heraldry, – the grotesqueries of future medieval illumination made animate; – the goblinries and foulnesses of superstitious fancy, – the Witches' Sabbath of abominations.

METAMORPHOSIS

The multitude of monsters melts away; the land changes into an Ocean; the creatures of the briny abysses appear. And the waters in turn also change; seaweeds are transformed to herbs, forests of coral give place to forests of trees, polypous life changes to vegetation. Metals crystallize; frosts effloresce; plants become living things, inanimate matter takes animate form, monads vibrate, the pantheism of nature makes itself manifest. Anthony feels a delirious desire to unite himself with the Spirit of Universal Being...

The vision vanishes. The sun arises. The face of Christ is revealed. The temptation has passed; Anthony kneels in prayer.

L. H.

THE TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTHONY

I

It is in the Thebaid at the summit of a mountain, upon a platform, rounded off into the form of a demilune, and enclosed by huge stones.

The Hermit's cabin appears in the background. It is built of mud and reeds, it is flat-roofed and doorless. A pitcher and a loaf of black bread can be distinguished within also, in the middle of the apartment a large book resting on a wooden stela; while here and there, fragments of basketwork, two or three mats, a basket, and a knife lie upon the ground.

Some ten paces from the hut, there is a long cross planted in the soil; and, at the other end of the platform, an aged and twisted palm tree leans over the abyss; for the sides of the mountain are perpendicular, and the Nile appears to form a lake at the foot of the cliff.

The view to right and left is broken by the barrier of rocks. But on the desert-side, like a vast succession of sandy beaches, immense undulations of an ashen-blond color extend one behind the other, rising higher as they recede; and far in the distance, beyond the sands, the Libyan chain forms a chalk-colored wall, lightly shaded by violet mists. On the opposite side the sun is sinking. In the north the sky is of a pearl-gray tint, while at the zenith purple clouds disposed like the tufts of a gigantic mane, lengthen themselves against the blue vault. These streaks of flame take darker tones; the azure spots turn to a nacreous pallor; the shrubs, the pebbles, the earth, all now seem hard as bronze; and throughout space there floats a golden dust so fine as to become confounded with the vibrations of the light.

Saint Anthony, who has a long beard, long hair, and wears a tunic of goatskin, is seated on the ground cross-legged, and is occupied in weaving mats. As soon as the sun disappears, he utters a deep sigh, and, gazing upon the horizon, exclaims: —

"Another day! another day gone! Nevertheless formerly I used not to be so wretched. Before the end of the night I commenced my orisons; then I descended to the river to get water, and remounted the rugged pathway with the skin upon my shoulder, singing hymns on the way. Then I would amuse myself by arranging everything in my hut. I would make my tools; I tried to make all my mats exactly equal in size, and all my baskets light; for then my least actions seemed to me duties in nowise difficult or painful of accomplishment.

"Then at regular hours I ceased working; and when I prayed with my arms extended, I felt as though a fountain of mercy were pouring from the height of heaven into my heart. That fountain is now dried up. Why?"

(He walks up and down slowly, within the circuit of the rocks.)

"All blamed me when I left the house. My mother sank to the ground, dying; my sister from afar off made signs to me to return; and the other — wept, Ammonaria, the child whom I used to meet every evening at the cistern, when she took the oxen to drink. She ran after me. Her foot rings glittered in the dust; and her tunic, open at the hips, fluttered loosely in the wind. The aged anchorite who was leading me away called her vile names. Our two camels galloped forward without respite; and I have seen none of my people since that day.

"At first, I selected for my dwelling place, the tomb of a Pharaoh. But an enchantment circulates through all those subterranean palaces, where the darkness seems to have been thickened by the ancient smoke of the aromatics. From the depths of Sarcophagi, I heard doleful voices arise, and call my name; or else, I suddenly beheld the abominable things painted upon the walls live and move; and I fled away to the shore of the Red Sea, and took refuge in a ruined citadel. There my only companions were the scorpions dragging themselves among the stones, and the eagles continually wheeling above my head, in the blue of heaven. At night I was torn by claws, bitten by beaks; soft wings brushed

against me; and frightful demons, shrieking in my ears, flung me upon the ground. Once I was even rescued by the people of a caravan going to Alexandria; and they took me away with them.

"Then I sought to obtain instruction from the good old man Didymus. Although blind, none equalled him in the knowledge of the Scriptures. When the lesson was finished, he used to ask me to give him my arm to lean upon, that we might walk together. Then I would conduct him to the Paneum, whence may be seen the Pharos and the open sea. Then we would return by way of the post, elbowing men of all nations, even Cimmerians clad in the skins of bears and Gymnosophists of the Ganges anointed with cow-dung. But there was always some fighting in the streets – either on account of the Jews refusing to pay taxes, or of seditious people who wished to drive the Romans from the city. Moreover, the city is full of heretics – followers of Manes; Valentinus, Basilides, Arius – all seeking to engross my attention in order to argue with me and to convince me.

"Their discourses often come back to my memory. Vainly do I seek to banish them from my mind. They trouble me!

"I took refuge at Colzin, and there lived a life of such penance that I ceased to fear God. A few men, desirous of becoming anchorites, gathered about me. I imposed a practical rule of life upon them, hating, as I did, the extravagance of Gnosus and the assertions of the philosophers. Messages were sent to me from all parts, and men came from afar off to visit me.

"Meanwhile the people were torturing the confessors; and the thirst of martyrdom drew me to Alexandria. The persecution had ceased three days before I arrived there!

"While returning thence, I was stopped by a great crowd assembled before the temple of Serapis. They told me it was a last example which the Governor had resolved to make. In the centre of the portico, under the sunlight, a naked woman was fettered to a column, and two soldiers were flogging her with thongs; at every blow her whole body writhed. She turned round, her mouth open; and over the heads of the crowd, through the long hair half hiding her face, I thought that I could recognize Ammonaria...

"Nevertheless ... this one was taller ... and beautiful ... prodigiously beautiful!"

(He passes his hands over his forehead.)

"No! no! I must not think of it!

"Another time Athanasius summoned me to assist him against the Arians. The contest was limited to invectives and laughter. But since that time he has been calumniated, dispossessed of his see, obliged to fly for safety elsewhere. Where is he now? I do not know! The people give themselves very little trouble to bring me news. All my disciples have abandoned me – Hilarion like the rest.

"He was perhaps fifteen years of age when he first came to me and his intelligence was so remarkable that he asked me questions incessantly. Then he used to listen to me with a pensive air, and whatever I needed he brought it to me without a murmur – nimbler than a kid, merry enough to make even the patriarchs laugh. He was a son to me."

(The sky is red; the earth completely black. Long drifts of sand follow the course of the gusts of wind, rising like great shrouds and falling again. Suddenly against a bright space in the sky a flock of birds pass, forming a triangular battalion, gleaming like one sheet of metal, of which the edges alone seem to quiver.

Anthony watches them.)

"Ah, how I should like to follow them.

"How often also have I enviously gazed upon those long vessels, whose sails resemble wings – and above all when they were bearing far away those I had received at my hermitage! What pleasant hours we passed! – what out-pourings of feeling! No one ever interested me more than Ammon: he told me of his voyage to Rome, of the Catacombs, the Coliseum, the piety of illustrious women, and a thousand other things! – and it grieved me to part with him! Wherefore my obstinacy in continuing to live such a life as this? I would have done well to remain with the monks of Nitria, inasmuch as they supplicated me to do so. They have cells apart, and nevertheless communicate with each other.

On Sundays a trumpet summons them to assemble at the church, where one may see three scourges hanging up, which serve to punish delinquents, robbers, and intruders; for their discipline is severe.

"Nevertheless they are not without some enjoyments. The faithful bring them eggs, fruits, and even instruments with which they can extract thorns from their feet. There are vineyards about Prisperi; those dwelling at Pabena have a raft on which they may journey when they go to seek provisions.

"But I might have served my brethren better as a simple priest. As a priest one may aid the poor, administer the sacraments, and exercise authority over families.

"Furthermore, all laics are not necessarily damned, and it only depended upon my own choice to become – for example – a grammarian, a philosopher. I would then have had in my chamber a sphere of reeds, and tablets always ready at hand, young men around me, and a wreath of laurel suspended above my door, as a sign.

"But there is too much pride in triumphs such as those. A soldier's life would have been preferable. I was robust and bold: bold enough to fasten the cables of the military machines – to traverse dark forests, or to enter, armed and helmeted, into smoking cities... Neither was there anything to have prevented me from purchasing with my money the position of publican at the toll-office of some bridge; and travellers would have taught me many strange things, and told me strange stories, the while showing me many curious objects packed up among their baggage...

"The merchants of Alexandria sail upon the river Canopus on holidays, and drink wine in the chalices of lotus-flowers, to a music of tambourines which makes the taverns along the shore tremble! Beyond, trees, made cone-shaped by pruning, protect the quiet farms against the wind of the south. The roof of the lofty house leans upon thin colonettes placed as closely together as the laths of a lattice; and through their interspaces the master, reclining upon his long couch, beholds his plains stretching about him – the hunter among the wheat-fields – the winepress where the vintage is being converted into wine, the oxen treading out the wheat. His children play upon the floor around him; his wife bends down to kiss him."

(Against the grey dimness of the twilight, here and there appear pointed muzzles, with straight, pointed ears and bright eyes. Anthony advances toward them. There is a sound of gravel crumbling down; the animals take flight. It was a troop of jackals.

One still remains, rising upon his hinder legs, with his body half arched and head raised in an attitude full of defiance.)

"How pretty he is! I would like to stroke his back gently!"

(Anthony whistles to coax him to approach. The jackal disappears.)

"Ah! he is off to join the others. What solitude! what weariness!" *(Laughing bitterly.)*

"A happy life this indeed! – bending palm-branches in the fire to make shepherds' crooks, fashioning baskets, stitching mats together – and then exchanging these things with the Nomads for bread which breaks one's teeth! Ah! woe, woe is me! will this never end? Surely death were preferable! I can endure it no more! Enough! enough!"

(He stamps his foot upon the ground, and rushes frantically to and fro among the rocks; then pauses, out of breath, bursts into tears, and lies down upon the ground, on his side.

The night is calm; multitudes of stars are palpitating; only the crackling noise made by the tarantulas is audible.

The two arms of the cross make a shadow upon the sand; Anthony, who is weeping, observes it.)

"Am I, then, so weak, O my God! Courage, let me rise from here!"

(He enters his hut, turns over a pile of cinders, finds a live ember, lights his torch and fixes it upon the wooden desk, so as to throw a light upon the great book.)

"Suppose I take the Acts of the Apostles? – yes! – no matter where!"

'And he saw the heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending, as it were a great linen sheet let down by the four corners from heaven to the earth – wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts,

and creeping things of the earth and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him: Arise, Peter! Kill and eat!'¹

"Then the Lord desired that his apostle should eat of all things?.. while I..."

(Anthony remains thoughtful, his chin resting against his breast. The rustling of the pages, agitated by the wind, causes him to lift his head again; and he reads:)

*'So the Jews made a great slaughter of their enemies with the sword, and killed them, repaying according to what they had prepared to do to them...'*²

"Then, comes the number of people slain by them – seventy-five thousand. They had suffered so much! Moreover, their enemies were the enemies of the true God. And how they must have delighted in avenging themselves thus by the massacre of idolaters! Doubtless the city must have been crammed with the dead! There must have been corpses at the thresholds of the garden gates, upon the stairways, in all the chambers, and piled up so high that the doors could no longer move upon their hinges!.. But lo! here I am permitting my mind to dwell upon ideas of murder and of blood!.."

(He opens the book at another place.)

*'Then King Nabuchodonosor fell on his face, and worshipped Daniel...'*³

"Ah! that was just! The *Most High* exalts his prophets above Kings; yet that monarch spent his life in banqueting, perpetually drunk with pleasure and pride. But God, to punish him, changed him into a beast! He walked upon four feet!"

(Anthony begins to laugh; and in extending his arms, involuntarily disarranges the leaves of the book with the tips of his fingers. His eyes fell upon this phrase: –)

*'And Ezechias rejoiced at their coming, and he showed them the house of his aromatical spices, and the gold and the silver, and divers precious odours and ointments, and the house of his vessels, and all that he had in his treasures...'*⁴

"I can imagine that spectacle; they must have beheld precious stones, diamonds and darics heaped up to the very roof. One who possesses so vast an accumulation of wealth is no longer like other men. While handling his riches he knows that he controls the total result of innumerable human efforts – as it were the life of nations drained by him and stored up, which he can pour forth at will. It is a commendable precaution on the part of Kings. Even the *Wisest* of all did not neglect it. His navy brought him elephants' teeth and apes... Where is that passage?"

(He turns the leaves over rapidly.)

"Ah! here it is:"

*'And the Queen of Saba, having heard of the fame of Solomon in the name of the Lord, came to try him with hard questions.'*⁵

"How did she hope to tempt him? The *Devil* indeed sought to tempt Jesus! But Jesus triumphed because he was God; and Solomon, perhaps, owing this knowledge of magic! It is sublime – that science! For the world – as a philosopher once explained it to me, forms a whole, of which all parts mutually influence one another, like the organs of one body. It is science which enables us to know the natural loves and natural repulsions of all things, and to play upon them?.. Therefore, it is really possible to modify what appears to be the immutable order of the universe?"

(Then the two shadows formed behind him by the arms of the cross, suddenly lengthen and project themselves before him. They assume the form of two great horns. Anthony cries out: –)

"Help me! O my God!"

(The shadows shrink back to their former place.)

¹ Acts X: 11-13 – T.

² Esther IX: 5 – T.

³ Daniel II: 46. – T.

⁴ Kings XX: 13 (Vulg.) – T.

⁵ III Kings X: I (Vulg.) – T.

"Ah!.. it was an illusion ... nothing more. It is needless for me to torment my mind further! I can do nothing! – absolutely nothing."

(He sits down and folds his arms.)

"Nevertheless ... it seems to me that I felt the approach of ... But why should *He* come? Besides, do I not know all his artifices? I repulsed the monstrous anchorite who laughingly offered me little loaves of warm, fresh bread, the centaur who sought to carry me away upon his croup, and that black child who appeared to me in the midst of the sands, who was very beautiful, and who told me that he was called the Spirit of Lust!"

(Anthony rises and walks rapidly up and down, first to the right, then to the left.)

"It was by my order that this multitude of holy retreats was constructed – full of monks all wearing sackcloth of camel's hair beneath their garments of goatskin, and numerous enough to form an army. I have cured the sick from afar off; I have cast out demons; I have passed the river in the midst of crocodiles; the Emperor Constantine wrote me three letters; Balacius, who had spat upon mine, was torn to pieces by his own horses; when I reappeared the people of Alexandria fought for the pleasure of seeing me, and Athanasius himself escorted me on the way back. But what works have I not accomplished Lo! for these thirty years and more I have been dwelling and groaning unceasingly in the desert! Like Eusebius, I have carried thirty-eight pounds of bronze upon my loins; like Macarius, I have exposed my body to the stings of insects; like Pacomus, I have passed fifty-three nights without closing my eyes; and those who are decapitated, tortured with red hot pincers, or burned alive, are perhaps less meritorious than I, seeing that my whole life is but one prolonged martyrdom." *(Anthony slackens his pace.)*

"Assuredly there is no human being in a condition of such unutterable misery! Charitable hearts are becoming scarcer. I no longer receive aught from any one. My mantle is worn out. I have no sandals – I have not even a porringer! – for I have distributed all I possessed to the poor and to my family, without retaining so much as one obolus. Yet surely I ought to have a little money to obtain the tools indispensable to my work? Oh, not much! a very small sum... I would be very saving of it..."

"The fathers of Nicæa, clad in purple robes, sat like magi, upon thrones ranged along the walls; and they were entertained at a great banquet and overwhelmed with honours, especially Paphnutius, because he is one-eyed and lame, since the persecution of Diocletian! The Emperor kissed his blind eye several times; what foolishness! Besides, there were such infamous men members of that Council! A bishop of Scythia, Theophilus! another of Persia, John! a keeper of beasts, Spiridion! Alexander was too old. Athanasius ought to have shown more gentleness towards the Arians, so as to have obtained concessions from them.

"Yet would they have made any? They would not hear me! The one who spoke against me – a tall young man with a curly beard – uttered the most captious objections to my argument; and while I was seeking words to express my views they all stared at me with their wicked faces, and barked like hyenas. Ah! why cannot I have them all exiled by the Emperor! or rather have them beaten, crushed, and see them suffer! I suffer enough myself."

(He leans against his cabin in a fainting condition.)

"It is because I have fasted too long; my strength is leaving me. If I could eat – only once more – a piece of meat." *(He half closes his eyes with languor.)*

"Ah! some red flesh – a bunch of grapes to bite into ... curdled milk that trembles on a plate!..

"But what has come upon me? What is the matter with me? I feel my heart enlarging like the sea, when it swells before the storm. An unspeakable feebleness weighs down upon me, and the warm air seems to waft me the perfume of a woman's hair. No woman has approached this place; nevertheless? – "

(He gazes toward the little pathway between the rocks.)

"That is the path by which they come, rocked in their litters by the black arms of the eunuchs. They descend and joining their hands, heavy with rings, kneel down before me. They relate to me

all their troubles. The desire of human pleasure tortures them; they would gladly die; they have seen in their dreams God calling to them ... and all the while the hems of their robes fall upon my feet. I repel them from me. 'Ah! no!' they cry, 'not yet! What shall I do?' They gladly accept any penitence I impose on them. They ask for the hardest of all; they beg to share mine and to live with me.

"It is now a long time since I have seen any of them! Perhaps some of them will come! why not? If I could only hear again, all of a sudden, the tinkling of mule-bells among the mountains. It seems to me..."

(Anthony clammers upon a rock at the entrance of the pathway, and leans over, darting his eyes into the darkness.)

"Yes! over there, far off I see a mass moving, like a band of travellers seeking the way. *She* is there!.. They are making a mistake." *(Calling.)*

"This way! Come! Come!"

(Echo repeats: Come! Come! he lets his arms fall, stupefied.)

"What shame for me! Alas! poor Anthony."

(And all of a sudden he hears a whisper: – "Poor Anthony!")

"Who is there? Speak!"

(The wind passing through the intervals between the rocks, makes modulations; and in those confused sonorities he distinguishes Voices, as though the air itself were speaking. They are low, insinuating, hissing.)

The First: "Dost thou desire women?"

The Second: "Great heaps of money, rather!"

The Third: "A glittering sword?" *(and)*

The Others: "All the people admire thee! Sleep!"

"Thou shalt slay them all, aye, thou shalt slay them!"

(At the same moment objects become transformed. At the edge of the cliff, the old palm tree with its tuft of yellow leaves, changes into the torso of a woman leaning over the abyss, her long hair waving in the wind.)

Anthony turns toward his cabin; and the stool supporting the great book whose pages are covered with black letters, seems to him changed into a bush all covered with nightingales.)

"It must be the torch which is making this strange play of light... Let us put it out!"

(He extinguishes it; the obscurity becomes deeper, the darkness profound.)

And suddenly in the air above there appear and disappear successively – first, a stretch of water; then the figure of a prostitute; the corner of a temple, a soldier; a chariot with two white horses, prancing.

These images appear suddenly, as in flashes – outlined against the background of the night, like scarlet paintings executed upon ebony.

Their motion accelerates. They defile by with vertiginous rapidity. Sometimes again, they pause and gradually pale and melt away; or else float off out of sight, to be immediately succeeded by others.

Anthony closes his eyelids.

They multiply, surround him, besiege him. An unspeakable fear takes possession of him; and he feels nothing more of living sensation, save a burning contraction of the epigastrium. In spite of the tumult in his brain, he is aware of an enormous silence which separates him from the world. He tries to speak; – impossible! He feels as though all the bands of his life were breaking and dissolving; – and, no longer able to resist, Anthony falls prostrate upon his mat.)

II

(Then a great shadow, subtler than any natural shadow, and festooned by other shadows along its edges, defines itself upon the ground.

It is the Devil, leaning upon the roof of the hut, and bearing beneath his wings – like some gigantic bat suckling its little ones – the Seven Deadly Sins, whose grimacing heads are dimly distinguishable.

With eyes still closed, Anthony yields to the pleasure of inaction; and stretches his limbs upon the mat.

It seems to him quite soft, and yet softer – so that it becomes as if padded; it rises up; it becomes a bed. The bed becomes a shallop; water laps against its sides.

To right and left rise two long tongues of land, overlooking low cultivated plains, with a sycamore tree here and there. In the distance there is a tinkling of bells, a sound of drums and of singers. It is a party going to Canopus to sleep upon the temple of Serapis, in order to have dreams. Anthony knows this; and impelled by the wind, his boat glides along between the banks. Papyrus-leaves and the red flowers of the nymphæa, larger than the body of a man, bend over him. He is lying at the bottom of the boat; one oar at the stem, drags in the water. From time to time, a lukewarm wind blows; and the slender reeds rub one against the other, and rustle. Then the sobbing of the wavelets becomes indistinct. A heavy drowsiness falls upon him. He dreams that he is a Solitary of Egypt.

Then he awakes with a start.)

"Did I dream? It was all so vivid that I can scarcely believe I was dreaming! My tongue burns. I am thirsty."

(He enters the cabin, and gropes at random in the dark.)

"The ground is wet; can it have been raining? What can this mean! My pitcher is broken into atoms! But the goatskin?" *(He finds it.)*

"Empty! – completely empty! In order to get down to the river, I should have to walk for at least three hours; and the night is so dark that I could not see my way.

"There is a gnawing in my entrails. Where is the bread!"

(After long searching, he picks up a crust not so large as an egg.)

"What? Have the jackals taken it? Ah! malediction!"

(And he flings the bread upon the ground with fury.

No sooner has the action occurred than a table makes its appearance, covered with all things that are good to eat.

The byssus cloth, striated like the bandelets of the sphinx, produces of itself luminous undulations. Upon it are enormous quarters of red meats; huge fish; birds cooked in their plumage, and quadrupeds in their skins; fruits with colors and tints almost human in appearance; while fragments of cooling ice, and flagons of violet crystal reflect each other's glittering. Anthony notices in the middle of the table a boar smoking at every pore – with legs doubled up under its belly, and eyes half closed – and the idea of being able to eat so formidable an animal greatly delights him. Then many things appear which he has never seen before – black hashes, jellies, the color of gold, ragouts in which mushrooms float like nenuphars upon ponds, dishes of whipt cream light as clouds.

And the aroma of all this comes to him together with the salt smell of the ocean, the coolness of mountains, the great perfumes of the woods. He dilates his nostrils to their fullest extent; his mouth waters; he thinks to himself that he has enough before him for a year, for ten years, for his whole life!

As he gazes with widely-opened eyes at all these viands, others appear; they accumulate, forming a pyramid crumbling at all its angles. The wines begin to flow over – the fish palpitate – the blood seethes in the dishes – the pulp of the fruit protrudes like amorous lips – and the table rises as high as his breast, up to his very chin at last – now bearing only one plate and a single loaf of bread, placed exactly in front of him.

He extends his hand to seize the loaf. Other loaves immediately present themselves to his grasp.)

"For me!.. all these! But ..." *(Anthony suddenly draws back.)*

"Instead of one which was there, lo! there are many! It must be a miracle, then, the same as our Lord wrought!

"Yet for what purpose?.. Ah! all the rest of these things are equally incomprehensible! Demon, begone from me! depart! begone!"

(He kicks the table from him. It disappears.)

"Nothing more? – no!" *(He draws a lung breath.)*

"Ah! the temptation was strong! But how well I delivered myself from it!"

(He lifts his head, and at the same time stumbles over some sonorous object.)

"Why! what can that be?" *(Anthony stoops down.)*

"How! a cup! Some traveller must have lost it here. There is nothing extraordinary..."

(He wets his finger, and rubs.)

"It glitters! – metal! Still, I cannot see very clearly..."

(He lights his torch, and examines the cup.)

"It is silver, ornamented with ovules about the rim, with a medal at the bottom of it."

(He detaches the medal with his nail!)

"It is a piece of money worth about seven or eight drachmas – not more! It matters not! even with that I could easily buy myself a sheepskin."

(A sudden flash of the torch lights up the cup.)

"Impossible! gold? Yes, all gold, solid gold!"

(A still larger piece of money appears at the bottom. Under it he perceives several others.)

"Why, this is a sum ... large enough to purchase three oxen ... and a little field!"

(The cup is now filled with pieces of gold.)

"What! what!.. a hundred slaves, soldiers, a host ... enough to buy..."

(The granulations of the rim, detaching themselves form a necklace of pearls.)

"With such a marvel of jewelry as that, one could win even the wife of the Emperor!"

(By a sudden jerk, Anthony makes the necklace slip down over his wrist. He holds the cup in his left hand, and with his right lifts up the torch so as to throw the light upon it. As water streams overflowing from the basin of a fountain, so diamonds, carbuncles, and sapphires, all mingled with broad pieces of gold bearing the effigies of Kings, overflow from the cup in never ceasing streams, to form a glittering hillock upon the sand.)

"What! how! Staters, cycles, dariacs, aryandics; Alexander, Demetrius, the Ptolemies, Cæsar! – yet not one of them all possessed so much! Nothing is now impossible! no more suffering for me! how these gleams dazzle my eyes! Ah! my heart overflows! how delightful it is! yes – yes! – more yet! never could there be enough! Vainly I might continually fling it into the sea, there would always be plenty remaining for me. Why should I lose any of it? I will keep all, and say nothing to any one about it; I will have a chamber hollowed out for me in the rock, and lined with plates of bronze, and I will come here from time to time to feel the gold sinking down under the weight of my heel; I will plunge my arms into it as into sacks of grain! I will rub my face with it, I will lie down upon it!"

(He flings down the torch in order to embrace the glittering heap, and falls flat upon the ground. He rises to his feet. The place is wholly empty.)

"What have I done!

"Had I died during those moments, I should have gone to hell – to irrevocable damnation."

(He trembles in every limb.)

"Am I, then, accursed? Ah! no; it is my own fault! I allow myself to be caught in every snare! No man could be more imbecile, more infamous! I should like to beat myself, or rather to tear myself out of my own body! I have restrained myself too long. I feel the want of vengeance – the necessity

of striking, of killing! – as though I had a pack of wild beasts within me! Would that I could hew my way with an axe, through the midst of a multitude... Ah, a poniard!.."

(He perceives his knife, and rushes to seize it. The knife slips from his hand; and Anthony remains leaning against the wall of his hut, with wide-open mouth, motionless, cataleptic.

Everything about him has disappeared.

He thinks himself at Alexandria, upon the Paneum – an artificial mountain in the centre of the city, encircled by a winding stairway.

Before him lies Lake Mareolis; on his right hand is the sea, on his left the country; and immediately beneath him a vast confusion of flat roofs, traversed from north to south and from east to west by two streets which intercross, and which offer throughout their entire length the spectacle of files of porticoes with Corinthian columns. The houses overhanging this double colonnade have windows of stained glass. Some of them support exteriorly enormous wooden cages, into which the fresh air rushes from without.

Monuments of various architecture tower up in close proximity. Egyptian pylons dominate Greek temples. Obelisks appear like lances above battlements of red brick. In the middle of public squares there are figures of Hermes with pointed ears, and of Anubis with the head of a dog. Anthony can distinguish the mosaic pavements of the courtyards, and tapestries suspended from the beams of ceilings.

He beholds at one glance, the two ports (the Great Port and the Eunostus), both round as circuses, and separated by a mole connecting Alexandria with the craggy island upon which the Pharos-tower rises – quadrangular, five hundred cubits high, nine storied, having at its summit a smoking heap of black coals.

Small interior ports open into the larger ones. The mole terminates at each end in a bridge supported upon marble columns planted in the sea. Sailing vessels pass beneath it, while heavy lighters overladen with merchandise, thalamegii⁶ inlaid with ivory, gondolas covered with awnings, triremes, biremes, and all sorts of vessels are moving to and fro, or lie moored at the wharves.

About the Great Port extends an unbroken array of royal construction: the palace of the Ptolomies, the Museum, the Posidium, the Cæsareum, the Timonium where Mark Anthony sought refuge, the Soma which contains the tomb of Alexander; while at the other extremity of the city, beyond the Eunostus, the great glass factories, perfume factories, and papyrus factories may be perceived in a suburban quarter.

Strolling peddlers, porters, ass-drivers run and jostle together. Here and there one observes some priest of Isis wearing a panther skin on his shoulders, a Roman soldier with his bronze helmet, and many negroes. At the thresholds of the shops women pause, artisans ply their trades; and the grinding noise of chariot wheels puts to flight the birds that devour the detritus of the butcher-shops and the morsels of fish left upon the ground.

The general outline of the streets seems like a black network flung upon the white uniformity of the houses. The markets stocked with herbs make green bouquets in the midst of it; the drying-yards of the dyers, blotches of color; the golden ornaments of the temple-pediments, luminous points – all comprised within the oval enclosure of the grey ramparts, under the vault of the blue heaven, beside the motionless sea.

But suddenly the movement of the crowd ceases; all turn their eyes toward the west, whence enormous whirlwinds of dust are seen approaching.

It is the coming of the monks of the Thebaid, all clad in goatskins, armed with cudgels, roaring a canticle of battle and of faith with the refrain:

"Where are they? Where are they?"

Anthony understands that they are coming to kill the Arians.

The streets are suddenly emptied – only flying feet are visible.

⁶ Thalamegii– pleasure-boats having apartments.

The Solitaries are now in the city. Their formidable cudgels, studded with nails, whirl in the air like suns of steel. The crash of things broken in the houses is heard. There are intervals of silence. Then great screams arise.

From one end of the street to the other there is a continual eddy of terrified people.

Many grasp pikes. Sometimes two bands meet, rush into one; and this mass of men slips upon the pavement – fighting, disjuncting, knocking down. But the men with the long hair always reappear.

Threads of smoke begin to escape from the corners of edifices! folding doors burst open. Portions of walls crumble down. Architraves fall.

Anthony finds all his enemies again, one after the other. He even recognizes some whom he had altogether forgotten; before killing them he outrages them. He disembowels – he severs throats – he fells as in a slaughter house – he hauls old men by the beard, crushes children, smites the wounded. And vengeance is taken upon luxury, those who do not know how to read tear up hooks; others smash and deface the statues, paintings, furniture, caskets, – a thousand dainty things the use of which they do not know, and which simply for that reason exasperates them. At intervals they pause, out of breath, in the work of destruction; then they recommence.

The inhabitants moan in the courtyards where they have sought refuge. The women raise their tearful eyes and lift their naked arms to heaven. In hope of moving the Solitaries they embrace their knees; the men cast them off and fling them down, and the blood gushes to the ceilings, falls back upon the walls like sheets of rain, streams from the trunks of decapitated corpses, fills the aqueducts, forms huge red pools upon the ground.

Anthony is up to his knees in it. He wades in it; he sucks up the blood-spray on his lips; he is thrilled with joy as he feels it upon his limbs, under his hair-tunic which is soaked through with it.

Night comes. The immense uproar dies away.

The Solitaries have disappeared.

Suddenly, upon the outer galleries corresponding to each of the nine stories of the Pharos, Anthony observes thick black lines forming, like lines of crows perching. He hurries thither; and soon finds himself at the summit.

A huge mirror of brass turned toward the open sea, reflects the forms of the vessels in the offing.

Anthony amuses himself by watching them; and while he watches, their number increases.

They are grouped together within a gulf which has the form of a crescent. Upon a promontory in the background, towers a new city of Roman architecture, with cupolas of stone, conical roofs, gleams of pink and blue marbles, and a profusion of brazen ornamentation applied to the volutes of the capitals, to the angles of the cornices, to the summits of the edifices. A cypress-wood overhangs the city. The line of the sea is greener, the air colder. The mountains lining the horizon are capped with snow.

Anthony is trying to find his way, when a man approaches him, and says:

"Come! they are waiting for you."

He traverses a forum, enters a great court, stoops beneath a low door; and he arrives before the facade of the palace, decorated with a group in wax, representing Constantine overcoming a dragon. There is a porphyry basin, from the centre of which rises a golden conch-shell full of nuts. His guide tells him that he may take some of them. He does so. Then he is lost, as it were, in a long succession of apartments.

There are mosaics upon the walls representing generals presenting the Emperor with conquered cities, which they hold out upon the palms of their hands. And there are columns of basalt everywhere, trellis-work in silver filigree, ivory chairs, tapestries embroidered with pearls. The light falls from the vaults above; Anthony still proceeds. Warm exhalations circulate about him; occasionally he hears the discreet clapping sound of sandals upon the pavement. Posted in the anti-chambers are guards, who resemble automata, holding wands of vermillion upon their shoulders.

At last he finds himself in a great hall, with hyacinth-colored curtains at the further end. They part, and display the Emperor seated on a throne, clad in a violet tunic, and wearing red shoes striped with bands of black.

A diadem of pearls surround his head; his locks are arranged symmetrically in rouleaux. He has a straight nose, drooping eyelids, a heavy and cunning physiognomy. At the four corners of the dais stretched above his head are placed four golden doves; and at the foot of the throne are two lions in enamel crouching. The doves begin to sing, the lions to roar. The Emperor rolls his eyes; Anthony advances; and forthwith, without preamble, they commence to converse about recent events. In the cities of Antioch, Ephesus, and Alexandria, the temples have been sacked, and the statues of the gods converted into pots and cooking utensils; the Emperor laughs heartily about it. Anthony reproaches him with his tolerance toward the Novations. But the Emperor becomes vexed. Novations, Arians or Meletians – he is sick of them all! Nevertheless, he admires the episcopate; for inasmuch as the Christians maintain bishops, who depend for their position upon five or six important personages, it is only necessary to gain over the latter, in order to have all the rest on one's side. Therefore he did not fail to furnish them with large sums. But he detests the Fathers of the Council of Nicæa.

"Let us go and see them!"

Anthony follows him.

And they find themselves on a terrace, upon the same floor.

It overlooks a hippodrome thronged with people, and surmounted by porticoes where other spectators are walking to and fro. From the centre of the race-course rises a narrow platform of hewn stone, supporting a little temple of Mercury, the statue of Constantine, and three serpents of brass twisted into a column; there are three huge wooden eggs at one end, and at the other a group of seven dolphins with their tails in the air.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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