

threshold, wearing espadrilles on their feet; they have entered noiselessly and with all the stealthy suppleness of a cat.

The remove their berets, a concession to the good manners of my household, and then, because of the blazing wood crackling in the fireplace, beg to be permitted to remove their coats as well, a less elegant proceeding though far more in accord with the Basque character.

Ignacio and Pantchiket are two of my neighbors—famous smugglers, of course—whom I have requested to row me across to the Spanish shore tonight. They are now seated at the table, in woolen Jerseys, in front of hot wine and a Christmas cake, which my servant is requested to share with them. Though greatly impressed at seeing me stretched on cushions, they begin a low-toned conversation, as at some death-vigil. Naturally, their talk is all about smuggling, night adventures in rain and storm. They also speak of myself for a short time, when they think I am fast asleep, and I am pleased to note that my servant makes the most of such qualities as I may possess, though, all the same, he deprecates certain slight imperfections.

"For instance," he says, "in the matter of leaving his room in a state of disorder, any one would think that the commander embodied at least half-a-dozen persons in himself. . . ."

I am unable to follow the thread of their narratives, for my consciousness becomes more and more fixed on Africa and those interminable marshes swarming with grey alligators. A feeling of torpor keeps me on my back, in spite of my determination to rise and stir about; it seems as though death were gradually enfolded me in a warm embrace, while my freed spirit escapes its bonds of flesh. . . . going off wherever my fancy dictates, above those regions of earth in which I have dwelt, and at times preferring to linger on deserts of slime and herbage resplendent in the torrid sun. . . . Really, I no longer know whether I am sleeping or awake.

In spite of it all, I hear Ignacio telling me that it is a glorious moonlight night, that the fresh air will certainly cure me, and that it is time to start if we do not want to be late for the mass. . . . No, no, my languid head lies motionless: I shall never be able to move. . . . never. . . .

I am now occupying a marvelous oratorio on the Apocalypse. Suddenly, as an interruption of the last trump, there enters my mind an inspiring chord which fills me with a mighty thrill, suggesting death and the end of all things. I admire myself for being so intuitive a musician, and determine to cultivate the gift. . . .

"Listen, Ignacio!" says Pantchiket. "You take nails, a hammer and some string in your pocket. Then, when the train is in motion, the night train, of course, you open the door and climb on top of the carriage with your smuggled goods. You arrange everything on the middle of the roof, and fasten it down firmly with your string and nails. Then you climb down and take your place in the carriage as innocent as a saint. . . . And who will discover the trick, pray? . . ."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Ignacio, "that is an old trick, they all know it. (They here refers to the custom house officers of France and the carabineers of Spain, with whom, by the way, the smugglers are on very good terms, apart from the tricks they play on them.) It's the same as hiding goods beneath the coal in the tender. . . ." continues Ignacio. "To think that we used to hide away there, when Itchoua was alive! . . . But they have got wind of it now; you see there is no possibility at all of smuggling anything through by train. . . ."

I must confess that his talk is rather commonplace, cutting discordantly into the oratorio I am composing. Still, all these things alternate, or rather, are jumbled together, though without clashing with one another, in my fevered head; the smuggled goods, the spreading lilies of Sen-

gal with their open petals on the surface of languid waters, and finally the somber valley of Jehosaphat, the scene of my apocalyptic symphony. And I invent harmonies that appear altogether superhuman—accompaniments to the trump of the awe-inspiring archangel, the final lament of a world sinking back into chaos. . . .

Suddenly I hear bells, real bells this time: Christmas bells! The smugglers have ceased talking. The bells of Fontarabia in the distance are pealing out, and the night air seems filled with their clear, silvery vibrations.

How delightful they sound! Never before have I heard so pure and musical a peal so that which reaches my ears this evening from across the slumbering river.

Well, since I am now wide awake, let me try to attend mass. It is not exactly what a doctor would advise me to do, in the height of a fever, to turn out in the fresh night air until about two in the morning. Never mind!

My head turns, and I feel giddy as I stand upright. Putting on a beret, my hair, which has become a thing insensitive, so to speak, seems as though it were standing on end, so painful is the contact with anything external. Never mind, come along!

My two boatmen were right: the night is a glorious one. The moon casts a pale blue light over all—the moon which the Basques call *Il-Argia* (the Dead Light)—and her pale splendor shines over sea and mountain. How much better to be out in the open air than stretched before a fire in a room that is too warm! What a delight merely to breathe! The air is exquisitely soothing, and there are gentle breezes from the south that remind one of a night in Africa. Often have I seen glorious Christmas eves in this Basque land, but never one like this—not the slightest sensation of cold or winter damp, not even dew on the ground.

Ignacio's boat awaits us at the end of the garden, and we begin the fifteen minutes' crossing, or rather, gliding, over a kind of starry mirror, leaving behind a silvery, moonlit furrow in our wake.

From the Spanish coast, stretching before us, all tinged with blue, come distant songs and the uncertain harmonies of a guitar. A momentary consciousness of ease, for which I may have to pay on my return, has succeeded the dull heaviness of the fever; I no longer see the marshes with their lily-covered surface, nor do I hear the melodious strains of the Apocalypse. But the bells of Fontarabia begin again, an eager, joyous tinkling, at this usually silent hour, and air and water seem all vibrant with the sound. . . .

Oh! The Christmas eves and the Christmas bells! Is that infinitely sweet and almost ineffable witchery of theirs, which the flight of time cannot destroy, made up of nothing more than childhood's memories, or rather, is there not behind it all something occult, something eternal? . . .

Translation by Fred Rothwell, from "On Life's By-Ways" (Reflets sur un Sombre Route): London, George Bell & Sons.

He was a rackets young man, and kept very late hours, but had now joined the Fusiliers and was ordered to the front, and on bidding farewell to his beloved he said to her:

"Darling, when I am far away, wilt thou gaze at yon star every night and think of me?"

"I will, indeed, dearest," she replied. "If I needed anything to remind me of you, I should choose that very star."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because it is out so very late at night, and looks so pale in the morning."—Tit Bits.

According to the dispatches, it seems that the disease that Emperor William is suffering from is *bindgewebentzuendung*. If that can't kill him, the Ailles might as well give up.

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