CHAPTER VII

The Lower Pantheism

"Jetzo, da ich ausgewachsen,
Viel gelesen, viel gereist,
Schwüllt mein Herz, und ganz von Herzen,
Glaub' ich an den Heilgen Geist." —HEINE.

Those who were curious in tracing the symmetries of chance or destiny felt now quite secure in the observation that of nine French kings of the name, every third Charles had been a madman. Over the exotic, nervous creature who had inherited so many delicacies of organisation, the coarse rage or rabies of the wolf, part doubtless of an inheritance older still, had asserted itself on that terrible night of Saint Bartholomew, at the mere sight, the scent of blood in the crime he had at least allowed others to commit; and it was not an unfriendly witness who recorded that, the fever once upon him, for an hour he had been less a man than a beast of prey. But, exemplifying that exquisite fineness of cruelty which is proper to ideal tragedy, with the work of his madness all around him, he awoke next day sane, to remain so—aged at twenty-one—seeking for the few months still left him to forget himself in his old out-of-door amusements, rending a consumptive bosom with the perpetual horn-blowing which could never rouse again the gay morning of life.

"I have heard," says Brantôme, of Elisabeth, Charles's queen, "that on the Eve of Saint Bartholomew, she, having no knowledge of the matter, went to rest at her accustomed hour, and sleeping till the morning was told, as she arose, of the brave mystery then playing. 'Alas!' she cried; 'The king! my husband! does he know it?' 'Ay, Madam!' they answered; 'the king himself has
ordained it.' 'God!' she cried; 'How is this? and what counsellors be they who have given him this advice? O God, be pitiful! For unless Thou art pitiful I fear this offence will never be pardoned unto him'; and asking for her 'Hours,' suddenly betook herself to prayer, weeping."

Like the shrinking, childish Elisabeth, the Pope almost wept at that dubious service to his Church from one who was, after all, a Huguenot in belief; and Huguenots themselves pitied his end.—"Ah, ces pauvres morts! que j'ai eu un meschant conseil. Ah, ma nourrice, m'amie, ma nourrice, que de sang, et que de meurtres!"

It was a peculiarity of the naturally devout Gaston that, though yielding himself to the poetic guidance of the Catholic Church in her wonderful, year-long, dramatic version of the story of redemption, he had ever found its greatest day least evocative of proportionate sympathy. The sudden gaieties of Easter morning, the congratulations to the Divine Mother, the sharpness of the recoil from one extreme of feeling to the other, for him at least never cleared away the Lenten preoccupation with Christ's death and passion. The empty tomb, with the white clothes lying, was still a tomb: there was no human warmth in the "spiritual body": the white flowers, after all, were like those of a funeral, with a mortal coldness, amid the loud Alleluias, which refused to melt at the startling summons, any more than the earth will do in the March morning because we call it Spring. It was altogether different however with that other festival which celebrates the Descent of the Spirit, "the tongues," the nameless impulses gone all abroad, to soften slowly, to penetrate all things, as with the winning subtlety of nature, or of human genius. The gracious Pentecostal fire seemed to be in alliance with the sweet, warm, relaxing winds of that later, securer season, bringing their spicy burden from unseen sources. Into the close world, like a walled garden, about him, influences from remotest time and space found their way, travelling unerringly on their long journeys as if straight to him, with the assurance that things were not wholly left to themselves; yet so unobtrusively that a little later the transforming spiritual agency would be discernible at most in the grateful cry of an innocent child, in some good deed of a bad man, or unlooked-for gentleness of a rough one, in the occasional turning to music of a rude voice. Through the course of years during which Gaston was to remain in Paris, very close to other people's sins, interested, all but entangled, in a world of corruption in flower (pleasantly enough to the eye), those influences never failed him. At times it was as if a legion of spirits besieged his door:—"Open unto me! Open unto me! My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled!" And one result, certainly, of this constant prepossession was that
it kept him on the alert concerning theories of the divine assistance to man and the world,—theories of inspiration.

On the Feast of Pentecost, on the afternoon of the thirtieth of May, news of the death of Charles the Ninth had gone abroad promptly with large rumours as to the manner of it. Those streams of blood they were full of blent themselves fantastically in Gaston’s memory of the event with the gaudy colours of the season, the crazy red trees in blossom upon the heated sky—like a fiery sunset, it might seem, as he looked back over the ashen intervening years. To Charles’s successor (he and the Queen-mother being now delightfully secure from fears, however unreasonable, of Charles’s jerking dagger) the day became a sweet one, to be noted unmistakably by various pious and other observances, which fixed still further the thought of that Sunday on Gaston’s mind, with continual surmise as to the tendencies of so complex and perplexing a scene.

Charles’s last words had asserted his satisfaction in leaving no male child to wear his crown. But the brother, whose obvious kingly qualities, the chief facts really known of him so far, Charles was thought to have envied,—those gallant feats of his youth, de ses jeunes guerres, his stature, his high-bred beauty and eloquence, his almost pontifical refinement and grace,—had already promptly deserted the half-barbarous kingdom which had been but the mask of banishment. He delayed much, however, on his way to his new kingdom, passing round through the cities of Venice and Lombardy, seductive schools of the art of life as conceived by Italian epicures, of which he became only too ready a student. On Whitsun-Monday afternoon, while Charles “went in lead,” amid very little private or public concern, to join his kinsfolk at Saint-Denis, Paris was already looking out for its new king, following, through doubtful rumour, his circuitous journey to the throne, by Venice, Padua, Ferrara, Mantua, Turin, over Mont Cenis, by Lyons, to French soil, still building confidently on the prestige of his early manhood. Seeing him at last, all were conscious in a moment of the inversion of their hopes. Had the old witchcrafts of Poland, the old devilries of his race, laid visible hold on the hopeful young man that he must now take purely satiric estimate of so great opportunity, with a programme which looked like formal irony on the kingly position, a premeditated mockery of those who yielded him, on demand, a servile reverence never before paid to any French monarch? Well! The amusement or business of Parisians, at all events, would still be that of spectators assisting at the last act of the Valois tragedy, in the course of which fantastic traits and incidents would naturally be multiplied. Fantastic humour seemed at its height in the institution of a new order of knighthood, the
enigmatic splendours of which were to be a monument of Henry's superstitious care, or, as some said, of his impious contempt, of the day which had made him master of his destiny—that great Church festival, towards the emphatic marking of which he was ever afterwards ready to welcome any novel or striking device for the spending of an hour.

It was on such an occasion, then,—on a Whitsunday afternoon, amid the red hues of the season, that Gaston listened to one, who, as if with some intentional new version of the sacred event then commemorated, had a great deal to say concerning the Spirit; above all, of the freedom, the indifference, of its operations, and who would give a strangely altered colour, for a long time to come, to the thoughts, to the very words, associated with the celebration of Pentecost. The speaker, though understood to be a brother of the Order of Saint Dominic, had not been present at the mass—the daily University red mass, De Spiritu Sancto, but said to-day according to the proper course of the season in the chapel of the Sorbonne, with much pomp, by the Italian Bishop of Paris. It was the reign of the Italians just then, with a doubly refined, somewhat morbid, somewhat ash-coloured, Italy in France, more Italian still. What our Elisabethan poets imagined about Italian culture,—forcing all they knew of Italy to an ideal of dainty sin such as had never actually existed there,—that the court of Henry, so far as in it lay, realised in fact. Men of Italian birth, “to the great suspicion of simple people,” swarmed in Paris, already “flightier, less constant, than the girouettes on its steeples”; and it was love for Italian fashions that had brought king and courtiers here this afternoon, with great éclat, as they said, frizzed and starched, in the beautiful, minutely considered dress of the moment, pressing the learned University itself into the background. For the promised speaker, about whom tongues had been busy, not merely in the Latin quarter, had come from Italy. In an age in which all things about which Parisians much cared must be Italian, there might be a hearing even for Italian philosophy. Courtiers at least would understand the Italian language, all the curious rhetoric arts of which in their perfection this speaker was rumoured to possess. And of all the kingly qualities of Henry's youth, the single one which had held by him was that gift of eloquence, which he valued also in others,—an inherited gift perhaps, for amid all contemporary and subsequent historic gossip about his mother, the two things certain are, that the hands credited with so much mysterious ill-doing were fine ones, and that she was an admirable speaker.

Bruno himself tells us, long after he had withdrawn himself from it, that the monastic life promotes the freedom of the intellect by its silence and self-
concentration. The prospect of such freedom sufficiently explains why a young man who, however well-found in worldly and personal advantages, was above all conscious of great intellectual possessions, and of fastidious spirit also, with a remarkable distaste for the vulgar, should have espoused "poverty, chastity, and obedience," in a Dominican cloister. What liberty of mind may really come to in such places, what daring new departures it may suggest even to the strictly monastic temper, is exemplified by the dubious and dangerous mysticism of men like John of Parma and Joachim of Flora, reputed author of a new "Everlasting Gospel," strange dreamers, in a world of rhetoric, of that later dispensation of the Spirit, in which all law will have passed away; or again by a recognised tendency, in the great rival Order of Saint Francis, in the so-called "spiritual" Franciscans, to understand the dogmatic statements of faith with a difference.

The three convents in which successively Bruno had lived, at Naples, at Città di Campagna, and finally the Minerva at Rome, developed freely, we may suppose, all the mystic qualities of a genius, in which, from the first, a heady southern imagination took the lead. But it was from beyond monastic bounds he would look for the sustenance, the fuel, of an ardour born or bred within them. Amid such artificial religious stillness the air itself becomes generous in under-tones. The vain young monk (vain of course!) would feed his vanity by puzzling the good, sleepy heads of the average sons of Dominic with his neology, putting new wine into old bottles, teaching them their own business—the new, higher, truer sense of the most familiar terms, of the chapters they habitually read, the hymns they sang, above all, as it happened, every word that referred to the Spirit, the reign of the Spirit, and its excellent freedom. He would soon pass beyond the utmost possible limits of his brethren's sympathy, beyond the largest and freest interpretation such words would bear, to words and thoughts on an altogether different plane, of which the full scope was only to be felt in certain old pagan writers—pagan, though approached, perhaps, at first, as having a kind of natural, preparatory kinship with Scripture itself. The Dominicans would seem to have had well-stocked, liberally-selected, libraries; and this curious youth, in that age of restored letters, read eagerly, easily, and very soon came to the kernel of a difficult old author, Plato or Plotinus,—to the real purpose of thinkers older still, surviving by glimpses only in the books of others, but who had been nearer the original sense of things—Empedocles, for instance, Pythagoras, Parmenides, above all, that most ancient assertor of God's identity with the world. The affinities, the unity, of the visible and the invisible, of earth and heaven, of all things whatever, with one another, through the consciousness,
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the person, of God the Spirit, who was at every moment of infinite time, in
every atom of matter, at every point of infinite space; Aye! was everything in
turn—that doctrine, l'antica filosofia Italiana, was in all its vigour, like some
hardy growth out of the very heart of nature, interpreting itself to congenial
minds with all the fulness of primitive utterance. A large thought! yet
suggesting, perhaps, from the first, in still, small, immediately practical, voice,
a freer way of taking, a possible modification of, certain moral precepts. A
primitive morality,—call it! congruous with those larger primitive ideas, with
that larger survey, with the earlier and more liberal air.

Returning to this ancient "pantheism," after the long reign of a seemingly
opposite faith, Bruno unfalteringly asserts "the vision of all things in God" to
be the aim of all metaphysical speculation, as of all enquiry into nature. The
Spirit of God, in countless variety of forms, neither above, nor in any way
without, but intimately within, all things, is really present, with equal
integrity and fulness, in the sunbeam ninety millions of miles long, and the
wandering drop of water as it evaporates therein. The divine consciousness
has the same relation to the production of things, as the human intelligence
to the production of true thoughts concerning them. Nay! those thoughts are
themselves actually God in man: a loan to man of His assisting Spirit, who, in
truth, is the Creator of things in and by His contemplation of them. For Him,
as for man in proportion as man thinks truly, thought and being are identical,
and things existent only in so far as they are known. Delighting in itself, in
the sense of its own energy, this sleepless, capacious, fiery intelligence evokes
all the orders of nature, all the revolutions of history, cycle upon cycle, in ever
new types. And God the Spirit, the soul of the world, being therefore really
identical with the soul of Bruno also, as the universe shapes itself to Bruno's
reason, to his imagination, ever more and more articulately, he too becomes
a sharer of the divine joy in that process of the formation of true ideas, which
is really parallel to the process of creation, to the evolution of things. In a
certain sense, which some in every age of the world have understood, he, too,
is the creator; himself actually a participator in the creative function. And by
such a philosophy, Bruno assures us, it was his experience that the soul was
greatly expanded: con questa filosofia l'anima mi s'aggrandisce; mi se magnifica
l'intelletto!

For, with characteristic largeness of mind, Bruno accepted this theory in
the whole range of its consequences. Its more immediate corollary was the
famous axiom of "indifference," of "the coincidence of contraries." To the eye
of God, to the philosophic vision through which God sees in man, nothing is
really alien from Him. The differences of things, those distinctions, above all,
which schoolmen and priests, old or new, Roman or Reformed, had invented for themselves, would be lost in the length and breadth of the philosophic survey: nothing, in itself, being really either great or small; and matter certainly, in all its various forms, not evil but divine. Dare one choose or reject this or that? If God the Spirit had made, nay! was, all things indifferently, then, matter and spirit, the spirit and the flesh, heaven and earth, freedom and necessity, the first and the last, good and evil, would be superficial rather than substantial differences. Only, were joy and sorrow also, together with another distinction always of emphatic reality to Gaston for one, to be added to the list of phenomena really “coincident” or “indifferent,” as some intellectual kinsmen of Bruno have claimed they should?

The Dominican Brother was at no distant day to break far enough away from the election, the seeming “vocation,” of his youth, yet would remain always, and under all circumstances, unmistakeably a monk in some predominant qualities of temper. At first it was only by way of thought that he asserted his liberty—delightful, late-found, privilege!—traversing, in strictly mental journeys, that spacious circuit, as it broke away before him at every moment upon ever-new horizons. Kindling thought and imagination at once, the prospect draws from him cries of joy, of a kind of religious joy, as in some new “Canticle of the Creatures,” some new hymnal or antiphonary. “Nature,” becomes for him a sacred term.—“Conform thyself to Nature!” With what sincerity, what enthusiasm, what religious fervour, he enounces that precept, to others, to himself! Recovering, as he fancies, a certain primeval sense of Deity broad-cast on things,—a sense in which Pythagoras and other “inspired” theorists of early Greece had abounded, in his hands philosophy becomes a poem, a sacred poem, as it had been with them. That Bruno himself, in “the enthusiasm of the idea,” drew from his axiom of “the indifference of contraries” the practical consequence which is in very deed latent there, that he was ready to sacrifice to the antinomianism, which is certainly a part of its logic, the austerities, the purity, of his own youth for instance, there is no proof. The service, the sacrifice, he is ready to bring to the great light that has dawned for him, occupying his entire conscience with the sense of his responsibilities to it, is the sacrifice of days and nights spent in eager study, of plenary, disinterested utterance of the thoughts that arise in him, at any hazard, at the price, say! of martyrdom. The work of the divine Spirit, as he conceives it, exalts, inebriates him, till the scientific apprehension seems to take the place of prayer, oblation, communion. It would be a mistake, he holds, to attribute to the human soul capacities merely passive or receptive. She, too, possesses initiatory powers as truly as the divine soul of
the world, to which she responds with the free gift of a light and heat that seem her own.

Yet a nature so opulently endowed can hardly have been lacking in purely physical or sensuous ardours. His pantheistic belief that the Spirit of God is in all things, was not inconsistent with, might encourage, a keen and restless eye for the dramatic details of life and character however minute, for humanity in all its visible attractiveness, since there, too, in very truth, divinity lurks. From those first fair days of early Greek speculation, love had occupied a large space in the conception of philosophy; and in after days Bruno was fond of developing, like Plato, like the Christian Platonists, combining something of the peculiar temper of each, the analogy between the flights of intellectual enthusiasm and those of physical love, with animation which shows clearly enough the reality of his experience in the latter. The Eroici Furori, his book of books, dedicated to Philip Sidney, who would be no stranger to such thoughts, presents a singular blending of verse and prose, after the manner of Dante's Vita Nuova. The supervening philosophic comment re-considers those earlier, physically erotic, impulses which had prompted the sonnet in voluble Italian, entirely to the advantage of their abstract, incorporeal, theoretic equivalents.

Yet if it is after all but a prose comment, it betrays no original lack of the sensuous or poetic fire. That there is no single name of preference, no Beatrice or Laura, by no means proves the young man's earlier desires to have been merely Platonic; and if the colours of love inevitably lose a little of their force and propriety by such deflection from their earlier purpose, their later intellectual purpose as certainly finds its opportunity thereby, in the matter of borrowed fire and wings. A kind of old scholastic pedantry creeping back over the ardent youth who had thrown it off so defiantly (as if love himself went in now for a University degree) Bruno develops, under the mask of amorous verse, all the various stages of abstraction, by which, as the last step of a long ladder, the mind attains actual "union." For, as with the purely religious mystics, "union," the mystic union of souls with one another and their Lord, nothing less than union between the contemplator and the contemplated—the reality, or the sense, or at least the name of such union—was always at hand. Whence that instinctive tendency towards union, if not from the Creator of things himself, who has doubtless prompted it in the physical universe, as in man? How familiar the thought that the whole creation, not less than the soul of man, longs for God "as the hart for the water-brooks"! To unite one's self to the infinite by largeness and lucidity of intellect, to enter, by that admirable faculty, into eternal life—this was the
true vocation of “the spouse,” of the rightly amorous soul. \( A \) filosofia è necessario amore. There would be degrees of progress therein, as of course also of relapse: joys and sorrows, therefore. And, in interpreting these, the philosopher, whose intellectual ardours have superseded religion and physical love, is still a lover and a monk. All the influences of the convent, the sweet, heady incense, the pleading sounds, the sophisticated light and air, the grotesque humours of old gothic carvers, the thick stratum of pagan sentiment beneath all this—Santa Maria sopra Minervam!—are indelible in him. Tears, sympathies, tender inspirations, attraction, repulsion, zeal, dryness, recollection, desire:—he finds place for them all: knows them all well in their unaffected simplicity, while he seeks the secret and secondary, or, as he fancies, the primary, form and purport of each.

A light on actual life, or a mere barren scholastic subtlety, never before had the pantheistic doctrine been developed with such completeness, never before connected with so large a sense of nature, so large a promise of the knowledge of it as it really is. The eyes that had not been wanting towards visible humanity turned now with equal liveliness on the natural world in that region of his birth, where all the colour and force of nature are at least two-fold. Nature is not only a thought or meditation in the divine mind; it is also a perpetual energy of that mind, which, ever identical with itself, puts forth and absorbs in turn all the successive forms of life, of thought, of language even. What seemed like striking transformations of matter were in truth only a chapter, a clause, in the great volume of the transformations of the divine Spirit. The mystic recognition that all is indeed divine had been simultaneous with a realisation of the largeness of the field of concrete knowledge, the infinite extent of all there was actually to know. Winged, fortified, by that central philosophic faith, the student proceeds to the detailed reading of nature, led on from point to point by manifold lights, which will surely strike on him, by the way, from the intelligence in it, speaking directly, sympathetically, to a like intelligence in him. The earth’s wonderful animation, as divined by one who anticipates by a whole generation the Baconian “philosophy of experience”:—in that, those bold, flighty, pantheistic speculations become tangible matter of fact. Here was the needful book for man to read, the full revelation, the story in detail of that one universal mind, struggling, emerging, through shadow, substance, manifest spirit, in various orders of being,—the veritable history of God. And nature, together with the true pedigree and evolution of man also, his gradual issue from it, was still all to learn. The delightful tangle of things!—it would be the delightful task of man’s thoughts to disentangle that. Already Bruno had measured the space
which Bacon would fill, with room perhaps for Darwin also. That Deity is everywhere, like all such abstract propositions, is a two-edged force, depending for its practical effect on the mind which admits it, on the peculiar perspective of that mind. To Dutch Spinosa, in the next century, faint, consumptive, with a hold on external things naturally faint, the theorem that God was in all things whatever, annihilating their differences, suggested a somewhat chilly withdrawal from the contact of all things alike. But in Bruno, eager and impassioned, an Italian of the Italians, it awoke a constant, inextinguishable appetite for every form of experience,—a fear, as of the one sin possible, of limiting, for one's self or another, the great stream flowing for thirsty souls, that wide pasture set ready for the hungry heart.

Considered from the point of view of a minute observer of nature, the Infinite might figure as "the infinitely little"; no blade of grass being like another, as there was no limit to the complexities of an atom of earth, cell within cell. And the earth itself, hitherto seemingly the privileged centre of a very limited universe, was, after all, but an atom in an infinite world of starry space, then lately divined by candid intelligence, but which the telescope would one day present to bodily eyes. For if Bruno must needs look forward to the future, to Bacon, for adequate knowledge of the earth, the infinitely little, he might look backwards also, gratefully, to another daring mind, which had already put that earth into its modest place, and opened the full view of the heavens. If God is eternal, then, the universe is infinite and worlds innumerable. Yes! one might well have divined what reason now demonstrated, indicating those endless spaces which a real sidereal science would gradually occupy.

That the stars are suns: that the earth is in motion: that the earth is of like stuff with the stars:—now the familiar knowledge of children:—dawning on Bruno as the calm assurance of reason on appeal from the prejudice of the eye, brought to him an inexpressibly exhilarating sense of enlargement in the intellectual, nay! in the physical atmosphere. And consciousness of unfailing unity and order did not desert him in that broader survey, which made the utmost one could ever know of the earth seem but a very little chapter in the endless history of God the Spirit, rejoicing so greatly in the admirable spectacle that He never ceases to evolve from matter new conditions. The immoveable earth as we term it, beneath our feet! Why, one almost felt the movement, the respiration of God in it. And yet how greatly even the physical eye, the sensible imagination (so to call it) was flattered by the theorem. What joy in that motion, in the prospect, the music! The music of the spheres,—he
could listen to it in a perfection such as had never been conceded to Plato, to Pythagoras even.

\[ \textit{Veni Creator Spiritus,} \\
\textit{Mentes tuorum visita,} \\
\textit{Iple superna gratia,} \\
\textit{Quae tu creasti pectora.} \]

Yes! The grand old Christian hymns, perhaps the grandest of them all, seemed to blend themselves in the chorus, to be deepened immeasurably under this new intention. It is not always, or often, that men's abstract ideas penetrate the temperament, touch the animal spirits, affect conduct. It was what they did with Bruno. The ghastly spectacle of the endless material universe—infinitesimal, in truth, starry as it may look to our terrestrial eyes—that prospect from which the mind of Pascal recoiled so painfully, induced in Bruno only the delightful consciousness of an ever-widening kinship and sympathy, since every one of those infinite worlds must have its sympathetic inhabitants. Scruples of conscience, if he felt such, might well be pushed aside for the "excellency" of such knowledge as this. To shut the eyes, whether of the body or the mind, would be a kind of sullen ingratitude: to believe, directly or indirectly, in any absolutely dead matter anywhere would be the one sin, as being implicitly a denial of the indwelling spirit.—A free spirit, certainly, as of old! Through all his pantheistic flights, from horizon to horizon, it was still the thought of liberty that presented itself, to the infinite relish of this "prodigal son" of Dominic. The Divine Spirit had made all things indifferently, with a largeness, a beneficence, impiously belied by any theory of restrictions, distinctions, of absolute limitation. Touch! see! listen! eat freely of all the trees of the garden of Paradise, with the voice of the Lord God literally everywhere:—here was the final counsel of perfection. The world was even larger than youthful appetite, youthful capacity. Let theologian and every other theorist beware how he narrowed either. "The plurality of worlds!"—How petty in comparison seemed those sins, the purging of which was men's chief motive in coming to places like this convent, whence Bruno, with vows broken, or obsolete for him, presently departed. A sonnet, expressive of the joy with which he returned to so much more than the liberty of ordinary men, does not suggest that he was driven from it. Though he must have seemed to those who had loved surely so loveable a creature to be departing, like the "prodigal" of the Gospel, into the farthest possible of far
countries, there is no proof of harsh treatment on their part, or even of an effort to detain him.

It happens, most naturally of course, that those who undergo the shock of spiritual or intellectual change sometimes fail to recognise their debt to the deserted cause:—how much of the heroism, or other high quality, of their rejection is really the product of what they reject. Bruno, the escaped monk, is still a monk; and his philosophy, impious as it might seem to some, a very new religion indeed, yet a religion. He came forth well-fitted by conventual influences to play upon men as he had been played upon. A challenge, a war-cry, an alarum, everywhere he seemed to be but the instrument of some subtly materialised spiritual force, like that of the old Greek prophets, the "enthusiasm" he was inclined to set so high, or like impulsive Pentecostal fire. His hunger to know, fed dreamily enough at first within the convent walls as he wandered over space and time an indefatigable reader of books, would be fed physically now by ear and eye, by large matter-of-fact experience, as he journeys from university to university; less as a teacher than as a courtier, a citizen of the world, a knight-errant of intellectual light. The philosophic need to try all things had given reasonable justification to the stirring desire for travel common to youth, in which, if in nothing else, that whole age of the later Renaissance was invincibly young. The theoretic recognition of that mobile spirit of the world, ever renewing its youth, became the motive of a life as mobile, as ardent, as itself, of a continual journey, the venture and stimulus of which would be the occasion of ever new discoveries, of renewed conviction.

The unity, the spiritual unity, of the world:—that must involve the alliance, the congruity, of all things with one another, of the teacher's personality with the doctrine he had to deliver, of the spirit of that doctrine with the fashion of his utterance, great reinforcements of sympathy. In his own case, certainly, when Bruno confronted his audience at Paris, himself, his theme, his language, were alike the fuel of one clear spiritual flame, which soon had hold of the audience also; alien, strangely alien, as that audience might seem from the speaker. It was intimate discourse, in magnetic touch with every one present, with his special point of impressibility; the sort of speech which, consolidated into literary form as a book, would be a dialogue according to the true Attic genius, full of those diversions, passing irritations, unlooked-for appeals, in which a solicitous missionary finds his largest range of opportunity, and takes even dull wits unaware. In Bruno, that abstract theory of the perpetual motion of the world was become a visible person talking with you.
And as the run-away Dominican was still in temper a monk, so he presented himself in the comely Dominican habit. The reproachful eyes were to-day for the most part kindly observant, registering every detail of that singular company; all the physiognomic effects which come by the way on people, and, through them, on things, the "shadows of ideas" in men's faces, his own pleasantly expressive with them, in turn. *De Umbris Idearum*: it was the very title of his discourse. There was "heroic gaiety" there: only, as usual with gaiety, it made the passage of an occasional peevish cloud seem all the chillier. Lit up, in the agitation of speaking, by many a harsh or scornful beam, yet always sinking, in moments of repose, to an expression of high-bred melancholy, the face was one that looked, after all, made for suffering,—already half pleading, half defiant, as of a creature you could hurt, but to the last never shake a hair's breadth from its estimate of yourself.

Like nature, like nature in that opulent country of his birth, which the "Nolan," as he delighted to call himself, loved so well that, born wanderer as he was, he must perforce return thither sooner or later at the risk of life, he gave *plenis manibus*, but without selection, and was hardly more fastidious in speech than the "asinine" vulgar he so deeply contemned. His rank, unweeded eloquence, abounding in play of words, rabbinic allegories, verses defiant of prosody, in the kind of erudition he professed to despise, with here and there a shameless image—the product not of formal method, but of Neapolitan improvisation—was akin to the heady wine, the sweet, coarse odours, of that fiery, volcanic soil, fertile in such irregularities as manifest power. Helping himself indifferently to all religions for rhetoric illustration, his preference was still for that of the soil, the old pagan religion, and for the primitive Italian gods, whose names and legends haunt his speech, as they do the carved and pictorial work of that age of the Renaissance. To excite, to surprise, to move men's minds, like the volcanic earth as if in travail, and, according to the Socratic fancy, bring them to the birth, was after all the proper function of the teacher, however unusual it might be in so "ancient" a university. "Fantastic!"—from first to last that was the descriptive epithet; and the very word, carrying us to Shakespeare, reminds one how characteristic of the age such habit was, and that it was pre-eminently due to Italy. A man of books, he had yet so vivid a hold on people and things, that the traits and tricks of the audience seemed to strike from his memory all the graphic resources of his old readings. He seemed to promise some greater matter than was then actually exposed by him; to be himself enjoying the fulness of a great out-look, the vaguer suggestion of which was sufficient to sustain the curiosity of the listeners. And still, in hearing him speak you seemed to see
that subtle spiritual fire to which he testified kindling from word to word. What Gaston then heard was, in truth, the first fervid expression of all those contending views out of which his written works would afterwards be compacted, of course with much loss of heat in the process. Satiric or hybrid growths, things due to ὑβρίς, insult, insolence, to what the old Satyrs of fable embodied,—the volcanic South is kindly prolific of these, and Bruno abounded in mockery: it was by way of protest. So much of a Platonist, for Plato's genial humour he had nevertheless substituted the harsh laughter of Aristophanes. Paris, teeming, beneath a very courtly exterior, with mordant words, in unabashed criticism of all real or suspected evil, provoked his utmost powers of scorn for the "Triumphant Beast," the "Installation of the Ass," shining even there amid the university folk—those intellectual bankrupts of the Latin Quarter, who had so long passed between them so gravely a worthless "parchment and paper" currency. In truth, Aristotle, the supplanter of Plato, was still in possession, pretending, as Bruno conceived, to determine heaven and earth by precedent, hiding the proper nature of things from the eyes of men. "Habit"—that last word of his practical philosophy—indolent habit! what would this mean in the intellectual life, but just that sort of dead judgments which, because the mind, the eye, were no longer at work in them, are most opposed to the essential freedom and quickness of the spirit?

The Shadows of Ideas, De Umbris Ideaorum: such, in set terms, had been the subject of Bruno's discourse, appropriately to the still only half emancipated intellect of his audience:—on approximations to truth: the divine imaginations, as seen, darkly, more bearably, by weaker faculties, in words, in visible facts, in their shadows merely. According to the doctrine of "Indifference," indeed, there would be no real distinction between substance and shadow. In regard to man's feeble wit, however, varying degrees of knowledge might constitute such a distinction. "Ideas, and Shadows of Ideas": the phrase recurred often; and, as such phrases will, fixed itself in Gaston's fancy, though not precisely according to the mind of the speaker; accommodated rather to the thoughts which just then pre-occupied his own. As already in his life there had been the Shadows of Events,—the indirect yet fatal influence there of deeds in which he had no part, so now, for a time, he seemed to fall under the spell, the power, of the Shadows of Ideas, of Bruno's Ideas; in other words, of those indirect suggestions, which, though no necessary part of his doctrines, yet inevitably followed upon them. What, for instance, might be the proper practical limitations of that telling theory of the "coincidence," the "indifference," of "opposites"?
To that true son of the Renaissance, in the light of those large, antique, pagan ideas, the difference between Rome and the Reform would figure, of course, as but an insignificant variation upon some deeper and more radical antagonism between two tendencies of men's minds. But what of an antagonism deeper still? Between Christ and the world? say:—Christ and the flesh? or that so very ancient antagonism between good and evil? Was there any real place left for imperfection, moral or otherwise, in a world wherein the minutest atom, the lightest thought, could not escape from God's presence? Who should note the crime, the sin, the mistake, in the all-embracing operation of that eternal spirit, which must be incapable of misshapen births? In proportion as man raised himself to the ampler survey of the divine work around him, just in that proportion would the very notion of evil disappear. There were no weeds, no "tares," in the endless field. The truly illuminated mind, discerning spiritually, might do with impunity what it would. Even under the shadow of monastic walls, that had sometimes been the precept, which larger theories of "inspiration" had bequeathed to practice. —"Of all the trees of the garden thou mayest freely eat!—If you take up any deadly thing, it shall not hurt you!—And I think that I, too, have the spirit of God!"

Bruno, a citizen of the world, Bruno at Paris, was careful to warn off the vulgar from applying the decisions of philosophy beyond its proper speculative limits. But a kind of secrecy, an ambiguous atmosphere, encompassed, from the first, alike the speaker and the doctrine; and in that world of fluctuating and ambiguous characters, the alert mind certainly, pondering on this novel "reign of the spirit"—what it might actually be—would hardly fail to find in Bruno's doctrines a method of turning poison into food, to live and thrive thereon—an art, to Paris, in the intellectual and moral condition of that day, hardly less opportune than had it related to physical poisons. If Bruno himself was cautious not to suggest the ethic or practical equivalent to his theoretic positions, there was that in his very manner of speech, in that rank, unweeded eloquence of his, which seemed naturally to discourage any effort at selection, any sense of fine difference, of nuances, or proportion, in things. The loose sympathies of his genius were allied to nature, nursing, with equable maternity of soul, good, bad, and indifferent, rather than to art, distinguishing, rejecting, refining. Commission and omission! sins of the former surely would have the natural preference. And how would Paolo and Francesca have read this lesson? How would Henry, and Margaret of the Memoirs, and other susceptible persons then present, read it, especially if the opposition between practical good and evil ran counter to, or did not wholly
coincide with, another distinction, the “opposed points” of which, to Gaston for one, could never by any possibility become “indifferent”—the distinction, namely, between the precious and the base, aesthetically: between what was right and wrong in the matter of art?