Gaston de Latour

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CHAPTER XI

[The Tyrant]

Was Margaret after all indeed the mirror of her time, or that other, her brother, on the throne? In an age so spontaneous and sincere, in its devotion to antiquity wearing its well-dusted antique lore like some fresh flower of to-day, the features of "The Tyrant," as Suetonius and Lampridius had conceived him, must of course have come in evidence, to be welcomed or otherwise along with other types. Would it have been with a shudder or with a sense of encouragement at the discovery of a spirit so akin to his own, with a blush or only a satiric laugh perhaps, the whirligig of things coming round again to the same point so funnily, that in the Latin pages of Lampridius, Dion, Herodianus, or in a new French version of the old Greek of [Plutarch], King Henry might recognise his likeness under a portrait in which vicious inclinations and a kind of reprobate beauty are blent in proportions of which we can hardly get at the secret? Many resemblances to himself in the shameful young Roman emperor, who had polluted afresh by taking the impiously divine name of Elagabalus, he could not fail to notice. Fondling of a woman he afterwards banishes to a remote Syrian town, but who, as the sister of an empress, had tasted something of the splendours of the imperial court like the French queen-mother, like Catherine, now all cunning, now all audacity, always without scruple for the child she has early dedicated to the service of an impure religion in the magnificent temple of the Sun-god at [Emesa], at fifteen he issues from the mystic shelter of his boyhood, himself like a fascinating idol in her hands. He delights the eyes of the debauched soldiery, as they see him gracefully performing the functions of his office, delights their very souls when, victims thus of a clever coup d'etat, they accept him as at least the illegitimate son of their late indulgent...
murdered emperor, as their emperor to be, with passing flashes of the courage, of the military gifts they can really understand.

He is still, notwithstanding, true to his priestly education, himself at heart a priest of the hot, mad Assyrian sun-god whose worship is a prostitution, whose name Elagabalus, adding to it the whole gaudy load of official names and titles, he has taken for his own, by whose favour, surely, he is now on his imperial progress, till with the assent, the acclamation of a senate and a populace doating in their turn on the lax, florid, sentimental features, still extant on his coins, on the strange voluptuous Syrian nature, the wild dances and barbaric hymns, his supposed possession of magic gifts, the largess, doubtless, of carefully hoarded wealth, he stands on the Palatine hill, the jewelled mitre glittering on his head, to lay there the foundations of the temple of his own tutelary deity, for whom he is jealous, and who shall cast the native gods of Rome into obscurity. But, like the young French monarch returning from Cracow to Paris, he had loitered, fatally for himself, on that so delightful journey. The roses had seemed to come down on him from above, and from the earth at the touch of his feet, of his chariot-wheels. All he comes in contact with blossoms or is transformed into gold. Only, somewhere among them, like Henry of France, he has left behind him his understanding, and appears at times a madman. His people soon tire of a frantic superstition, such as this he appears really attached to, of the lad’s cruelties, of a sensual cruelty apparently for its own sake, of the grave folly which establishes a senate of women under the presidency of his mother, an earlier Catherine de Medici, for the decision of questions of attire and etiquette, his marriage to a Vestal virgin, his polygamy, his coarse favouritism, the dreamy profanity with which he solemnises the nuptials of his impure god to Pallas of Troy, to Urania, to all the goddesses of Italy, the secret human sacrifices, the open murders. He could hardly have sinned so much in the time, objects the shrewder student of what historic writers liked so well, doubtless, to tell of him. For, alas! for the degeneracy of a later age, of a Northern latitude, in this matter of life as a fine art (one of the minor merely decorative or amusing arts), Elagabalus had managed to pack his entire story into the incredibly brief term of three years, and died at eighteen along with the still doating mother, cut to pieces suddenly by the swords of his former admirers, the victim of art, of his poetry, his own poetic soul, you might almost say of his religion!

King Henry's masquerade, his gloomy theatrical reproduction of the part of the insane young Roman emperor, had a run after all of not less than [fifteen] years. He dies by the hand of an assassin, a fanatical monk, at the age
of [thirty-seven], in Gaston's [thirty-seven]th year, with taste surfeited, one might fancy, of such toys as he really cared for. Meantime the storm gathering around, joining cloud to cloud, does but enhance, at least for sensitive spectators, the theatrical effect of the thing, a tiny, flowery, madly lighted island, whence the music and satiric laughter are heard across the black waves which must presently engulf it. Gay as those revellers seem, they have at heart the melancholy proper to the insane. Pluck one of them by the sleeve, and you'll hear also the weeping of the madman, for a moment aware of his madness and what must come of it. But since we are, all, or the more sensitive of us, educated, formed, transformed, brought to be what we are in a large measure by what we see, perforce or by chance or choice, sympathetically or otherwise, to follow for a few pages that singularly blent scenery, may further the interpretation of Gaston's character as he stands there for a while to watch the actors; so closely that for a time he seemed actually to be of their company, fascinated by the sense of a certain beauty there, he could not wholly have explained even to himself, of the saving animation and gaiety, it might be, with which a worthless thing was done, the pathetic grace with which the infatuated, the doomed, pass to their destruction, as he was always on the alert also for redeeming traits in vitiated human nature. The estimate of an age, of its characteristics, as seen in its effects upon a sensitive mind:—that, after all, is the utmost we can come by in converse with even the strictest of historians.

Votre État baye de tous côtés, comme une vieille masure. Où sont vos noblesses? Où sont vos soldats? Votre trône est à qui veut le prendre. Vous touchez la ruine.—It was the warning of Louis of Nassau, a shrewd politician not unfriendly to the throne of the Valois, in the year next after that fatal one of Saint Bartholomew. Ten years had since passed by, and now the faithful chronicler of his time, Pierre de l'Estoile, noting events from day to day, seemingly with no prejudices, records precisely how Le Roi is [behaving] comme [s'il n'y eust plus eu de guerre, ni de Ligue en France:] faisait tous les jours festins nouveaux, comme si son Estat eut été le plus paisible du monde. As if blinded, however, by heaven or by himself, he did thus with an all but empty purse, on the verge of public bankruptcy. "On n'entendait parler que des choses effroyables." It was as if they felt, knew—these people, Catherine and her flying cortège—their hour, the end of their world all but upon them, and were bent desperately now on gathering up what they really cared for most—they and their like, the fragments that remained under the threatening ferment, to the curious eye revealing [their] character. The historian observes about this time that la huitième guerre civile avait commencé,—the eighth: and,
in fact, we know that for a whole generation war, civil war, had been like a part of the established condition of things, its shocking incidents mixed up with the perennial picturesque of nature, and the pretty artifices of that gracefully self-indulgent age. Smoldering like a fire, creeping like a serpent among the corn, raising its metal coil here or there in declared battle, war, or the spirit of it, its immediate causes were everywhere, in men's families, in men's very selves, in Gaston for instance, a war between that profoundly rooted sensuousness within, which held him there gazing sympathetically year after year on what the religious mysticism, which formed the other half of his nature, bid him fly from for immediate refuge in the wounds of [Jesus Christ]. The reader sees him, it is to be hoped, pleased or at least interested, yet regretful, sorrowfully puzzled for himself and others, curious, indulgent, not however very self-indulgent, and certainly not with a made-up mind. And on the larger scene of battle also, various long-smoldering oppositions had formed at last very definitely into two camps, hostile even to death. The eighth civil war, the war of the three Henries, des trois Henri, had commenced, says the historian. But in truth among the many parties into which France was split, Henry the Third and what friends he had scarcely counted for one at all. The League being set now so decisively against “The Cause,” you might think that legitimate royalty as a third party might ally itself to either, to each in turn, with the futile subtlety of old Catherine's hopeless policy. No! The other two will squeeze number three out “of the way” between them. It was beside any question of the insignificant claims of Henri de Valois, and all but over his crushed person, that Henri de Guise and Henri de Navarre were to fight out their battle.

—“The Cause” led by Henri de Navarre, “The League” under Henri de Guise, loosely representative, respectively, of the Huguenots, of the Catholics:—It would be impossible for the King to take the leadership of either, though invited, perhaps half ironically, to do so by one and the other. The Huguenots are less than a tenth part of the French people, but shrewd and rich far beyond that proportion: the Reformation, armed Protestantism. Their Catholic neighbours are really afraid of these men, who will pray openly after their own fashion in defiance of law, but who pray standing upright in their armour. The crime or accident of the Eve of Saint Bartholomew has left their general condition unchanged, adding only a profound sense of wrong. “They were cats,” as the Queen-mother, Catherine, knew—“those Huguenots!—que vos Huguenots qui se trouvent toujours sur leurs pieds.” All over France they are drawing more and more compactly together, hope to conquer
France for the Reformation, failing that are ready to dismember her by the conquest of a part.

You may read in a certain old Suabian chronicler whose grimy blacksmith's hands handled a pen forcibly, how a famous Italian smith constructed a singular flower of iron. It was like the stealthy formation of the League over against those Huguenots, une armée of terrible armed men—d'hommes sortant de la terre. They loved, those genial old Swiss and South German masters, to curb, smooth, and curl their harsh rude metal into trellis work of honeysuckle, spiked lilies, bossy roses: and now, here was a cunning Italian more than emulating their art, being determined for once to do the like while retaining under the undulous leaves all iron's native poignancy and defiance. How he contrived, polished, veiled his machinery, you were tempted to try with the finger amid the graceful foliage, touched the hidden spring perchance, and found your wrist imprisoned in a moment in a circle of bristling points, while the central stamen slid through the hand, like a great poignard from its sheath, or the fang of a steelly serpent. Flashing suddenly like that upon the Huguenots, upon King Henry, the League, “The Holy Union for [Defense of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Faith]” (the supremacy, in fact the final accession to the throne of France, of the house of Lorraine, somewhat hypocritically of catholicism, only so far as was compatible with that) had been cunningly shaped to its end in secrecy for years, and was at last, after a shock of incredible conflicting rumour, now actually in evidence, first of all in Picardy patient, humble and devout, its broad waves of corn and grass and stately grey churches in large sympathy with the sky, Picardy, where catholicism still seems a thing of the soil, the earth itself, so to speak, still naturally green with it. It was not for the Pope certainly: he disavows it, with many another false or ambiguous volunteer in his service; nor for the king, though satirically challenged to assume its headship—of the Sainte Union—if a true son of the church he be; nor for the clergy, whose fanaticism it is ready to betray; nor for Christ, nor, as it pretends, for the poor whom He loved, “the impoverished French people”; “the poor of France!”—nor for France, which it is as ready to sell to Spain as the Huguenot to dismember, nor even for any section of it, nor in the proper sense for any political interest at all, but simply bent on taking advantage of all men's religious or other enthusiasm by the way, the unscrupulous conspiracy of a family, a family with a nest of murderous enmities within its own bosom, something of the unnatural tragic horror of some old Greek play. With that unerring relentlessness, for once, which fiction supposes in the “secret society,” as such, it spreads from Picardy to Normandy to Champagne,
from North to South, into the streets of Paris, closes gradually and therefore all the more firmly, locks itself together, round the court, the throne, the person of the king, from whose light head it would pluck the crown, has its Judith, or [Jael], or [Jehu], in the person of the Duchesse de Montpensier, the soeur furieuse of Henri de Guise, ostentatiously resident in Paris. She carries at her girdle, strange heirloom, the scissors which made a tonsured monk of the fainéant, and shall do the like for Henry the Third.

The court, as we saw, with its sweet-lipped leader, its Queen Margot, was gracefully pedantic, classical, ready to sell anything, to sell itself for a song really old, and its enemies catch a trick so taking for the moment, in learned but not necessarily far-fetched parallels, minatory, significant, between the present and the past in ancient Rome, or say! in ancient Tyre even, or in [Babylon]. They had their theories also, in an age ambitious of metaphysic views, abstract theories, yet practical in this, that they give to vague or passing enmities or discontent that intellectual coherence, that unity of idea, by which they may appeal to the imagination. A certain old theory for instance du gouvernement des sires du fleur de Lys, that recommends itself to the house of Lorraine. Legitimately, France must of necessity be governed by a member of the royal family, but not necessarily by its hereditary head: and that convenient theory is reinforced by an appeal still more disquieting to recondite historic fact. Older than the House of Capet, the House of Lorraine, Henri de Guise and his natural issue are the legitimate heirs not merely of the personal rights of Charlemagne, but of the apostolic benediction upon him, the patronage of the Roman see to which, Observe! we are faithful. And the opportunity is come at last for a restoration of the crown to its legitimate owners. Nay! they represent, in a past older than Charlemagne even: Pharamond, Clodion le Chevelu. Retourne, Chilpéric! Clovis, revéille-toi! says the Anonymous Sonnet, chalked on the walls, the house-doors, of Paris, on the doors of the Louvre.

Le tuer ou le tondre, to slay the usurping tyrant who fails even of the conventional title to reign, or make him a monk, a capucin, with those shears of the new Judith, La duchesse de Montpensier; lui faire suivre sa vocation: there are genuine precedents for either course in our old French history. Pope Sixtus the Fifth, who does not think much of what the Leaguers and their like boast to be doing for him, asked at length s'il serait bon d'attenter à la vie du Roi, answers of course honestly with a decided negative. Old Jewish history, old Roman history, however, seemed to give a different answer to Huguenot and to certain new-fangled "republicans" of that early date as to the righteous
treatment of Tyrants, and the end of Henry the Third might already be foreseen.

For to the classic fantasies of a court paganised under the mask of catholic zeal, to the antique, poetic or pedantic pretensions of the rival Guises, the Huguenots reading their Bible in French, oppose in their turn, like our English puritans, ardent defenders of the Évangele, of the New Testament, though they profess to be, certain grim reminiscences of the Old, and were terribly in earnest about them. Tyrannicide, that is to say assassination, is duty, surely, nay! heroic piety, in certain cases about which "armed Protestantism" may develop a Protestant casuistry. Men's thoughts were then hard at work all around on the nature and basis of royal and all other authority, on the very basis of society itself. Those fervid Hebrew reminiscences of the past meet half-way a wholly different range of thoughts which anticipate the future. Les rois tenant leur couronne du peuple, et peuvent le "forfaire" pour félonie envers le peuple, comme un vassal "forfait" son fief envers son seigneur. Those forcible, metallic words are heard in a new connexion. Full-fledged republican theories of "social contract," Elective Monarchy, la "sacro-sainte autorité de l'assemblée nationale,"—present themselves in folios or pamphlets or audacious talk, and lend a sufficiently threatening import to the assembling of the States-general with immense popular enthusiasm at Blois, whither, already his people's prisoner, King Henry goes to preside, playing the desperate hand of Louis the Sixteenth—to preside over the debates which may end in "improving away" himself. The League itself, "for mutual protection sans nulle acception de personnes," had already mastered some of the revolutionary slang of 'ninety-three.

And our brother of Alençon, Anjou and the rest, Monsieur, our sullen younger brother!—how far may we count on the loyalty, the family sentiment of one of our own blood, our own naughty blood who, should we fail of legitimate offspring, is our natural heir, yet who sees us but a few years older than himself and wedded to maiden health fresh from the fields of [Jarnac and Moncontour]. So acutely, in fact, does he understand the advantages, the temptations of his position, that he is terribly afraid lest we be beforehand with his very existence and, to add to our perplexities, is for ever escaping from an affectionate home, as from a prison, to our avowed enemies in England or the Netherlands, or within the bounds of France, or at our very doors. Our mother, truly, does not fail in the blind love of a cat for her offspring, of herself, but is failing in whatever dubious political craft may once have been hers, her old tricks which no longer deceive, is anxious still, however, to manage for us, to occupy us with delightful aesthetic fatuities,
that all the serious things of life may be left to her, and has blundered badly more than once of late. Our version, then, of Elagabalus in the North is not an unmixed success. Of the personal gifts appropriate to that part we are undoubtedly possessed, but circumstance, the accidents we cannot compel, go for more than half in the production of such magnetic effects as that wonderful progress from Syria to Rome, or the brilliancy of our own youth. We are Christians, after all, of a sort, not pagans, very craven ones indeed, hampered at every move, at least by the susceptibilities of others, and in a Northern latitude every thing moves slowly, while rapidity of the action in passion was, as may be perceived, an essential in the success of the piece which that blood-stained, flowery young Roman emperor played out to its end in three years. The mistake of prolonging such a piece beyond the natural life of its floral decorations is nothing less than ruinous. Dès lors, says the historian, le roi était comme seul. To whom shall we turn?

Well! With Louise at one's side, princesse si belle et bien formée, still, of course, to the hope of offspring of our own. A cry, a wail, poignant as that of biblical Leah, or Rachel, goes up from every church in France, that Le Roi pourroit tost avoir belle et abandante lignée, and gives a kind of shrill, startling, sharply expressed outward accent to Gaston's silent preoccupation with the fate of his own lost child, to his increasing desire, as the years increase, that he might feel less alone, while those haunting voices of the children, grown now to youth, come to him too reproachfully to be borne, out of some dim background of the world immediately about him, with its manifold outrages on human kindness. King and Consort proceed once more to the sanctuary of his youth, to the church of Chartres, to the feet of Our Lady Under the Earth, as to the hem of her veritable garment there, take away with them the copy of it to be worn by themselves in faith.

But in vain! Ostentatiously, in late Lent after a too prolonged carnival, Leurs Majestés visit in turn every church in Paris, to hear Mass with a special "intention" that male offspring may be given them as they so greatly desire—the male line which may succeed to the crown of France. Henry dedicates a new or fresh piece of The True Cross replacing an older relic stolen lately from La Sainte-Chapelle, the chapel of Our "Palace," fallen doubtless into miserable Italian keeping, to the great consternation of Parisians, always devout at least up to that level. Hypocrite! think his people as they see him pass in somewhat abject devotion, along the foul streets, muttering prayers as best he can amid a pressing crowd of sordid "penitents." Still, there really are complexities of human temper at times a little beyond the people. True! Meantime, observes the chronicler, not withstanding all its
miseries, they manage to be gay in Paris, to dance and laugh, he says; amorously of course, to put the last refinements upon the low octave of colour then prevailing, *couleurs de sacristie* almost, art's latest triumph surely, in bringing by a subtle economy out of so little, effects so rich. A banquet in one colour, or a combat by torch-light of *quatorze blancs contra quatorze jaunes*, in the courtyard of the Louvre. If those comedians we have ordered from Venise would but come to teach us what little remains to be learned of the full meaning of life!—Brown satin, grey silk enriched with black velvet, set up with rich dark fancy stones and heavy unbleached lace! What a flutter of expectation along the double row of courtiers when [Henry] enters the presence chamber in that new toilet, contrasting, the white aristocratic *pâté* of his face, while the silent unheeding monarch, “the tyrant,” cons—a Latin grammar! *qui semboit*, says [L'Estoile], *presager la déclinaison de son Etat*, is actually learning anew to decline, keeps all the world waiting for that. And had not that other delightful young decadent Byzantine emperor, kept the grey-beard ministers waiting, while he fed his favourite pigeons, studied their dietetic whims, their markings, their dainty tumbles over the jasper floor, an achievement of nature, a spectacle for infinite power, infinite leisure, worth surely all protocols, movement of armies and the like; all the world beside. For contrast, *pour rehausser* the effect of all that, across those dim *couleurs de sacristie*, as if revealed by sudden lantern flash amid shadows, the uniforms, crude, truculent, barbaric, of the Swiss guards who serve us, a regiment of mercenary guards already in attendance, again like a presage of 'ninety-three, against revolutionary outrage on our sacred person. Nay! our aesthetic doings shall have a purpose beyond any merely momentary satisfaction. Pentecost, that day we have always piously observed as so conspicuously our day of good-fortunes, shall be further honoured by a new order of knighthood, a band of young men tall and “proper,” dear to our heart, and devoted to us, who may defend us—*ces épées dorées*—in the undisguised hand-to-hand battle in one's very chamber, to which we seem to be coming, among these rambling stairs and narrow passages of our hôtel, or prison, de Saint Paul. The insignia and apparel of the Order, its copes, with [altar and desks] you might still see not long since in the *Musée des Souverains de France*, along with the [silver baptismal font] of St. Louis and [Charlemagne’s prayer-book] and [the armour in which Henry II died].

Fear, wild sudden fear, the chief performer stricken by it:—that is of course a distinctly appropriate effect in such a scene of tragi-comedy, the sort of effect to which orchestra and spectators gradually attune themselves. As if angry heaven itself in the form of a beggar forced its way in to threaten,
through the serried guards, amid all the morbid luxuries of this bankrupt court, comes the bold remonstrance of a single just man here or there, representing the wretched condition of "the poor," that is to say of the people of France. *Pour dix qui vivent grassement ici il y en a dix mille qui ont disette.* In still less considerate form, the same reproach penetrates to the royal cabinet as anonymous printed matter, pasquinades in French or Latin, that irrepressible *liberté Française de parler* now chatting through a press whose agency is already everywhere. Outside, the learned and curious were already collecting the handbills, tracts, sheets for posting all over Paris, very popular in intention though often quaintly learned in the form or even in the very language in which they were written:—*Le Réveille-matin*, journal of the Huguenots who could cut as sharply with the pen as with the sword, says L'Estoile, who has soiled many of his pages with such lying or truthful satire of the day—silly acrostics which repack the letters of the royal name, *La Vie de la Royne-Mère qu'on appelle vulgairement La Vie de Sainte Catherine.* She herself read and laughed at, could have done it better, added something to it. *Rithmes parlant des roines Frédégondes, Brunehilde, Jézébel.*—*Des bruits de Paris c'est-à-dire menteries*, yet they pass from hand to hand, things erewhile people would not have dared to whisper, printed now. And about this time, *exhumée pour ainsi dire du tombeau de son auteur, Le Discours de la Servitude Volontaire,* that terrible declaration de La Boétie against royalty, is published for the first time.—A circle of hissing tongues all about, round the court and its gaieties, with fangs of set steel below.

The reader remembers perhaps the sad case of the traveller who must needs die or sleep for an hour as he traverses a desolate forest. The place abounds in ants, terrible red ants. But he gathers the brush wood carefully together in a great circle on a clear space, and lights a great fire all round him to keep the insects away. Then he lies down to sleep in the midst, but wakes with the hissing of a circle of venomous serpents all round his blazing ring, only waiting till the fire burns itself out.

Strange! It is this conscious or unconscious imitator of faineant old Roman or Byzantine emperor-deities, who becomes "majesty" for the first time in France, half in personal vanity, half in fear, shrouds himself to be adored, changes the old easy accessibility of a French monarch into a curious system of etiquette through which it is difficult for ordinary people to penetrate. The people of Paris, the poor, have their suspicions, and with more or less shrewdness put their own disloyal construction on the studied mystery of their master's life, disseminate their rumours. He makes a shadow where he goes artfully. Great is gossip; and the mysterious, even if it be not the mystery
of hidden crime, secures its full further advantage to gossip. Meantime the rival Henry, Henri de Guise, now veritable Roi de Paris, comes hither on his selfish business, leader of that solemn league and covenant, yet with florid abundant face and hair, like the sun; and, as if he made the flowers they threw about him to grow there, playing his part with a delightful ease and a kind of jovial natural royalty over common people. Parisians always sympathetic, ever at home straightforward with a cheerful countenance, like him none the less for that manly or brutal scar across the check. That it repeats oddly the accident of his father's youth, who had been Le Balafré before him, doubles the prestige of the thing. It is like a sign impressed by heaven—or hell. They credit him, as people will sometimes credit creatures only a very little stronger than themselves, with almost diabolical personal force.—Is it powder of gold, or of steel, that he takes in his meat?—Bon Prince! Meantime the flowers are rained gently upon him. He is well-nigh stifled with the close pressure of affection. The simple rubbed their chapelets contre lui pour les sanctifier.

I have dwelt thus at length on what was visible in Paris just then, on the mere historic scene there, forgetful it might seem of the company of Gaston, but only because I do suppose him thoughtfully looking on with us, all the while, as essentially a creature of the eye, even more likely than others to be shaped by the things he sees. With a look, a manner, a manner of speaking also, which infallibly win royal kindness, he penetrates that awful reserve, does but feel at rest, a certain repose of temper, amid the dainty selections and adjustments which prevail amid these last pale lustres of the court of the Valois, awed sometimes by its deeper shadows, its darkness, wistful, curious, but himself certainly uncontaminate as if invisibly shielded, and always with great pity, a great indulgence. J'ai une merveilleuse lâcheté, says his tutor, Michel de Montaigne (might have said for him), vers la miséricorde et mansuétude.

There are certain half-domestic animals which draw very near to men's lives, their firesides, only to be the objects of their hatred; the last of the Valois set Gaston thinking of them. The tyrant—le tyran aux abois; it was like one of these animals, and he pitied it as one must pity the very rat which sheds tears at last, they say who know it best. And then, according to his habit, he looked back and saw his contemporary, the hopeful lad, eloquent and brave, "spirituel," in this man whose name was to be infamous: and that he could do so without effort was a proof, surely, of surviving moral capacity, as if some discerning artist, from the malignant caricatures which remain as the veritable likeness of so personable a monarch, were to put together for himself such a portrait of Henry the Third, as happens to have
been preserved, in a certain old picture gallery not far from Venice: winsome lad there! \textit{puer ingenui vultus ingenuique pudoris}. You had but to look closely, kindly, even now, and there were redeeming touches amid the ruin to which he was actually come.

To the disciple of Montaigne, his doctrine of the "ondoyancy" of the world, it came naturally of course to note the unexpected taking place in us, after all reassuringly, to the discredit of many an obvious forecast about men's souls, those surprises which Montaigne had taught him to prize in man as in nature, the mixture of motives, the afterthoughts, the repentances, saving inconsistencies, returns upon one's self, of the conscience of right; dews of paradise, call them in fact, penetrating even to hell, which leave seemingly damned souls at the worst but dubious ones after all. The devil, the \textit{savant chimiste}, says \textit{Baudelaire}, is \textit{the alchemist of boredom}, and as such an \textit{ennuyant} because a really inexpressive character; and for one's own sake as a mere spectator who claims at least to be interested, we are anxious to find those saving inconsistencies in evil, which reassure us as with a hopeful indication of latent redeeming forces still at work here or there below the surface, very deep it may be, to regenerate after all in ways beyond our limited power of calculation. It brought him, then, a flattering sense of his philosophic capacity, that he could note without prejudice the self-denying assiduities of royalty about a childish death-bed at this time. It was pitiful enough, indeed, to think of what became of some other children, stricken, forced to suffer in their earliest days, so large a part of the penalty of the political offences or mere unsuccess of their fathers, the young children of Coligni, or Gabriel Montgomery. Little Madame Elizabeth, the daughter of \textit{Charles IX}, she at least, for one, felt what sweetness there was in Henry's kindness. The courtly array about her bed of suffering had for once its justification in pleasing distracting a sick child. The little princess—with perhaps mistaken scruples they tried to make her understand she was dying, but didn't succeed. Though she admitted in truth her inability to say her long prayer, said her short one, and then died, \textit{pleurée et regrettée, à cause de son gentil esprit et de sa bonté et douceur}. The white queen, mother of the tiny princess, soon after departed finally alone to her old German home. That was like another child's funeral, with universal regret for a train of such white deaths, so to call them, of women and children, amid red ones. Ah! how people wept in that Paris which meant to have sold itself for the minor graces of life. And here was the other queen, praying, full of contending terrors, that the king her husband may repudiate her, and the like. Ah! Pity of Heaven, of \textit{Notre-Dame de Cléry}, of \textit{Notre-Dame de} Chartres, \textit{Me donnez masle lignée}!
There was one artist in France to whom, though he knew how to be a courtier, a sort of primitive greatness, something of the proper and the natural dignity of art and life, had still remained in the midst of that world of self-satisfied decadence in both. Let him give us, ere we part from it, a glimpse of those persistent moral forces in things, such as he afforded from time to time, with an effect of ironic contrast to the age of Henry the Third, and without which no picture of that age can be complete. Jean Cousin, a sort of Michelangelo in France, has an imagination like his occupied not by the low-pulsed middle-period, so to call it, of his own day, but with its energetic origins and issues of human life, the Creation of Adam and Eve, Eva Pandora, the Last Judgment: the naked realities, so to speak, of human destiny, displayed in a world which had come to find dress the most important thing in life, and draped sculpture more significant than the nude. Here indeed, under a certain Italian influence, all the little things of existence were become marvellously refined, but with a refinement, however, which was in truth but the garment's hem, the outermost aura of the great art of Italy itself, and it was to this that the soul of Cousin had reverted, or rather perhaps to the old Gothic vigour of his native France itself. For he had in fact a predilection not explained by the mere conditions of demand and supply at that moment, for work in that conspicuously medieval and French manufacture of painting on glass, though he refined immeasurably at every point in the process upon all earlier achievements in it. While he knows more than all the old secrets of its [embroidered draperies] and ruby and gold, he can also draw with the truth and largeness of a master, though still with an eye to the particular destination of his drawing. He can also think profoundly, and has, again like Michelangelo, and in sympathy with the finer spirit of that age generally, his dreams of old Roman greatness, like that from the realisation of which his hand has just now rested. To-day, then, King and court, with whom, unfitted though they are for more than a superficial understanding of his aims, the aged master nevertheless has his credit, proceed in gay summer weather fitted for the excursion to the old chapel of the castle in the forest of Vincennes, to gaze on his latest achievement there in the colours they love. The new window gleams out amid the shadows of the old gothic chapel, a marvel of many-coloured gold, clear as crystal, like in the Apocalyptic vision itself, and they listen readily while the aged painter deferentially, with ironic deference is it? explains the subject ("I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!") concerning which, though like veritable connoisseurs they profess an almost exclusive care for form and handling in art, they are straightway curious.—What the splendid figure with crown and sceptre is doing:—A fine
subject in fact, perhaps the greatest art can deal with, though certainly not yet worn-out by artists: the Sibyl, summing up all [modes of thought and life]: Augustus [kneeling at her feet]: the Mother and the Child, all the pathos of human flesh which the eternal Son has now wrapt about himself. Aye! a Gospel subject, the speaker asserts to the ignorant questions with which, with rapturous comments on the [Madonna], they begin presently to distract Cousin's further speech, who seems, indeed, [like aghostly cricket]. For their master, being visibly put out [by God's favor to] Augustus, was supposed to have merited [a male heir himself. Henry's unavailing quest for progeny] is one horn of the royal dilemma, and the light [of that visionary company, the heavenly court,] glares actually on the other, the opposite form of it, with the effect of an unkindly, ironic contrast, like a blow in the face, as from the lightning-flash, the thunder-clap which suddenly darkens the place on the June evening, at which modern royalty, in a wicked rage, pulls out a rattling rosary and begins to patter to itself, with the mien of a veritable coward: a model of such as the artist perhaps took note for professional use.