

Louis Lambert eBook

Louis Lambert by Honoré de Balzac

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Contents

Louis Lambert eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	5
Page 3.....	6
Page 4.....	7
Page 5.....	8
Page 6.....	9
Page 7.....	11
Page 8.....	12
Page 9.....	13
Page 10.....	14
Page 11.....	15
Page 12.....	17
Page 13.....	19
Page 14.....	21
Page 15.....	23
Page 16.....	25
Page 17.....	27
Page 18.....	29



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
FRAGMENT.		1
V		4
ADDENDUM		18



Page 1

FRAGMENT.

“Is so perfect an attachment happiness? Yes, for years of suffering would not pay for an hour of love.

“Yesterday, your sadness, as I suppose, passed into my soul as swiftly as a shadow falls. Were you sad or suffering? I was wretched. Whence came my distress? Write to me at once. Why did I not know it? We are not yet completely one in mind. At two leagues’ distance or at a thousand I ought to feel your pain and sorrows. I shall not believe that I love you till my life is so bound up with yours that our life is one, till our hearts, our thoughts are one. I must be where you are, see what you feel, feel what you feel, be with you in thought. Did not I know, at once, that your carriage had been overthrown and you were bruised? But on that day I had been with you, I had never left you, I could see you. When my uncle asked me what made me turn so pale, I answered at once, ‘Mademoiselle de Villenoix had has a fall.’” “Why, then, yesterday, did I fail to read your soul? Did you wish to hide the cause of your grief? However, I fancied I could feel that you were arguing in my favor, though in vain, with that dreadful Salomon, who freezes my blood. That man is not of our heaven.” “Why do you insist that our happiness, which has no resemblance to that of other people, should conform to the laws of the world? And yet I delight too much in your bashfulness, your religion, your superstitions, not to obey your lightest whim. What you do must be right; nothing can be purer than your mind, as nothing is lovelier than your face, which reflects your divine soul.” “I shall wait for a letter before going along the lanes to meet the sweet hour you grant me. Oh! if you could know how the sight of those turrets makes my heart throb when I see them edged with light by the moon, our only confidante.”

IV

“Farewell to glory, farewell to the future, to the life I had dreamed of! Now, my well-beloved, my glory is that I am yours, and worthy of you; my future lies entirely in the hope of seeing you; and is not my life summed up in sitting at your feet, in lying under your eyes, in drawing deep breaths in the heaven you have created for me? All my powers, all my thoughts must be yours, since you could speak those thrilling words, ‘Your sufferings must be mine!’ Should I not be stealing some joys from love, some moments from happiness, some experiences from your divine spirit, if I gave my hours to study—ideas to the world and poems to the poets? Nay, nay, my very life, I will treasure everything for you; I will bring to you every flower of my soul. Is there anything fine enough, splendid enough, in all the resources of the world, or of intellect, to do honor to a heart so rich, so pure as yours—the heart to which I dare now and again to unite my own?”



Page 2

Yes, now and again, I dare believe that I can love as much as you do. "And yet, no; you are the angel-woman; there will always be a greater charm in the expression of your feelings, more harmony in your voice, more grace in your smile, more purity in your looks than in mine. Let me feel that you are the creature of a higher sphere than that I live in; it will be your pride to have descended from it; mine, that I should have deserved you; and you will not perhaps have fallen too far by coming down to me in my poverty and misery. Nay, if a woman's most glorious refuge is in a heart that is wholly her own, you will always reign supreme in mine. Not a thought, not a deed, shall ever pollute this heart, this glorious sanctuary, so long as you vouchsafe to dwell in it—and will you not dwell in it for ever? Did you not enchant me by the words, 'Now and for ever?' *Nunc et semper!* And I have written these words of our ritual below your portrait—words worthy of you, as they are of God. He is *nunc et semper*, as my love is. "Never, no, never, can I exhaust that which is immense, infinite, unbounded—and such is the feeling I have for you; I have imagined its immeasurable extent, as we measure space by the dimensions of one of its parts. I have had ineffable joys, whole hours filled with delicious meditation, as I have recalled a single gesture or the tone of a word of yours. Thus there will be memories of which the magnitude will overpower me, if the reminiscence of a sweet and friendly interview is enough to make me shed tears of joy, to move and thrill my soul, and to be an inexhaustible wellspring of gladness. Love is the life of angels!" I can never, I believe, exhaust my joy in seeing you. This rapture, the least fervid of any, though it never can last long enough, has made me apprehend the eternal contemplation in which seraphs and spirits abide in the presence of God; nothing can be more natural, if from His essence there emanates a light as fruitful of new emotions as that of your eyes is, of your imposing brow, and your beautiful countenance—the image of your soul. Then, the soul, our second self, whose pure form can never perish, makes our love immortal. I would there were some other language than that I use to express to you the ever-new ecstasy of my love; but since there is one of our own creating, since our looks are living speech, must we not meet face to face to read in each other's eyes those questions and answers from the heart, that are so living, so penetrating, that one evening you could say to me, 'Be silent!' when I was not speaking. Do you remember it, dear life?" "When I am away from you in the darkness of absence, am I not reduced to use human words, too feeble to express heavenly feelings? But words at any rate represent the marks these feelings leave in my soul, just as the word *God* imperfectly



Page 3

sums up the notions we form of that mysterious First Cause. But, in spite of the subtleties and infinite variety of language, I have no words that can express to you the exquisite union by which my life is merged into yours whenever I think of you. "And with what word can I conclude when I cease writing to you, and yet do not part from you? What can *farewell* mean, unless in death? But is death a farewell? Would not my spirit be then more closely one with yours? Ah! my first and last thought; formerly I offered you my heart and life on my knees; now what fresh blossoms of feelings can I discover in my soul that I have not already given you? It would be a gift of a part of what is wholly yours. "Are you my future? How deeply I regret the past! I would I could have back all the years that are ours no more, and give them to you to reign over, as you do over my present life. What indeed was that time when I knew you not? It would be a void but that I was so wretched."

FRAGMENT.

"Beloved angel, how delightful last evening was! How full of riches your dear heart is! And is your love endless, like mine? Each word brought me fresh joy, and each look made it deeper. The placid expression of your countenance gave our thoughts a limitless horizon. It was all as infinite as the sky, and as bland as its blue. The refinement of your adored features repeated itself by some inexplicable magic in your pretty movements and your least gestures. I knew that you were all graciousness, all love, but I did not know how variously graceful you could be. Everything combined to urge me to tender solicitation, to make me ask the first kiss that a woman always refuses, no doubt that it may be snatched from her. You, dear soul of my life, will never guess beforehand what you may grant to my love, and will yield perhaps without knowing it! You are utterly true, and obey your heart alone. "The sweet tones of your voice blended with the tender harmonies that filled the quiet air, the cloudless sky. Not a bird piped, not a breeze whispered—solitude, you, and I. The motionless leaves did not quiver in the beautiful sunset hues which are both light and shadow. You felt that heavenly poetry—you who experienced so many various emotions, and who so often raised your eyes to heaven to avoid answering me. You who are proud and saucy, humble and masterful, who give yourself to me so completely in spirit and in thought, and evade the most bashful caress. Dear witcheries of the heart! They ring in my ears; they sound and play there still. Sweet words but half spoken, like a child's speech, neither promise nor confession, but allowing love to cherish its fairest hopes without fear or torment! How pure a memory for life! What a free blossoming of all the flowers that spring from the soul, which a mere trifle can blight, but which, at that moment, everything



Page 4

warmed and expanded. "And it will always be so, will it not, my beloved? As I recall, this morning, the fresh and living delights revealed to me in that hour, I am conscious of a joy which makes me conceive of true love as an ocean of everlasting and ever-new experiences, into which we may plunge with increasing delight. Every day, every word, every kiss, every glance, must increase it by its tribute of past happiness. Hearts that are large enough never to forget must live every moment in their past joys as much as in those promised by the future. This was my dream of old, and now it is no longer a dream! Have I not met on this earth with an angel who had made me know all its happiness, as a reward, perhaps, for having endured all its torments? Angel of heaven, I salute thee with a kiss. "I shall send you this hymn of thanksgiving from my heart, I owe it to you; but it can hardly express my gratitude or the morning worship my heart offers up day by day to her who epitomized the whole gospel of the heart in this divine word: 'Believe.'"

V

"What! no further difficulties, dearest heart! We shall be free to belong to each other every day, every hour, every minute, and for ever! We may be as happy for all the days of our life as we now are by stealth, at rare intervals! Our pure, deep feelings will assume the expression of the thousand fond acts I have dreamed of. For me your little foot will be bared, you will be wholly mine! Such happiness kills me; it is too much for me. My head is too weak, it will burst with the vehemence of my ideas. I cry and I laugh—I am possessed! Every joy is an arrow of flame; it pierces and burns me. In fancy you rise before my eyes, ravished and dazzled by numberless and capricious images of delight. "In short, our whole future life is before me—its torrents, its still places, its joys; it seethes, it flows on, it lies sleeping; then again it awakes fresh and young. I see myself and you side by side, walking with equal pace, living in the same thought; each dwelling in each other's heart, understanding each other, responding to each other as an echo catches and repeats a sound across wide distances. "Can life be long when it is thus consumed hour by hour? Shall we not die in a first embrace? What if our souls have already met in that sweet evening kiss which almost overpowered us—a feeling kiss, but the crown of my hopes, the ineffectual expression of all the prayers I breathe while we are apart, hidden in my soul like remorse? "I, who would creep back and hide in the hedge only to hear your footsteps as you went homewards—I may henceforth admire you at my leisure, see you busy, moving, smiling, prattling! An endless joy! You cannot imagine all the gladness it is to me to see you going and coming;



Page 5

only a man can know that deep delight. Your least movement gives me greater pleasure than a mother even can feel as she sees her child asleep or at play. I love you with every kind of love in one. The grace of your least gesture is always new to me. I fancy I could spend whole nights breathing your breath; I would I could steal into every detail of your life, be the very substance of your thoughts—be your very self. “Well, we shall, at any rate, never part again! No human alloy shall ever disturb our love, infinite in its phases and as pure as all things are which are One—our love, vast as the sea, vast as the sky! You are mine! all mine! I may look into the depths of your eyes to read the sweet soul that alternately hides and shines there, to anticipate your wishes.” My best-beloved, listen to some things I have never yet dared to tell you, but which I may confess to you now. I felt a certain bashfulness of soul which hindered the full expression of my feelings, so I strove to shroud them under the garbs of thoughts. But now I long to lay my heart bare before you, to tell you of the ardor of my dreams, to reveal the boiling demands of my senses, excited, no doubt, by the solitude in which I have lived, perpetually fired by conceptions of happiness, and aroused by you, so fair in form, so attractive in manner. How can I express to you my thirst for the unknown rapture of possessing an adored wife, a rapture to which the union of two souls by love must give frenzied intensity. Yes, my Pauline, I have sat for hours in a sort of stupor caused by the violence of my passionate yearning, lost in the dream of a caress as though in a bottomless abyss. At such moments my whole vitality, my thoughts and powers, are merged and united in what I must call desire, for lack of a word to express that nameless delirium. “And I may confess to you now that one day, when I would not take your hand when you offered it so sweetly—an act of melancholy prudence that made you doubt my love—I was in one of those fits of madness when a man could commit a murder to possess a woman. Yes, if I had felt the exquisite pressure you offered me as vividly as I heard your voice in my heart, I know not to what lengths my passion might not have carried me. But I can be silent, and suffer a great deal. Why speak of this anguish when my visions are to become realities? It will be in my power now to make life one long love-making!” Dearest love, there is a certain effect of light on your black hair which could rivet me for hours, my eyes full of tears, as I gazed at your sweet person, were it not that you turn away and say, ‘For shame; you make me quite shy!’ “To-morrow, then, our love is to be made known! Oh, Pauline! the eyes of others, the curiosity of strangers, weigh on my soul. Let us go to Villenoix, and stay there far from every one. I should like no creature in human

Page 6

form to intrude into the sanctuary where you are to be mine; I could even wish that, when we are dead, it should cease to exist—should be destroyed. Yes, I would fain hide from all nature a happiness which we alone can understand, alone can feel, which is so stupendous that I throw myself into it only to die—it is a gulf!

“Do not be alarmed by the tears that have wetted this page; they are tears of joy. My only blessing, we need never part again!”

In 1823 I traveled from Paris to Touraine by *diligence*. At Mer we took up a passenger for Blois. As the guard put him into that part of the coach where I had my seat, he said jestingly:

“You will not be crowded, Monsieur Lefebvre!”—I was, in fact, alone.

On hearing this name, and seeing a white-haired old man, who looked eighty at least, I naturally thought of Lambert’s uncle. After a few ingenious questions, I discovered that I was not mistaken. The good man had been looking after his vintage at Mer, and was returning to Blois. I then asked for some news of my old “chum.” At the first word, the old priest’s face, as grave and stern already as that of a soldier who has gone through many hardships, became more sad and dark; the lines on his forehead were slightly knit, he set his lips, and said, with a suspicious glance:

“Then you have never seen him since you left the College?”

“Indeed, I have not,” said I. “But we are equally to blame for our forgetfulness. Young men, as you know, lead such an adventurous and storm-tossed life when they leave their school-forms, that it is only by meeting that they can be sure of an enduring affection. However, a reminiscence of youth sometimes comes as a reminder, and it is impossible to forget entirely, especially when two lads have been such friends as we were. We went by the name of the Poet-and-Pythagoras.”

I told him my name; when he heard it, the worthy man grew gloomier than ever.

“Then you have not heard his story?” said he. “My poor nephew was to be married to the richest heiress in Blois; but the day before his wedding he went mad.”

“Lambert! Mad!” cried I in dismay. “But from what cause? He had the finest memory, the most strongly-constituted brain, the soundest judgment, I ever met with. Really a great genius—with too great a passion for mysticism perhaps; but the kindest heart in the world. Something most extraordinary must have happened?”

“I see you knew him well,” said the priest.



From Mer, till we reached Blois, we talked only of my poor friend, with long digressions, by which I learned the facts I have already related in the order of their interest. I confessed to his uncle the character of our studies and of his nephew's predominant ideas; then the old man told me of the events that had come into Lambert's life since our parting. From Monsieur Lefebvre's account, Lambert had betrayed some symptoms of madness before

Page 7

his marriage; but they were such as are common to men who love passionately, and seemed to me less startling when I knew how vehement his love had been and when I saw Mademoiselle de Villenoix. In the country, where ideas are scarce, a man overflowing with original thought and devoted to a system, as Louis was, might well be regarded as eccentric, to say the least. His language would, no doubt, seem the stranger because he so rarely spoke. He would say, "That man does not dwell in heaven," where any one else would have said, "We are not made on the same pattern." Every clever man has his own quirks of speech. The broader his genius, the more conspicuous are the singularities which constitute the various degrees of eccentricity. In the country an eccentric man is at once set down as half mad.

Hence Monsieur Lefebvre's first sentences left me doubtful of my schoolmate's insanity. I listened to the old man, but I criticised his statements.

The most serious symptom had supervened a day or two before the marriage. Louis had had some well-marked attacks of catalepsy. He had once remained motionless for fifty-nine hours, his eyes staring, neither speaking nor eating; a purely nervous affection, to which persons under the influence of violent passion are liable; a rare malady, but perfectly well known to the medical faculty. What was really extraordinary was that Louis should not have had several previous attacks, since his habits of rapt thought and the character of his mind would predispose him to them. But his temperament, physical and mental, was so admirably balanced, that it had no doubt been able to resist the demands on his strength. The excitement to which he had been wound up by the anticipation of acute physical enjoyment, enhanced by a chaste life and a highly-strung soul, had no doubt led to these attacks, of which the results are as little known as the cause.

The letters that have by chance escaped destruction show very plainly a transition from pure idealism to the most intense sensualism.

Time was when Lambert and I had admired this phenomenon of the human mind, in which he saw the fortuitous separation of our two natures, and the signs of a total removal of the inner man, using its unknown faculties under the operation of an unknown cause. This disorder, a mystery as deep as that of sleep, was connected with the scheme of evidence which Lambert had set forth in his *Treatise on the Will*. And when Monsieur Lefebvre spoke to me of Louis' first attack, I suddenly remembered a conversation we had had on the subject after reading a medical book.

"Deep meditation and rapt ecstasy are perhaps the undeveloped germs of catalepsy," he said in conclusion.



Page 8

On the occasion when he so concisely formulated this idea, he had been trying to link mental phenomena together by a series of results, following the processes of the intellect step by step, from their beginnings as those simple, purely animal impulses of instinct, which are all-sufficient to many human beings, particularly to those men whose energies are wholly spent in mere mechanical labor; then, going on to the aggregation of ideas and rising to comparison, reflection, meditation, and finally ecstasy and catalepsy. Lambert, of course, in the artlessness of youth, imagined that he had laid down the lines of a great work when he thus built up a scale of the various degrees of man's mental powers.

I remember that, by one of those chances which seems like predestination, we got hold of a great Martyrology, in which the most curious narratives are given of the total abeyance of physical life which a man can attain to under the paroxysms of the inner life. By reflecting on the effects of fanaticism, Lambert was led to believe that the collected ideas to which we give the name of feelings may very possibly be the material outcome of some fluid which is generated in all men, more or less abundantly, according to the way in which their organs absorb, from the medium in which they live, the elementary atoms that produce it. We went crazy over catalepsy; and with the eagerness that boys throw into every pursuit, we endeavored to endure pain by thinking of something else. We exhausted ourselves by making experiments not unlike those of the epileptic fanatics of the last century, a religious mania which will some day be of service to the science of humanity. I would stand on Lambert's chest, remaining there for several minutes without giving him the slightest pain; but notwithstanding these crazy attempts, we did not achieve an attack of catalepsy.

This digression seemed necessary to account for my first doubts, which were, however, completely dispelled by Monsieur Lefebvre.

"When this attack had passed off," said he, "my nephew sank into a state of extreme terror, a dejection that nothing could overcome. He thought himself unfit for marriage. I watched him with the care of a mother for her child, and found him preparing to perform on himself the operation to which Origen believed he owed his talents. I at once carried him off to Paris, and placed him under the care of Monsieur Esquirol. All through our journey Louis sat sunk in almost unbroken torpor, and did not recognize me. The Paris physicians pronounced him incurable, and unanimously advised his being left in perfect solitude, with nothing to break the silence that was needful for his very improbable recovery, and that he should live always in a cool room with a subdued light.— Mademoiselle de Villenoix, whom I had been careful not to apprise of Louis' state," he went on, blinking his eyes, "but who was supposed to have broken off the match, went to Paris and heard what the doctors had pronounced. She immediately begged to see my nephew, who hardly recognized her; then, like the noble soul she is, she insisted on devoting herself to giving him such care as might tend to his recovery. She would have been obliged to do so if he had been her husband, she said, and could she do less for him as her lover?"



Page 9

“She removed Louis to Villenoix, where they have been living for two years.”

So, instead of continuing my journey, I stopped at Blois to go to see Louis. Good Monsieur Lefebvre would not hear of my lodging anywhere but at his house, where he showed me his nephew’s room with the books and all else that had belonged to him. At every turn the old man could not suppress some mournful exclamation, showing what hopes Louis’ precocious genius had raised, and the terrible grief into which this irreparable ruin had plunged him.

“That young fellow knew everything, my dear sir!” said he, laying on the table a volume containing Spinoza’s works. “How could so well organized a brain go astray?”

“Indeed, monsieur,” said I, “was it not perhaps the result of its being so highly organized? If he really is a victim to the malady as yet unstudied in all its aspects, which is known simply as madness, I am inclined to attribute it to his passion. His studies and his mode of life had strung his powers and faculties to a degree of energy beyond which the least further strain was too much for nature; Love was enough to crack them, or to raise them to a new form of expression which we are maligning perhaps, by ticketing it without due knowledge. In fact, he may perhaps have regarded the joys of marriage as an obstacle to the perfection of his inner man and his flight towards spiritual spheres.”

“My dear sir,” said the old man, after listening to me with attention, “your reasoning is, no doubt, very sound; but even if I could follow it, would this melancholy logic comfort me for the loss of my nephew?”

Lambert’s uncle was one of those men who live only by their affections.

I went to Villenoix on the following day. The kind old man accompanied me to the gates of Blois. When we were out on the road to Villenoix, he stopped me and said:

“As you may suppose, I do not go there. But do not forget what I have said; and in Mademoiselle de Villenoix’s presence affect not to perceive that Louis is mad.”

He remained standing on the spot where I left him, watching me till I was out of sight.

I made my way to the chateau of Villenoix, not without deep agitation. My thoughts were many at each step on this road, which Louis had so often trodden with a heart full of hopes, a soul spurred on by the myriad darts of love. The shrubs, the trees, the turns of the winding road where little gullies broke the banks on each side, were to me full of strange interest. I tried to enter into the impressions and thoughts of my unhappy friend. Those evening meetings on the edge of the coombe, where his lady-love had been wont to find him, had, no doubt, initiated Mademoiselle de Villenoix into the secrets of that vast and lofty spirit, as I had learned them all some years before.



Page 10

But the thing that most occupied my mind, and gave to my pilgrimage the interest of intense curiosity, in addition to the almost pious feelings that led me onwards, was that glorious faith of Mademoiselle de Villenoix's which the good priest had told me of. Had she in the course of time been infected with her lover's madness, or had she so completely entered into his soul that she could understand all its thoughts, even the most perplexed? I lost myself in the wonderful problem of feeling, passing the highest inspirations of passion and the most beautiful instances of self-sacrifice. That one should die for the other is an almost vulgar form of devotion. To live faithful to one love is a form of heroism that immortalized Mademoiselle Dupuis. When the great Napoleon and Lord Byron could find successors in the hearts of women they had loved, we may well admire Bolingbroke's widow; but Mademoiselle Dupuis could feed on the memories of many years of happiness, whereas Mademoiselle de Villenoix, having known nothing of love but its first excitement, seemed to me to typify love in its highest expression. If she were herself almost crazy, it was splendid; but if she had understood and entered into his madness, she combined with the beauty of a noble heart a crowning effort of passion worthy to be studied and honored.

When I saw the tall turrets of the chateau, remembering how often poor Lambert must have thrilled at the sight of them, my heart beat anxiously. As I recalled the events of our boyhood, I was almost a sharer in his present life and situation. At last I reached a wide, deserted courtyard, and I went into the hall of the house without meeting a soul. There the sound of my steps brought out an old woman, to whom I gave a letter written to Mademoiselle de Villenoix by Monsieur Lefebvre. In a few minutes this woman returned to bid me enter, and led me to a low room, floored with black-and-white marble; the Venetian shutters were closed, and at the end of the room I dimly saw Louis Lambert.

"Be seated, monsieur," said a gentle voice that went to my heart.

Mademoiselle de Villenoix was at my side before I was aware of her presence, and noiselessly brought me a chair, which at first I would not accept. It was so dark that at first I saw Mademoiselle de Villenoix and Lambert only as two black masses perceived against the gloomy background. I presently sat down under the influence of the feeling that comes over us, almost in spite of ourselves, under the obscure vault of a church. My eyes, full of the bright sunshine, accustomed themselves gradually to this artificial night.

"Monsieur is your old school-friend," she said to Louis.



Page 11

He made no reply. At last I could see him, and it was one of those spectacles that are stamped on the memory for ever. He was standing, his elbows resting on the cornice of the low wainscot, which threw his body forward, so that it seemed bowed under the weight of his bent head. His hair was as long as a woman's, falling over his shoulders and hanging about his face, giving him a resemblance to the busts of the great men of the time of Louis XIV. His face was perfectly white. He constantly rubbed one leg against the other, with a mechanical action that nothing could have checked, and the incessant friction of the bones made a doleful sound. Near him was a bed of moss on boards.

"He very rarely lies down," said Mademoiselle de Villenoix; "but whenever he does, he sleeps for several days."

Louis stood, as I beheld him, day and night with a fixed gaze, never winking his eyelids as we do. Having asked Mademoiselle de Villenoix whether a little more light would hurt our friend, on her reply I opened the shutters a little way, and could see the expression of Lambert's countenance. Alas! he was wrinkled, white-headed, his eyes dull and lifeless as those of the blind. His features seemed all drawn upwards to the top of his head. I made several attempts to talk to him, but he did not hear me. He was a wreck snatched from the grave, a conquest of life from death—or of death from life!

I stayed for about an hour, sunk in unaccountable dreams, and lost in painful thought. I listened to Mademoiselle de Villenoix, who told me every detail of this life—that of a child in arms.

Suddenly Louis ceased rubbing his legs together, and said slowly:

"The angels are white."

I cannot express the effect produced upon me by this utterance, by the sound of the voice I had loved, whose accents, so painfully expected, had seemed to be lost for ever. My eyes filled with tears in spite of every effort. An involuntary instinct warned me, making me doubt whether Louis had really lost his reason. I was indeed well assured that he neither saw nor heard me; but the sweetness of his tone, which seemed to reveal heavenly happiness, gave his speech an amazing effect. These words, the incomplete revelation of an unknown world, rang in our souls like some glorious distant bells in the depth of a dark night. I was no longer surprised that Mademoiselle de Villenoix considered Lambert to be perfectly sane. The life of the soul had perhaps subdued that of the body. His faithful companion had, no doubt—as I had at that moment—intuitions of that melodious and beautiful existence to which we give the name of Heaven in its highest meaning.

This woman, this angel, always was with him, seated at her embroidery frame; and each time she drew the needle out she gazed at Lambert with sad and tender feeling.



Unable to endure this terrible sight—for I could not, like Mademoiselle de Villenoix, read all his secrets—I went out, and she came with me to walk for a few minutes and talk of herself and of Lambert.

Page 12

“Louis must, no doubt, appear to be mad,” said she. “But he is not, if the term mad ought only to be used in speaking of those whose brain is for some unknown cause diseased, and who can show no reason in their actions. Everything in my husband is perfectly balanced. Though he did not actively recognize you, it is not that he did not see you. He has succeeded in detaching himself from his body, and discerns us under some other aspect—what that is, I know not. When he speaks, he utters wondrous things. Only it often happens that he concludes in speech an idea that had its beginning in his mind; or he may begin a sentence and finish it in thought. To other men he seems insane; to me, living as I do in his mind, his ideas are quite lucid. I follow the road his spirit travels; and though I do not know every turning, I can reach the goal with him.

“Which of us has not often known what it is to think of some futile thing and be led on to some serious reflection through the ideas or memories it brings in its train? Not unfrequently, after speaking about some trifle, the simple starting-point of a rapid train of reflections, a thinker may forget or be silent as to the abstract connection of ideas leading to his conclusion, and speak again only to utter the last link in the chain of his meditations.

“Inferior minds, to whom this swift mental vision is a thing unknown, who are ignorant of the spirit’s inner workings, laugh at the dreamer; and if he is subject to this kind of obliviousness, regard him as a madman. Louis is always in this state; he soars perpetually through the spaces of thought, traversing them with the swiftness of a swallow; I can follow him in his flight. This is the whole history of his madness. Some day, perhaps, Louis will come back to the life in which we vegetate; but if he breathes the air of heaven before the time when we may be permitted to do so, why should we desire to have him down among us? I am content to hear his heart beat, and all my happiness is to be with him. Is he not wholly mine? In three years, twice at intervals he was himself for a few days; once in Switzerland, where we went, and once in an island off the wilds of Brittany, where we took some sea-baths. I have twice been very happy! I can live on memory.”

“But do you write down the things he says?” I asked.

“Why should I?” said she.

I was silent; human knowledge was indeed as nothing in this woman’s eyes.

“At those times, when he talked a little,” she added, “I think I have recorded some of his phrases, but I left it off; I did not understand him then.”

I asked her for them by a look; she understood me. This is what I have been able to preserve from oblivion.

I



Everything here on earth is produced by an ethereal substance which is the common element of various phenomena, known inaccurately as electricity, heat, light, the galvanic fluid, the magnetic fluid, and so forth. The universal distribution of this substance, under various forms, constitutes what is commonly known as Matter.

II



Page 13

The brain is the alembic to which the Animal conveys what each of its organizations, in proportion to the strength of that vessel, can absorb of that Substance, which returns it transformed into Will. The Will is a fluid inherent in every creature endowed with motion. Hence the innumerable forms assumed by the Animal, the results of its combinations with that Substance. The Animal's instincts are the product of the coercion of the environment in which it develops. Hence its variety.

III

In Man the Will becomes a power peculiar to him, and exceeding in intensity that of any other species.

IV

By constant assimilation, the Will depends on the Substance it meets with again and again in all its transmutations, pervading them by Thought, which is a product peculiar to the human Will, in combination with the modifications of that Substance.

V

The innumerable forms assumed by Thought are the result of the greater or less perfection of the human mechanism.

VI

The Will acts through organs commonly called the five senses, which, in fact, are but one—the faculty of Sight. Feeling and tasting, hearing and smelling, are Sight modified to the transformations of the Substance which Man can absorb in two conditions: untransformed and transformed.

VII

Everything of which the form comes within the cognizance of the one sense of Sight may be reduced to certain simple bodies of which the elements exist in the air, the light, or in the elements of air and light. Sound is a condition of the air; colors are all conditions of light; every smell is a combination of air and light; hence the four aspects of Matter with regard to Man—sound, color, smell, and shape—have the same origin, for the day is not far off when the relationship of the phenomena of air and light will be made clear. Thought, which is allied to Light, is expressed in words which depend on sound. To man, then, everything is derived from the Substance, whose transformations vary only through Number—a certain quantitative dissimilarity, the proportions resulting in the individuals or objects of what are classed as Kingdoms.

VIII



When the Substance is absorbed in sufficient number (or quantity) it makes of man an immensely powerful mechanism, in direct communication with the very element of the Substance, and acting on organic nature in the same way as a large stream when it absorbs the smaller brooks. Volition sets this force in motion independently of the Mind. By its concentration it acquires some of the qualities of the Substance, such as the swiftness of light, the penetrating power of electricity, and the faculty of saturating a body; to which must be added that it apprehends what it can do. Still, there is in man a primordial and



Page 14

overruling phenomenon which defies analysis. Man may be dissected completely; the elements of Will and Mind may perhaps be found; but there still will remain beyond apprehension the *x* against which I once used to struggle. That *x* is the Word, the Logos, whose communication burns and consumes those who are not prepared to receive it. The Word is for ever generating the Substance.

IX

Rage, like all our vehement demonstrations, is a current of the human force that acts electrically; its turmoil when liberated acts on persons who are present even though they be neither its cause nor its object. Are there not certain men who by a discharge of Volition can sublimate the essence of the feelings of the masses?

X

Fanaticism and all emotions are living forces. These forces in some beings become rivers that gather in and sweep away everything.

XI

Though Space *is*, certain faculties have the power of traversing it with such rapidity that it is as though it existed not. From your own bed to the frontiers of the universe there are but two steps: Will and Faith.

XII

Facts are nothing; they do not subsist; all that lives of us is the Idea.

XIII

The realm of Ideas is divided into three spheres: that of Instinct, that of Abstractions, that of Specialism.

XIV

The greater part, the weaker part of visible humanity, dwells in the Sphere of Instinct. The *Instinctives* are born, labor, and die without rising to the second degree of human intelligence, namely Abstraction.

XV



Society begins in the sphere of Abstraction. If Abstraction, as compared with Instinct, is an almost divine power, it is nevertheless incredibly weak as compared with the gift of Specialism, which is the formula of God. Abstraction comprises all nature in a germ, more virtually than a seed contains the whole system of a plant and its fruits. From Abstraction are derived laws, arts, social ideas, and interests. It is the glory and the scourge of the earth: its glory because it has created social life; its scourge because it allows man to evade entering into Specialism, which is one of the paths to the Infinite. Man measures everything by Abstractions: Good and Evil, Virtue and Crime. Its formula of equity is a pair of scales, its justice is blind. God's justice sees: there is all the difference. There must be intermediate Beings, then, dividing the sphere of Instinct from the sphere of Abstractions, in whom the two elements mingle in an infinite variety of proportions. Some have more of one, some more of the other. And there are also some in which the two powers neutralize each other by equality of effect.

XVI



Page 15

Specialism consists in seeing the things of the material universe and the things of the spiritual universe in all their ramifications original and causative. The greatest human geniuses are those who started from the darkness of Abstraction to attain to the light of Specialism. (Specialism, *species*, sight; speculation, or seeing everything, and all at once; *Speculum*, a mirror or means of apprehending a thing by seeing the whole of it.) Jesus had the gift of Specialism; He saw each fact in its root and in its results, in the past where it had its rise, and in the future where it would grow and spread; His sight pierced into the understanding of others. The perfection of the inner eye gives rise to the gift of Specialism. Specialism brings with it Intuition. Intuition is one of the faculties of the Inner Man, of which Specialism is an attribute. Intuition acts by an imperceptible sensation of which he who obeys it is not conscious: for instance, Napoleon instinctively moving from a spot struck immediately afterwards by a cannon ball.

XVII

Between the sphere of Abstraction and that of Specialism, as between those of Abstraction and Instinct, there are beings in whom the attributes of both combine and produce a mixture; these are men of genius.

XVIII

Specialism is necessarily the most perfect expression of man, and he is the link binding the visible world to the higher worlds; he acts, sees, and feels by his inner powers. The man of Abstraction thinks. The man of Instinct acts.

XIX

Hence man has three degrees. That of Instinct, below the average; that of Abstraction, the general average; that of Specialism, above the average. Specialism opens to man his true career; the Infinite dawns on him; he sees what his destiny must be.

XX

There are three worlds—the Natural, the Spiritual, and the Divine. Humanity passes through the Natural world, which is not fixed either in its essence and unfixed in its faculties. The Spiritual world is fixed in its essence and unfixed in its faculties. The Divine world is necessarily a Material worship, a Spiritual worship, and a Divine worship: three forms expressed in action, speech, and prayer, or, in other words, in deed, apprehension, and love. Instinct demands deed; Abstraction is concerned with Ideas; Specialism sees the end, it aspires to God with presentiment or contemplation.

XXI



Hence, perhaps, some day the converse of *Et Verbum caro factum est* will become the epitome of a new Gospel, which will proclaim that The Flesh shall be made the Word and become the Utterance of God.

XXII

The Resurrection is the work of the Wind of Heaven sweeping over the worlds. The angel borne on the Wind does not say: "Arise, ye dead"; he says, "Arise, ye who live!"



Page 16

Such are the meditations which I have with great difficulty cast in a form adapted to our understanding. There are some others which Pauline remembered more exactly, wherefore I know not, and which I wrote from her dictation; but they drive the mind to despair when, knowing in what an intellect they originated, we strive to understand them. I will quote a few of them to complete my study of this figure; partly, too, perhaps, because, in these last aphorisms, Lambert's formulas seem to include a larger universe than the former set, which would apply only to zoological evolution. Still, there is a relation between the two fragments, evident to those persons—though they be but few—who love to dive into such intellectual deeps.

I

Everything on earth exists solely by motion and number.

II

Motion is, so to speak, number in action.

III

Motion is the product of a force generated by the Word and by Resistance, which is Matter. But for Resistance, Motion would have had no results; its action would have been infinite. Newton's gravitation is not a law, but an effect of the general law of universal motion.

IV

Motion, acting in proportion to Resistance, produces a result which is Life. As soon as one or the other is the stronger, Life ceases.

V

No portion of Motion is wasted; it always produces number; still, it can be neutralized by disproportionate resistance, as in minerals.

VI

Number, which produces variety of all kinds, also gives rise to Harmony, which, in the highest meaning of the word, is the relation of parts to the whole.

VII



But for Motion, everything would be one and the same. Its products, identical in their essence, differ only by Number, which gives rise to faculties.

VIII

Man looks to faculties; angels look to the Essence.

IX

By giving his body up to elemental action, man can achieve an inner union with the Light.

X

Number is intellectual evidence belonging to man alone; by it he acquires knowledge of the Word.

XI

There is a Number beyond which the impure cannot pass: the Number which is the limit of creation.

XII

The Unit was the starting-point of every product: compounds are derived from it, but the end must be identical with the beginning. Hence this Spiritual formula: the compound Unit, the variable Unit, the fixed Unit.

XIII

The Universe is the Unit in variety. Motion is the means; Number is the result. The end is the return of all things to the Unit, which is God.

XIV

Three and Seven are the two chief Spiritual numbers.

XV

Page 17

Three is the formula of created worlds. It is the Spiritual Sign of the creation, as it is the Material Sign of dimension. In fact, God has worked by curved lines only: the Straight Line is an attribute of the Infinite; and man, who has the presentiment of the Infinite, reproduces it in his works. Two is the number of generation. Three is the number of Life which includes generation and offspring. Add the sum of four, and you have seven, the formula of Heaven. Above all is God; He is the Unit.

After going in to see Louis once more, I took leave of his wife and went home, lost in ideas so adverse to social life that, in spite of a promise to return to Villenoix, I did not go.

The sight of Louis had had some mysteriously sinister influence over me. I was afraid to place myself again in that heavy atmosphere, where ecstasy was contagious. Any man would have felt, as I did, a longing to throw himself into the infinite, just as one soldier after another killed himself in a certain sentry box where one had committed suicide in the camp at Boulogne. It is a known fact that Napoleon was obliged to have the hut burned which had harbored an idea that had become a mortal infection.

Louis' room had perhaps the same fatal effect as that sentry box.

These two facts would then be additional evidence in favor of his theory of the transfusion of Will. I was conscious of strange disturbances, transcending the most fantastic results of taking tea, coffee, or opium, of dreams or of fever—mysterious agents, whose terrible action often sets our brains on fire.

I ought perhaps to have made a separate book of these fragments of thought, intelligible only to certain spirits who have been accustomed to lean over the edge of abysses in the hope of seeing to the bottom. The life of that mighty brain, which split up on every side perhaps, like a too vast empire, would have been set forth in the narrative of this man's visions—a being incomplete for lack of force or of weakness; but I preferred to give an account of my own impressions rather than to compose a more or less poetical romance.

Louis Lambert died at the age of twenty-eight, September 25, 1824, in his true love's arms. He was buried by her desire in an island in the park at Villenoix. His tombstone is a plain stone cross, without name or date. Like a flower that has blossomed on the margin of a precipice, and drops into it, its colors and fragrance all unknown, it was fitting that he too should fall. Like many another misprized soul, he had often yearned to dive haughtily into the void, and abandon there the secrets of his own life.

Mademoiselle de Villenoix would, however, have been quite justified in recording his name on that cross with her own. Since her partner's death, reunion has been her constant, hourly hope. But the vanities of woe are foreign to faithful souls.

Villenoix is falling into ruin. She no longer resides there; to the end, no doubt, that she may the better picture herself there as she used to be. She had said long ago:



Page 18

“His heart was mine; his genius is with God.”

CHATEAU DE SACHE. June-July 1832.

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Lambert, Louis

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Seaside Tragedy

Lefebvre

A Seaside Tragedy

Meyraux

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Stael-Holstein (Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, Baronne de)

The Chouans

Letters of Two Brides

Villenoix, Pauline Salomon de

A Seaside Tragedy

The Vicar of Tours