

THE BLUE FLOWERS



BY RAYMOND QUENEAU

Translated by Barbara Wright

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With an afterword by Vivian Kogan

A New Directions Book

ὄναρ ἀντὶ ὀνείρατος

PLATO

On the twenty-fifth of September, twelve hundred and sixty-four, at break of day, the Duke of Auge appeared at the summit of the keep of his castle, there to consider, be it ever so little, the historic situation. It was somewhat confused. A few odd remnants of the past were still lying around here and there, rather messily. On the banks of a nearby gully two Huns were camping; quite near them a Gaul and a Haeduan, perhaps, was boldly immersing his feet in the fresh, running water. On the horizon were outlined the flabby silhouettes of tired Romans, neither Norsemen, old Franks and Christmas Carolingians. A few Normans were drinking calvados.

The Duke of Auge sighed, but nevertheless continued his careful examination of these antiquated phenomena.

The Huns were preparing some steak tartare, the Gauloise smoking a gitane, the Romans were drawing the Greeks, the Norsemen were snoring, the Franks were looking for their sootier-kins, and the Carolingians were waiting to see whether anyone was concealing any Ossetians. The Normans were drinking calvados.

‘So much history,’ said the Duke of Auge to the Duke of Auge, ‘so much history, just for a few puns and a few anachronisms. I think it’s pathetic. Shan’t we ever get away from it?’

Fascinated, it was some hours before he stopped watching these rejects refusing to disintegrate; then, for no apparent outward reason, he left his look-out post for the lower levels of the castle indulging, as he went, his mood, which was bellicose.

He didn’t beat his wife, because she was defunct, but he beat his daughters, who numbered three; he beat some men-servants, some maid-servants, some carpets, he struck some irons while they were hot, camp, some money, and finally he cudgelled his brains. Immediately afterwards he decided to take a short trip, and go to the capital city, without undue pageantry, accompanied only by his page Mouscaillot.

He chose from among his palfreys his favourite percheron whose name was Demosthenes because he talked, even with the bit between his teeth.

‘Ah, my good Demo,’ said the Duke in a plaintive voice, ‘I am right sad and right melancholic.’

‘Is it still History?’ asked Sthenes.

‘It withers all my joy,’ replied the Duke.

‘Courage, my Lord, courage! Come on up and we’ll go for a blow.’

‘That was indeed my intention, and something more, besides.’

‘What was that?’

‘To go away for a few days.’

‘I hear thee and rejoice. Where, my Lord, do you wish me to take you?’

‘Far, far from here. Here, the mud is made from our flowers.’

‘... our blue flowers, I know. But more precisely?’

‘You choose.’

Sthenes, when the Duke of Auge had got up on to his back, made the following proposition:

‘What would you say to going and seeing how the work on the church of Notre-Dame is getting on?’

‘What!’ exclaimed the Duke. ‘Haven’t they finished it yet?’

‘That’s what we shall ascertain.’

‘If they go on working to rule like that they’ll end up by building a mahometory.’

‘Why not a buddhoir? A confucianal? A sanct-Iao-tsuary? You mustn’t get so depressed, m Lord! En route! and at the same time we’ll present our feudal homage to the saintly King Louis, the ninth of that name.’

Without waiting for his master’s reply, Sthenes started trotting off towards the drawbridge which lowered itself in a functional sort of way. Mouscaillot, who wasn’t saying a word, for fear of getting a swipe round the chops with a gauntlet, followed, mounted on Stefan, so named because he was not very chatty. While the Duke was brooding over his resentment and Mouscaillot, following his prudent policy, was persevering in his silence, Sthenes alone went on chatting gaily, and tossing merry quips at the people he saw going by, the Celts with a gallican air, the Romans with a caesarian air, the Norsemen with a nauseating air, the Huns with a honeyed air, the Carolingians with a nartish air and the Francs with a sui generis air. The Normans were drinking calvados.

As they were bowing very low to their beloved suzerain, the yokels were muttering fearson threats which they knew to be inefficacious and which therefore didn’t outstrip the limits of the moustaches, that’s if they were wearing them.

Sthenes was going along the highroad at a good pace, and finally held his tongue, as he couldn’t find anyone to talk to any more, since the traffic was non-existent; he didn’t want to disturb his cavalier, who he felt was dozing off; as Stef and Mouscaillot shared this reserve the Duke of Auge finally fell asleep.

He lived on a barge moored near a big town and his name was Cidrolin. He was served a not very fresh crayfish with glaucous mayonnaise. While he was decorticating the animal’s legs with nutcrackers, Cidrolin said to Cidrolin:

‘Pretty lousy, this stuff, pretty lousy; Lamélie will never learn to cook.’

He added, still addressing his remarks to himself:

‘But where on earth was I going like that, riding a horse? I can’t remember. Anyway, that’s typical of dreams; I’ve never ridden a horse in my life. I’ve never ridden a bicycle in my life, either but I never ride a bicycle in my dreams and yet I do ride a horse. There must be some explanation that’s obvious. This crayfish certainly is lousy and this mayonnaise is even worse and why don’t I learn to ride a horse? In the Bois de Boulogne, for instance. Or even a bicycle?’

‘You wouldn’t need a driving licence, either,’ he is told.

‘All right, all right.’

Then the cheese is brought.

Made of plaster.

Some fruit.

Where vilest worms do dwell.

Cidrolin wipes his mug and mutters:

‘Another fucking fiasco.’

‘Doesn’t stop you having your siesta’ he is told.

He doesn’t answer; his chaise-longue is waiting for him on deck. He covers his face with his handkerchief and he’s soon within sight of the walls of the capital city, without bothering about how many days’ journey it had been.

‘Great,’ exclaimed Sthenes, ‘we’re there.’

The Duke of Auge woke up, with the impression that he’d had a bad meal. This was when Stefan who hadn’t said a word since they’d left, felt the need of addressing the company in these terms:

‘Alme and inclyte city ...’

‘Silence!’ said Sthenes, ‘If anyone heard us talking, our good master would be accused

sorcery.'

'Brrr,' said the Duke.

Ditto his page.

'Brrr,' said Mouscaillot.

And to show the proper way for a horse to express himself, Sthenes neighed.

The Duke of Auge dismounted at the Crooked Siren, which a passing troubadour had once recommended to him.

'Name, Christian names, rank?' asked Martin the hostiler.

'Duke of Auge,' replied the Duke of Auge. 'Joachim yclept and am accompanied by my devoted page Mouscaillot, son of Count d'Empoigne. My horse ys nempned Sthenes, and the other one y nempned Stef.'

'Residing ...?'

'Thiarch, near the bridge.'

'Archi-respectable, then, I'd say,' said Martin.

'So I should hope,' said the Duke, 'because I'm beginning to get pissed off with your rotten little questions.'

'Forgive me, my Lord, it is by order of the King.'

'Aren't you going to ask me what I've come to the capital city for, though?'

'No need! My Lord has come to see our whores, who are the most beautiful in the whole Christendom. Our saintly King hates them greatly, but they are ardent participants in the finances of the forthcoming crusade.'

'Thou art in vicious error, hostiler. I have come to see how the work on the church of Notre Dame is getting on.'

'The south tower is growing apace, and they are about to start the north one and the gallery connecting them. They are also altering the higher parts to give more light.'

'That's enough!' roared the Duke. 'If you tell me all about it there'll be nothing left for me to do but go back home, and that I will not.'

'Me neither, so I'll bring your supper incontinent.'

The Duke ate copiously, then he went to bed and slept with a very good appetite.

He hadn't finished his siesta when he was awoken by two nomads calling him from the top of the bank. Cidrolin answered them by signs, but they couldn't have understood that language because they went down the bank to the gang-plank and boarded the barge. There were a male camper and a female camper.

'Anteheksi,' said the male camper, 'ma nosotros sind eksyk-sissä.'

'A good beginning,' Cidrolin rejoins.

'Capito? Lostes ... exyxissä ...'

'A sad fate.'

'The campink site? Lontano? Ons ... kauaksi ...'

'He talks well,' murmured Cidrolin, 'but is hé speaking vernacular European or neo-Babelian?'

'Aha,' said the male camper, manifesting all the signs of lively satisfaction. 'Do you fairshytay European?'

'Un poco,' replied Cidrolin, 'but put down your packs, noble strangers, and have a drink before you go.'

'Aha, capito: drink.'

So the noble stranger, beaming with joy, put down his pack and then, disdainingly those articles

furniture destined for that usage, squatted on the floor, supplely crossing his legs beneath him. The young lady who was accompanying him did the same.

‘Could they be Japanese?’ Cidrolin wondered under his breath. ‘Their hairs are blonde, though. Maybe they’re Ainos.’

So, turning to the boy:

‘Are you by any chance an Aïno?’

‘I? No. Me: boy friend of whole world.’

‘I see: a pacifist?’

‘Jawohl. And what about that drink?’

‘Keeps his mind on the essentials, this European.’

Cidrolin clapped his hands and called:

‘Lamélie! Lamélie!’

An entrance.

‘Lamélie, something to drink for these noble strangers.’

‘What?’

‘Some essence of fennel, for instance, with some still water.’

An exit.

Cidrolin leant over towards the nomads.

‘Well, my little fledglings, so you’re egarrirtes, are you?’

‘Lost,’ said the girl. ‘In the shit.’

‘Could you be French, my pet?’

‘Not yet: Canadian.’

‘And what about that drink?’ asked the squatting figure. ‘Schnell, let’s have one!’

‘He’s a bit of a bore,’ said Cidrolin.

‘Oh, he’s not a bad guy.’

‘And naturally what you’re doing you’re both going to the camping camp for campers.’

‘We’re looking for it.’

‘You’re as good as there. It’s along the river, not five hundred yards up-stream from here.’

‘Wir sind arrivati?’ exclaimed the boy, getting back on to his feet in a single movement. ‘Trwa song maytr? Andiamo!’

He put his kit-bag back on his back, a kit-bag which could easily have weighed a ton.

‘We’re waiting for the essence of fennel,’ said the girl, not budging.

‘Ouell, ouell.’

He removed his ton of baggage and sat down again as naturally as if the deck had been a lotus.

Cidrolin smiled at the girl and said, as if he were complimenting her.

‘Well-trained.’

‘Well-trained? Don’t get you.’

‘Well, yes; just raise a finger or give him a look and he obeys.’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘You’re a bit short on the grey matter,’ she said. ‘He’s staying because he’s free, not because he’s well-trained. If he were well-trained he’d already be on his way to the camping camp for campers. He’s staying because he’s free.’

‘There’re even some ideas in a little head like that,’ murmured Cidrolin, looking with great care at the Canadian, and in particular at the blonde down on her thighs, and at the soles of her shoes. ‘Well, yes, some ideas ...’

Whereupon the essence of fennel and the still water got brought. They drank.

~~‘And how do you go nomading?’ asked Cidrolin. ‘On foot, on horseback, by car? By helicostrik~~
by bike, by hike?’

‘We hitch,’ replied the girl.

‘You hitch-hike?’

‘Of course we hitch-hike.’

‘Personally I sometimes travel by hitch-taxi. It’s less economical.’

‘Pooff, money.’

‘How right you are. What d’you think of my essence of fennel?’

‘Not bad. Me prefer pure water.’

‘It never *is* pure here. The river’s the sewer and the tap’s chlorine.’

‘Wouldn’t you like him to sing you something?’

‘What for?’

‘To thank you.’

‘For the essence of fennel?’

‘For the welcome.’

‘That’s nice of you. Thank you.’

The girl turned to the boy and said:

‘Sing.’

He fumbled in his equipment and brings out a banjo of minimal proportions whose strings immediately started to scratch. After a few preliminary chords he opened his mouth and they heard these words:

‘I love Paimpol and its cliff, its belfry and its old pilgrimage ...’

‘Where did he learn that?’ asked Cidrolin when it was over and he’d thanked the virtuoso.

‘In Paimpol, of course,’ replied the Canadian.

‘How stupid I am,’ said Cidrolin, hitting himself on the forehead. ‘I hadn’t thought of that.’

The minibanjo returned to the rucksack, the boy readopted a standing position and held out his hand to Cidrolin.

‘Gin-couillon Panoo,’ he said, ‘and ah rivadairchi.’

And to the girl:

‘Schnell! Are we going oder aren’t we going?’

The girl gets up gracefully and harnesses herself presto.

‘Well-trained,’ said Cidrolin under his breath.

The nomad protested:

‘Nein! Nein! Not drained: free. Sie es libre. Anda al campus omdat sie es libre to andare campum.’

‘I know, I know.’

‘Adieu’ said the girl, and now it was her turn to hold a hand out to Cidrolin. ‘Thanks again and maybe we’ll come back and see you if we have time.’

‘That’s right,’ said Cidrolin.

He watched them climb up the bank with all their luggage.

‘Got to be tough, for that job,’ he murmured.

‘Will they come back?’ asked Lamélie.

‘I don’t think so. No, they’ll never come back. What’d I have done with them? They’ve only just gone and I can hardly remember them. They exist, though, and they probably deserve to exist. They’

never come back to get lost in the labyrinth of my memory. It's an unimportant incident. Some dreams seem to be made up of unimportant incidents, you wouldn't remember things of that sort in your waking life, and yet they interest you when you catch them in the morning chaotically shoving themselves up against the door of your eyelids. Maybe I was dreaming?'

Lamélie didn't have to say yes or no to him; in any case she hadn't waited for the end of the speech.

Cidrolin consulted the clock in the cabin and observed, not without satisfaction, that the episode of the nomads had been only a fairly short interlude in the time he allotted to his siesta and that he could decently resume it for a few more minutes. So he stretched himself out on his chaise-longue and managed to fall asleep again.

II

‘What do I behold?’ exclaimed the King, who was sitting under his oak tree, ‘is not that my well-beloved Auge advancing towards me?’

‘The same, Sire,’ replied the squireen, bowing very low. ‘My respects,’ he added.

‘I am happy to see you in flourishing health,’ said the King. ‘How is your little family?’

‘My wife is dead, Sire.’

‘You didn’t kill her, at least? One never knows, with you.’

The King, out of his benevolent indulgence, smiled and the throng that surrounded him on all sides admired him the more. ‘Still no heir?’ asked the King.

‘Alas!’ said the Duke. ‘I have only my triplets, which, I assure you, is my cross.’

‘Talking of crosses,’ said the King, ‘I’m very glad to see you. We’re preparing a new crusade and we’re naturally counting on your joining us.’

‘Doesn’t appeal to me much.’

‘Ttt ttt. You mustn’t make your mind up until you’ve heard the thing in detail. In the first place we shall not be going to Egypt this time (that would be an asserlute waste of time) but we shall set sail for Carthage.’

‘That has no greater appeal for me.’

‘Carthage? Come come, my well-beloved Auge, even if only for its historic memories ... Saint Augustine ... Jugurtha ... Scipio... Hannibal ... Salammbô ... don’t they mean something to you?’

‘Nothing at all, Sire. Me not be an intellectual.’

‘Ah Auge, my well-beloved Auge, you really will have to come with me to disembowel some infidels.’

‘Nenni, Sire. This time I’ll have none of it.’

‘You no longer wish to discomfit the worshippers of Mahom?’

‘Look, Sire, I have retired to my little castle in the country, there I am bringing up the daughter with which the good Lord has afflicted me, there I nurse, though without sodewynge them, the malarial fevers I brought back from Damietta and other distant colonies, that saintly man my chaplain, the Abbé Onesiphore Biroton, is leading me towards the paths of sanctification, why, Sire, yes, why should I leave my little province in order to be brought back to it the year after salted in a pickling jar?’

The saintly King sighed.

‘In short,’ he said, ‘you don’t want to go and cleave el Mostanser Billah in twain?’

‘Let him cleave himself in twain all by himself, Sire, such is my last word.’

‘Ah! I can see I’m going to have a great deal of trouble organising this eighth crusade.’

This made the good saint and King quite sad.

‘Oh, come,’ said the Duke of Auge, ‘you’ll always be able to find a good fourth part of a hundred nodcocks to accompany you to those distant shores.’

‘Indeed I hope so,’ said the King with melancholy.

‘May I take my leave?’

The King gave his accord.

As he was withdrawing, the corner of the Duke’s face became the recipient of a whole shipload

rotten eggs and withered tomatoes; the throng listening to the saintly King holding forth under his oak tree considered that the said saintly King was showing himself to be of culpable weakness in relation to this cowardly vassal who preferred the comfort of his little castle to the hazards of a Christian expedition somewhere around Bizerta; and this all the more as they themselves, borgeis, artisans and vileyns, ran not the slightest risk of seeing themselves despatched to what were formerly Cathaginian shores there to suffer scimitar blows or catch unsodewable diseases.

‘Boo, boo, the trollop,’ they cried, ‘oh the rotten chicken-heart, the shite-a-bed scoundrel, the porcine looby, the whoreson shirker, the lousy patriot, the wicious wild-boar, the rotten ringworm, the brazen false-heart, the caitiff Paulician, the verminous Jemmy-Jessamy, the lily-livered mange-pot, the ord’rous poltroon, the false-hearted sneaksby who wants to leave the tomb of Lord Jesus in the hands of the pagans and who answers his King back. Long live Louis of Poissy! Boo, boo, the trollop!’

And they went on chucking bleeding cow-pats and truffled turds at the Duke, who finally got annoyed. Drawing his braquemard he flourished it with such sweeping gestures that he put to flight the vileyns, artisans and borgeis, all of whom dispersed rapidly around and about but not without a good deal of trampling on one another, which caused to be slawe a few dozen of them for the repose of whose souls the saintly King later prayed with efficacy.

Nauseated, the Duke made his way towards a bathery to cleanse himself from the residua of the public hostility.

‘Ah! the swine,’ he muttered, ‘there’s no freedom any more if the homagers start interfering. He Louis, hasn’t forgotten the services I rendered him at Damietta and Mansura. He knows what colonial war is, he understands me. He, Louis, he wants to go back: that’s his business. He, Louis, isn’t like me, he’s a saintly man, we’ll end up by seeing his name on the calendar; whereas the homagers booing me, what do they actually want? To liberate the holy sepulchre? They’re not the slightest bit interested. What they want is to see all the noble lords like me disembowelled by the Wogs so that they can invade our castles, drink the claret wine in our cellars and, who knows? Viola our mothers, our wives, our daughters, our maid-servants and our lambs.’

‘And our mares,’ said Sthenes.

A passer-by started.

‘And our mares,’ said the Duke out loud.

He leant over in the direction of the individual:

‘It was I who said: “and our mares.” It was I, d’you hear, homager?’

As the Duke was rolling ferocious eyes, the other replied very politely:

‘That dought I not, yf yt please your grace.’

Then he disappeared, scarcely reassured.

‘It’s high time we left this town,’ said the Duke. ‘We have seen the work on Notre-Dame, I’ve admired the Sainte Chapelle, that gem of gothic art, done the necessary homage to our saintly King, all this is well and good, but I feel that things are going to deteriorate with the population; so, after we have bathed, we shall go and dine in a first-class tavern to cheer ourselves up, and leave immediately afterwards.’

While his clothes were being cleaned and he was simmering in the hot water, the Duke fell fast asleep.

After shutting the gate behind him, Cidrolin looked to see if there were any inscriptions defiling the fence that separated the sloping ground adjoining the barge from the boulevard. There were none. Having done so he decided to cross the road and go and see how they were getting on with the work progress opposite. They were supposed to be building a block of flats; for the moment there was on

a hole.

Having taken the necessary precautions, Cidrolin found himself safe and sound on the other side of the road. He cautiously approaches the hoarding, on which was stated Danger - Lorry - Exit. At the far end of the site a mechanical shovel is collecting debris from the cellars to fill one of the lorries whose exit is advertised as being so dangerous. White-helmeted men are coming and going. Things are being discharged in a corner. All this must be intelligible to a builder.

A passer-by has come up to Cidrolin; they both watch the lorry getting filled up. When it was full, the lorry climbed up the ramp which took it out of the hole. Cidrolin prudently got out of its way. The moment it was on the level the lorry drove like mad at the boulevard; the passer-by jumped back to a squealing of brakes.

‘Did you see that?’ the passer-by, who had gone quite pale, said to Cidrolin. ‘That son of a bastard nearly ran me over.’

‘He didn’t actually do anything of the sort,’ replied Cidrolin objectively.

‘He did the best he could.’

‘You’d been warned. It was written up there: ‘Danger -Lorry - Exit.’ When I was at school I used to wonder why we learnt to read, now I know: to get out of the way of lorries.’

‘Could be, but just suppose that I’d learnt to read too, but a different language from yours. Must inevitably be run over, then?’

A gentleman riding a mobylette braked suddenly, dismounted, and, leading his vehicle by one ear, came up to them. He was dressed in a long black gown and wearing a sombrero of the same color with turned-up edges.

‘Ad majorem Dei gloriam,’ said he, holding out his hand.

‘Monsieur doesn’t know French,’ said Cidrolin.

‘Sed tu?’

‘I can just about understand it.’

‘Good, good.’

He got back into the saddle, rode a short way along the pavement contrary to the regulations, and rejoined the road a little further on, disappearing in the flow of cars.

‘As conciliatory as a Father of the Council,’ said the passer-by.

Cidrolin yawned.

‘Are you sleepy?’ asked the passer-by.

‘No, I’m hungry. The lunch-hour approaches. I must ask you to excuse me, I’m going to continue my antepandial walk, the circuit of which I haven’t yet completed.’

‘I,’ continued the passer-by, raising his voice, ‘was telling you, you may remember, that I was a foreigner. Do you remember the lorry?’

‘Are you one of those nomads?’ asked Cidrolin politely.

‘I? Far from it. I live in an hotel ...’

‘and I live in that barge ...’

‘a luxury hotel, even ...’

‘a house-boat ...’

‘there’s a toilet in the bathroom ...’

‘it’s moored ...’

‘a lift ...’

‘I could even have a telephone ...’

‘a telephone in the bedrooms ...’

‘it has a blue number with figures on just like a house ...’

‘you can dial direct to foreign countries ...’

‘it’s number twenty-one ...’

‘and on the ground floor there’s a bar ...’

‘I could fish, from my bedroom ...’

‘an American bar ...’

‘I could fish, if I fished, but I don’t like fishing.’

‘You’re quite right,’ said the passer-by, suddenly becoming interested in what his interlocutor was saying: ‘fishing is just as cruel as bull-fighting ...’

‘I’d never made the comparison,’ said Cidrolin modestly.

‘Just think for five minutes. They’re sadistic maniacs, anglers. They’ve usurped the reputation of good philosophers. Frankly, don’t you think the hook is slyer and more viciously barbaric than the espadrille?’

‘The espadrille?’

‘Those things they stick in the brute’s neck.’

‘Are you sure that’s what they’re called?’

‘That’s what I’m calling them for the moment, so that’s what they’re called, and as it’s me you’re talking to for the moment and nobody else you’ll just have to take my words at their face value.’

‘The fact is that I understand you perfectly.’

‘You see! Well, let’s terminate our conversation at this point and content ourselves with the premises of mutual and unescapable understanding between peoples and of future peace. May I be allowed to continue my walk? Delighted to have met you.’

The passer-by withdrew just as the foreman was whistling to signal the non-tea break. Cidrolin embarked on the business of crossing the boulevard, which he did with extra prudence, since it was the hour when the horseless carriages go for their libations. Arriving safe and sound on the other side of the road he was able to observe that both fence and gate were innocent of graffiti.

The essence of fennel and the still water, the litre of red wine and the mustard pot were awaiting Cidrolin. He was served some anchovies and butter, some black pudding cooked according to a country recipe with earth-apples and sky apples, some roquefort and three babas. The anchovies and pluvios herrings, the black pudding and its apples turn out to be inconsistent, the roquefort created under the knife, and the liquid in the flabby babas could never have claimed to be anything rummier than water.

Cidrolin sighs and murmurs:

‘Another fucking fiasco.’

‘What is there to eat in your first-class tavern?’ asks the Duke of Auge.

The taverner replies.

‘There’s borshch, that’s shoup made from schlavonic beech-root, and tripe à la viducasse, the whole washed down with wine from the slopes of Suresnes.’

‘Hardly enough to get round to your back teeth,’ said the Duke scornfully.

‘Has your Lordship ever eaten any borshch?’ retorted the taverner, provoked to insolence.

‘My word!’ exclaimed the Duke to Mouscaillot, ‘he takes me for a gaby! I’ve known it since the days of Queen Anne!’

Impressed, the taverner bowed low.

‘I can see from your mien,’ continued the Duke, ‘that you’re wondering who Queen Anne is.’

‘Well um ... your Lordship ...’

It was quite clear that the taverner had in fact no idea.

‘Ah, Mouscaillot,’ said the Duke, ‘our good Kings and gentle Queens are soon forgotten by the people. Two hundred years have barely passed and this taverner no longer knows who Andre Vladimirovitch was, but that doesn’t stop him serving borshch. Ah well!’

Taking advantage of this point scored, the Duke continues in these terms:

‘Beforehand, taverner, I’ll have a little glass of some ecphractic liquor, essence of fennel, for instance. Can you serve me a little glass of essence of fennel?’

‘Ah, my Lord!’ exclaimed the taverner, on the verge of tears, ‘I most humbly entreat you not to blot the escutcheon of my three stars.’

Whereupon he did quite a bit of bowing and scraping.

‘That,’ said the Duke, ‘reminds me of the salaams of the worshippers of Mahom.’

‘Can I serve you some essence of fennel?’ went on the taverner in a heartbreaking voice. ‘I even have several different brands, my Lord.’

‘Give me the best, then! And get them to feed my horses with good hay, good straw and good oats.’

This was done with alacrity. The Duke whiffed up several little glasses of essence of fennel with a drop of still water. Two dapperous and muscular menservants were bringing in a big olla of borshch when there suddenly appeared a person who was uttering cries of terrorstrickenness. He was trembling, and his yellow and vermilion mottled-green face was tending to become as white as chalk.

‘Oo la la,’ he was saying, dancing up and down on the spot. ‘Oo la la.’

‘Hector,’ said the taverner, ‘aren’t you ashamed and abashed at coming and disturbing my refectory in this way? I shall give you the stick. This serving-man is my palfrenier,’ he added, for the Duke’s benefit.

‘Oo la la, sweet Jesus,’ the serving-man who was a palfrenier continued to wail. ‘Oo la la, I was so frightened, I was more frightened than I’ve ever been in the whole of my poor and humble life as a serving-man who is a palfrenier. Oo la la, how frightened I was!’

‘Tell us what happened, for goodness’ sake!’

‘Couldn’t I have a little glass of essence of fennel to fortify me?’

Hector held out his hand towards the bottle on the Duke’s table, but the Duke rapped him sharply over the knuckles.

‘Owch,’ said Hector.

‘But what happened, what happened?’ The taverner was getting annoyed.

‘May I not enjoy my borshch?’ asked the Duke, with formidable irony. ‘Tell those dapperous and muscular serving-men to put that olla on the table and ...’

‘His horse talks!’ Hector started bawling. ‘His Lordship’s horse,’ he added, pointing most impolitely at the Duke, ‘he talks like you and me! Oo la la!’

‘What a dolt,’ said the Duke.

‘Ah,’ said the taverner, with a threatening air, ‘if you’re lying ...’

‘I swear it’s true! I swear it’s true! His Lordship’s horse talks! He speaks! he jabbers!’

‘But this is the devil’s work!’ exclaimed the taverner.

At these words the dapperous and muscular serving-men dropped the great olla whose contents ran all over the floor. The whole household fell on its knees in the shoup, burning the said knees and making muchel signs of the cross; paternosters could be heard deflagrating all over the place.

‘In default of borshch,’ said the Duke calmly, ‘we might have some tripe.’

But the cook, overcome by the ambient emotion, had just dropped the dish into the fire.

‘Another fucking fiasco!’ yelled the Duke.

In the meantime the rumour was starting to spread through the surrounding streets that there was a talking horse at the Three Star Tavern, which the good people took advantage of to indulge their loquacity and comment on the event in these terms:

‘Out of the abundance of the devil the horse speaketh.’

‘If the cockadoodle coo, the beans will rot in the stew.’

‘To boisterous crab, oyster is drab.’

‘When the fish start to talk then the pig turns to chalk.’

‘When she’s got bells on her bubs, she’s Beelzebub’s.’

And other extremely salty proverbs issuing from the magnificent false bottom of the folkloric sapience of the eel de France.

‘My Lord,’ said Mouscaillot, ‘things are beginning to deteriorate, as you foresaw. Don’t you think we should go home?’

‘Without our dinner?’

Outside, people were starting to shout:

‘To the stake with the nigromancer! to the stake with the dowser!’

‘You’re right,’ the Duke went on, ‘we are far from popular in the neighbourhood.’

He got up; followed by Mouscaillot he went out to the stables, which instigated flight, scuffling and yapping.

‘Ah, my good Demo,’ said the Duke, ‘what made you demonstrate your gifts to that palfrenier? Now we’re really in the cack with that bawling mass dying to abernen us alive.’

‘Well, my Lord,’ replied Sthenes, ‘the knave was doing a bit of graft, he didn’t give me my oats. Would it have been your pleasure that I let myself be cheated thus?’

‘No, no, my good Demo, you were right. The wicked palfrenier will die of the evil eye, and serve him right. En route!’

A considerable throng was already waiting for them outside.

‘Oh, oh,’ exclaimed several parishioners, ‘there’s that rotten squireen who refuses to cross himself! That Albigenian must be a worshipper of Mahom and his palfrey’s undoubtedly called Satan.’

Shards and stones started raining on the Duke and Mouscaillot; then it was blazing logs, larding needles, step-ladders and parpens. Everything about the Duke was displeasing and the good people were getting highly annoyed with this heretic, aristocrat and provincial, but you don’t take the Bastille every day of the week, especially in the thirteenth century.

Drawing his braquemard for the second time that day, Joachim d’Auge darted into the fray and slew two hundred and sixteen persons, men, women, children and others, of whom twenty-seven were licensed borgeis and twenty-six on the point of becoming so.

In order to make their way out of the town they also had to discomfit some archers.

III

‘Oo-oo’, someone called.

Cidrolin doesn’t budge, at regular little intervals his breathing raises the handkerchief he covered his face with.

‘Oo-oo,’ someone called, more loudly.

‘Another Canadian with her banjo-player,’ murmured Cidrolin under his handkerchief.

‘Oo-oo.’

It’s an oo-oo that’s coming nearer.

‘She’s by herself. She’s got a nerve.’

Cidrolin makes up his mind to emerge from his siesta. He yawns and gets up. On the other side the gang-plank there was in fact a damsel equipped as a camperess.

‘Excuse me, Monsieur,’ says she. ‘The camping camp for campers, please?’

He replies to this question with another question.

‘You wouldn’t be Canadian by any chance, would you?’

Sure enough, she is indeed Canadian and not by chance but by necessity seeing that she was born that way and isn’t married to a foreigner (she doesn’t state that she is a virgin) and hasn’t had herself naturalised Roubaisian or Zanzibian. Looking at her more carefully Cidrolin realised that he hadn’t so far looked at her really carefully and that, not being a racist, he hadn’t seen that she was a red indian.

‘Me surprise you, no?’ she murmured.

‘Not in the least,’ replied Cidrolin.

‘Me Wyandot,’ she said, ‘and me proud of it.’

‘Dot’s as it should be.’

‘Why? Are you being funny?’

‘No, no. Don’t make me dot my whys.’

‘Me woke you up, yes?’

‘I’d be telling a lie if I said no.’

‘Then you’re cross with me?’

‘Beloved, be not coy.’

‘And this camping site? Are you finally going to tell me where it hangs out?’

Cidrolin executed some gestures which determined the situation of that place to within some four inches.

‘Me thank you,’ said the Canadian Wyandot, ‘and me do beg you to excuse me for having disturbed your siesta, but they say that the French are so obliging.... so helpful....’

‘That’s just a saying.’

‘So I took the liberty ...’

‘Liberty! Do you still believe in liberty? As you do in the obligingness and helpfulness of my compatriots? Might you possibly be over-credulous, Mademoiselle?’

‘What? Isn’t one allowed to believe in liberty any more in France?... or equality?... or fraternity?’

‘Pull yourself together, Mademoiselle, there’s no need to get so emotional about such trifles.’

Look, what d'you say to coming and having a little glass of essence of fennel on my barge, would that make you feel better?'

'Here we go! a sex-maniac! That's another thing they all told me. Every Frenchman ...'

'Mademoiselle ... please believe me ...'

'If you think, Monsieur, that you are likely to attain your blagatory and lubricious ends by proffering philanderous utterances designed to lure me into your perverse lair, me, a poor defenceless bird, a poor Wyandotte, even, you've got another think coming, Monsieur, you've got another think coming!'

Turning on her heel forthwith, the young lady climbed up the bank again, manifesting, in so doing, the harmonious musculature of her posterior.

'There's another female Canadian I shall never see again,' murmured Cidrolin. 'I certainly shall have seen some female Canadians, though, bags of'em, even, bags of female Canadians, with or without bags, at that; with, or rather without, those charming sheepskin chackets they actually call female Canadians and flog over here as the fine efflorescence of Canadian haute couture; without a match, because the only female Canadians I see, it's in the summer. Or the spring. Or the autumn. Huh! I ought to have drawn her attention to the fact that it's a fine autumn day today: maybe she wouldn't have taken that the wrong way.'

He went into the cabin to look at the time and, as a consequence of this examination, he lay down on his chaise-longue once more to complete his interrupted siesta.

When he opened his eyes again he perceived all around him everything that he usually saw; the walls of his bedroom, the narrow window that let a bit of light into it and, lying on a bundle of straw at his feet, the faithful page Mouscaillot, surrounded by a few dogs, all of whom had names: T'Ali Ho, Taliho, Tallyho, Mohrt & Cetera. A familiar spectacle which did much to reassure the Duke, who got up and started kicking this little family awake, which provoked some snivelling and barking.

Having said his prayers and relieved his bladder down the stairs, he made his way to the chapel to hear Mass said by his chaplain, Onésiphore Biroton. Onésiphore Biroton was a priest who believed in shock-tactics; for every kick the Duke gave him he gave him back two, so the Duke was highly fond of him, and on this particular day he couldn't wait to discuss several important points with him. Hardly had the Abbé Biroton itemissaeasted than the Duke led him out on to the bailey and said:

'Now listen, Onésiphore, I have muchel anxieties which I'm going to pour into your ears.'

'Did you have some trouble in the capital city?'

'That's not the point,' said the Duke, irritated. 'And anyway, do you know I did or do you imagine I did?'

'Hm, hm,' said Onésiphore. 'While you were away your daughters were as good as gold-capped weaver birds.'

'Ouais. We'll come to that later. For the moment I've got three questions to ask you, which are primo what you think about dreams, secundo what you think about the language of animals, and tertio what you think about world history in general and general history in particular. I'm listening.'

'Hm, hm,' said Onésiphore. 'Distinguo ...'

'No distinguos!' yelled the Duke, stamping his foot. 'D'you hear? No distinguos, no dialectics, none of that sort of thing. I want something solid. I'm listening.'

'Hm, hm,' said Onésiphore. 'I can't answer three questions simultaneously: my speech is linear, like all human speech.'

'What are you getting at?'

'At this: I shall have to answer one question first, then another, and finally the last. Which one of

you wish me to start with?’

‘With the second.’

‘Optime. And which was the second?’

‘Stupid ass, have you already forgotten my questions? And do you really want me to repeat them? Eh, do you, old pious-face?’

The Duke caused a good clout behind the right ear to follow these words. The Abbé retorted with a well-placed crack on the nut and a well-placed push in the mush.

‘Well,’ said the Duke of Auge, spitting out an incisor, ‘start where you like. With the first one for instance.’

‘I haven’t forgotten your questions, just their order.’

‘Well, start where you like.’

‘I’ll start with the dreams.’

‘Good. Tell me what you think about dreams.’

‘Some come from God and others from the Devil.’

‘You wouldn’t be an Albigensian, by any chance?’

‘Nay, my Lord, and it’s good Catholic doctrine to say: there are two sorts of dream; some come from God and the others from the Devil.’

‘How can you tell the difference?’

‘Oh, that’s immediately obvious.’

‘How? Buffoon, how do *you* tell the difference? *I* can’t tell the difference.’

‘It’s simple, though. If you see the sky, or angels, or even simply birds, on condition that they aren’t night-birds, the dream comes from God; if you see flames, demons, or even simply rampaging animals and more especially snakes, then the dream comes from the Devil.’

‘I never dream of anything like that.’

‘And what do you dream of, your Lordship?’

‘I often dream that I’m on a barge, I’m sitting in a chaise-longue, I put a handkerchief over my face and I have a little siesta.’

‘Siesta ... handkerchief ... barge ... what sort of words are those? I cannot comprehend them.’

‘They’re words I’ve invented to designate the things I see in my dreams.’

‘So you practise neologism, my Lord?’

‘Don’t *you* start neologising, now; that’s a privilege that’s reserved for Dukes. Well, from the Italian barca, a regular phonetic descendant from the Latin barca, I get barge; from the Latin sex hora I get the Spanish siesta, which I don’t bother to change, and from curchef and kerchef, syncopated forms of coverchef and keverchef respectively, I get coverchief, a cloth used to cover the head, and hence kerchief. I add hand, I take my kerchief in my hand, and I then re-cover my head with it.’

‘We’ve come a long way from sapiential and Christian oneirology. Your semantic science, my Lord, stinks of heresy.’

‘In what way might it be heretical to dream of a barge?’

‘I’ll agree that it is far from common to see angels and saints in one’s dreams. Most often, if you can judge from my own experience, dreams are only concerned with the petty incidents of everyday life.’

‘What about them then, buffoon, do they come from the Devil or from God?’

‘Neither from the one nor from the other. They are immaterial. Positively immaterial. *A primam respondi.*’

‘Huh, huh! You don’t get out of it so easily as that, my dear Abbé. I don’t need *you* if I’m on going to get feeble observations like that, I’d be quite capable of inventing them all by myself. Do you really think I’ll go on giving you your daily swill if you content yourself with such banalities?’ demand another answer.’

And he aimed a smart kick at the Abbé’s right tibia, which target it reached. Onésiphore tried reply by an onslaught on the epigastrium but it was dodged, and he measured his length. The Duke immediately jumps on him and starts trampling on him, shouting:

‘Answer me pi-face! Answer me!’

The Abbé indicates that he will.

‘Well then,’ says the Duke getting down off his victim.

‘Well then,’ says the Abbé getting up on to his feet again, ‘dreams of that sort come from the intermediary world inhabited by goblins, fairies, gnomes, brownies, elves, leprechauns, imps, undines and melusines, beings who come neither from God nor from the Devil, and who are dedicated neither to evil nor to good.’

‘Well, haven’t you become benevolent. What would the Holy Inquisition think of that?’

‘Optime. And that’s how I answer your question. Ad secundum, which is about animal language ...’

‘You’re getting a move on, now.’

‘... I say that it is not universally agreed that Adam’s sin involved the animal world in the Fall. The most eminent theologians dispute that. On the other hand, as it stands to reason that they didn’t take part in the construction of the tower of Babel, there’s nothing to prevent them making themselves understood amongst themselves.’

‘Theologians?’

‘No, my Lord, animals.’

‘Trivial! I was talking not about animals who talk to each other, which is a commonplace, but animals who talk the language of men; and as for you, you talk through your hat.’

The Duke raises his hand to give a backhander, but the Abbé beats him to it and sashes him straight to the chin, which causes his interlocutor to vacillate.

‘Ad tertiam, respondeo ...’ the chaplain hastened to say.

‘Ttt, ttt,’ said the Duke, putting his jaw back into place. ‘Not so fast. I should now like to hear you talk about animals who talk in dreams. Do they come from God or from the Devil?’

‘Not the slightest importance. Completely immaterial. Ad tertiam ...’

‘Ttt, ttt. You told me just now that rampant animals in dreams came from the Devil.’

‘Dixi.’

‘And if they talk?’

‘Bis diabolici.’

‘And if you talk to them?’

‘Ter diabolici.’

‘And if they answer you?’

‘Quater.’

‘Good. I find that highly satisfying, because I’ve never had a conversation with a snake in a dream; not like our mother Eve.’

‘She didn’t dream.’

‘What did Adam dream of when God put him to sleep so that he could take out his rib?’

‘That’s a fourth question that we can put off till tomorrow. Ad tertiam, respondeo.’

‘Ttt, ttt. I haven’t finished with the talking animals yet. And what about cars? Do they come from God or from the Devil?’

‘Cars? I know not what they are.’

‘They’re living, squealing beasties that run about in every direction on their round paws. They don’t eat anything solid and they only drink petroleum. Their eyes light up at nightfall.’

‘Nevere seyn oon.’

‘I see them in my dreams. Thousands, myriads, legions. I see them invading the streets and the roads. They go by along the embankment, they’re the things that make the continuous rumbling noise I hear from my barge ...’

As the Abbé Biroton wasn’t interested in hearing people’s dreams, he fell asleep.

‘For the greater glory of God.’

Cidrolin turned round.

‘Oh, sorry,’ said a man dressed in an elegantly-cut iron-grey suit. ‘I know you, I didn’t mean to bother you. You live around here.’

‘I live on the barge over the road,’ said Cidrolin, ‘and ...’

‘Senough. ‘bout ship! Adieu.’

The quasi-clergyman got back on to his mobylette and went off towards the camping camp for the campers. Cidrolin, who was watching the building workers at their labours, also continued his walk in that direction. Behind some barbed wire Goddams, Brabantines, Netherlanders, Suomiphones, Pictish Gauls, Cumbrians and Norlanders were going about their business, which consisted of wending their way from their caravan or their tent to the lavatories, from the lavatories to the showers, from the showers to the canteen and from the canteen to their caravan or their tent, while they were waiting to take the return road to Elsinore, Salzburg, Uppsala or Aberdeen. Various kinds of music accompanied these different activities and the piercing song of multiple transistors was occasionally drowned by choruses in foreign tongues accompanied by bagpipes, bugles or ocarinas. Some particularly optimistic characters were uttering loud cries of satisfaction whilst beating their breasts with their fists in order to evoke the rolling of a drum.

Other sight-seers were examining the situation with Cidrolin; one of them said:

‘We’re looking at them as if they were exotic animals; this isn’t the zoo, though.’

‘Almost,’ said Cidrolin.

‘All the same, you’re not going to tell me they’re animals and not men.’

‘Prove it,’ said Cidrolin.

‘They talk.’

‘What about parrots,’ said Cidrolin, ‘don’t they talk?’

‘They don’t understand what they’re saying.’

‘Prove it,’ said Cidrolin.

‘Bloody bore you are! It’s impossible to have a conversation with a bloody bore like you.’

‘We’ve just had one, though, and an extremely interesting one. It isn’t every day that the sight of a camping camp for campers gives rise to observations that would almost be worth recording on tape.’

‘Tape recording my nostrils,’ said the nauseated sight-seer as he withdrew, muttering.

From afar the quasi-clergyman gave Cidrolin a cordial little wave. Cidrolin answered him extremely politely, and then went home. Some insulting inscriptions had been daubed on the fence around the gate. Cidrolin went to fetch a paint pot and a brush to cause these graffiti to disappear.

IV

On the café terrace some couples were practising the French kiss and the saliva was dribbling down their amorous chins; among the most desperately leech-like were Lamélie and an omnibudsman, particularly Lamélie, because the omnibudsman didn't forget to look at his watch from time to time in view of his professional duties. Lamélie shut her eyes and devoted herself religiously to the science of tongues.

Came the moment of separation; the omnibudsman slowly started ungluing operations and, when he had attained his object, there was a plop. He wiped himself with the back of his hand and said:

'Gotta blow.'

And he distributed a little beer over his desiccated mucous membranes.

Lean and languid, Lamélie gives him a look.

He pulls some francs out of his pocket and taps on the table with them. He says in a fairly low voice:

'Waiter.'

Lamélie, lean and languid, gives him a look.

The waiter comes up for the pay-off. At this moment Lamélie throws herself on her omnibudsman and starts all over again. Her partner finds it necessary to express himself by signs which, however, are easy to understand. The waiter picks up the change. The spectacle doesn't excite him in the least. He moves off.

The omnibudsman embarks on a new ungluing process. He manages it by easy stages and there is another plop. He wipes his lips with the back of his hand and says:

'This time I really gotta blow.'

He drains his half pint and gets up nimbly.

Lamélie gives him a look, lean and languid. She follows her leader, and says:

'I'm not in any hurry, I'll come for a ride with you.'

'Za lot of traffic at this time of day, you know, we always run late, shan't have time to talk to you.'

'I'll watch you turn your little handle on the machine on your stomach, I'll hear your voice when you call out the fare stages, I'll be quite happy.'

'You can't be sure of getting on. Going to be a lot of people.'

There were. Two hundred and seventeen people were cooling their heels in a queue constituted in accordance with the official regulations. Lamélie waited, people got in, the bus filled up and she was still a good long way away in the mass of postulants when her loved one, with a graceful flourish, swung down the sign that said full up and tugged at his little bell. The whole lot drove off. The omnibudsman made a gesture with his hand which may perhaps have been addressed to someone long in the waiting file, which was getting longer and longer. Lamélie turned on her heel and tried to carve a clearway through the queuing crowd. As she was trying to stem the current, people remarked:

'Make your mind up, ducks.'

'Another one who thinks we aren't bugged about enough as it is.'

'Silly bitches that change their minds, they're the end.'

'They queue the wrong way round and then they're surprised you grumble.'

A lady yelled:

~~‘Stop pushing, will you? Can’t you see my stomach!’~~

‘If you’re pregnant,’ retorted Lamélie cantankerously, ‘better get in the priority queue.’

A citizen, who hadn’t understood a word of this dialogue, exploded.

‘Make way!’ he yelled, ‘make way! a pregnant woman isn’t feeling well!’

‘Make way! for Christ’s sake, don’t you understand? A pregnant woman!’

‘Out of the way! Let’s have some respect for pregnant women, and pride in maternity!’

‘Make way! Make way!’

‘Out of the way!’

Lamélie found herself cast out from the crowd of waiters like a tuft of sea-wrack on a Norman shore. She walked away. She passed the café again; various couples on the terrace were still pretending they were leeches. Feeling quite melancholic, Lamélie reached the embankment.

Little by little she found herself in front of the Ark.

Cidrolin was resting on the after-deck; he was very comfortable but he wasn’t snoozing, he was looking into the middle distance. Lamélie’s arrival didn’t change his lack of behaviour in the slightest. It was only when the essence of fennel and the still water were brought that he modified his attitude and at the same time took the floor in one sense and went half-way to taking it in another. Sitting up, he said:

‘The inspector of corbitary contributions has been.’

‘I came back by bus.’

‘He inspected everything.’

‘The conductor was a giggle.’

‘I came in for some compliments.’

‘He said something funny to every passenger.’

‘He decided the Ark was entitled to two anchors in category A.’

‘He talked to me, too.’

‘Not three anchors yet. Two isn’t at all bad though.’

“‘You certainly have got more shape than a season ticket,’” he said, “‘and you’ve got a hell of a lot more curves than a book of tickets.’”

‘Obviously I shall have to pay more taxes, but think of the status.’

“‘Huh you, well, Ida know, huh you,’” that’s what I retorted.’

‘There’s one thing he pointed out.’

‘But I couldn’t help laughing.’

“‘You call it the Ark?’” he said, “‘there aren’t any animals on board, it’s paradoxical.’” “‘Yes, that’s true,’” I answered, “‘it *is* paradoxical, but that’s the way it is.’” “‘Fine, fine,’” he added: “‘it was just a remark, you know.’” “‘Well, so was mine,’” that’s what *I* added. And so he went. He was pleased with himself and I was pleased with myself. Up to now, apart from the grub, this has been rather a good day - but it isn’t over yet. Anything can still happen.’

‘That chap - I like him.’

‘What chap?’

‘The conductor on the 421.’

‘There isn’t only one, I presume.’

‘The one I know.’

‘I don’t know him.’

‘I’ve just been telling you.’

‘Then you’re not interested in the fact that the Ark has been promoted to two anchors in category A?’

‘Pathetic. Why not three? I work hard enough I should have thought.’

‘We’ ll have to wait a bit. We’ ll have them one day, our three anchors.’

‘And why not four?’

‘I know, I know.’

He stretched out his hand for the bottle of essence of fennel to pour himself out a new dollop.

‘You drink too much,’ he is told.

He shrugged his shoulders and helped himself liberally.

‘Well,’ he asked, ‘what about your conductor?’

‘Essence of fennel, it drives you mad, it’s in all the papers.’

Cidrolin frowned, ceased to frown in order to empty his glass, and then frowned again with some intensity. Four deep lines dug into his glabella. He grumbled:

‘You’ve spoilt my pleasure. Another fucking fiasco!’

The bottle, the still water and the glasses are taken away.

‘Tell me about your conductor.’

‘I’ve got work to do.’

‘Shall I get the paint pot?’

‘No, there’s nothing there.’

This being the case he lay down once more on his chaise-longue and started looking into the middle distance again.

A detachment of royal security companies appeared on the horizon; the look-out man came to advise the Duke of Auge of its approach, and the Duke made such a row yelling the necessary orders that the Abbé Biroton woke up.

‘The securicorpses are coming,’ said the Duke, rubbing his hands. ‘We’ ll atomise them.’

‘What’s going on? Why the securicorpses?’

‘Ah yes! I hadn’t told you. I slew a few bourgeois who were bugging me.’

‘Wrath is a bad counsellor. You’ ll have to do penitence.’

‘As much as anyone likes, but these fellows certainly have more sinister intentions.’

‘Our saintly king doesn’t take the indiscretions of his noblemen lightly.’

‘He takes us seriously,’ said the Duke with satisfaction.

There were now several detachments approaching the castle, coming from different points of the horizon.

‘Things are deteriorating,’ murmured the Abbé, ‘things are deteriorating.’

‘Don’t worry, if they get nasty I’ve already told you: I’ ll atomise them!’

‘Good God, are you going to become a rebel, into the bargain?’

The securicorpses were now surrounding the castle, the most heraldic of them came up to the drawbridge and, by signs as sonorous as they were heraldic, intimated that he wished to transmit a message to the Lord of these parts.

The Abbé lamented:

‘What a business! What a business! And I find it highly questionable ...’

‘Ah yes, you haven’t answered my third question yet, the one about world history in general and general history in particular.’

But the herald was ushered in, and he started to explain to the Duke that the saintly King wasn’t at all pleased, that to slay the bourgeois for slender reasons wasn’t done any more, and that the

nobility ought to take it for granted that one just doesn't disembain people without rhyme or reason by consequence of the whiche Joachim Duke of Auge would have to extract from his treasury one hundred refined pure and unalloyed gold écus (minted at Tours) per head per stiff, which without the slightest doubt would add up to a considerable sum, all the more so as there were some people with split heads who hadn't quite finished dying yet, and that Joachim Duke of Auge should get it firmly into his head that this sum would be but partially utilised to indemnify the widowers, widows orphans and would in the main serve substantially to subsidise the crusade now in course of preparation.

What was more, Joachim Duke of Auge would have to recite six thousand six hundred and fifty seven paters, as many aves and three times less confiteors and have as many masses said as there were slain, whiche masses he would attend with bare feet, in his shirt, and with his head covered with ashes, cold or hot as he pleased.

And that Joachim of Auge should further get it well into his head that the saintly King would have had him hanged by his two ears until death did then ensue if the saintly King had not kept some remembrance of the services rendered by Joachim of Auge to the Christian cause at Damietta as well as at Mansura.

Finally, that Joachim of Auge could keep his refined pure and unalloyed gold écus (minted at Tours) and reduce by half the number of his paters and the number of his aves even though the number was an odd number and by a quarter the number of his confiteors, even though four was an aliquant part of two thousand two hundred and nineteen, nothing being changed with regard to the masses with however permission for the Duke to attend them shod and dressed as he wished, all this on the simple, benign, blessed and pardoning condition that he join the saintly King and go and eviscerate some Saracens on the next Crusade.

'Never,' replied the Duke of Auge. 'I've already explained to him that I never want to set foot on those impossible dumps again. One crusade is a lot; two is too much.'

'Then, my Lord,' said the herald, 'you have no desire to seize the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the Infidel?'

'But we've had it, you poor nodcock! He's only going to get more cold-jellied Bouillons out of it. Our Holy Father himself doesn't believe in it any more. We've been sweating our guts out for nearly two hundred years now trying to get it back, but there it still is, in the hands of the Infidel, the sepulchre.'

Horrified by these utterances, the herald crossed himself.

'And,' went on the Duke of Auge, 'do you really think that by going to Tunisia we shall seize it from the hands of the Infidel, the sepulchre? Tunisia! Why not the country of the Amaurots or the Hamaxobians? While he's about it, our saintly King, why doesn't he go as far as the countries where the Indians live, or the Seres? Why doesn't he set sail on the Oceanic sea until he gets beyond the islands of Thule, maybe he'd find an unknown land around those parts with some extra infidels to atomise.'

'Moderate your ardour, my Lord,' murmured the Abbé Biroton. The herald went on crossing himself non-stop.

'No, no and no,' concluded the Duke of Auge. 'Me no go crusade. I'll say all those concatenations of patravêfiteors, I'll go to all those ashy masses and I'll relinquish my beautiful refined pure and unalloyed gold écus (minted at Tours), but as for going and messing about in the vicinity of the Boggie Syrtes, I can only repeat: no, no and no. Such is my answer, and having said that I should like to point out that our saintly King has forbidden those of us who have the right to coin our own money to allow our sols and our écus to circulate outside our own domains, but that I

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